

The Altavista Planning Commission held a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, February 7th, 2022, at 5:00 p.m. in Council Chambers at Town Hall, located at 510 7th Street, Altavista, Virginia.

Members present: John Jordan, Chairman
 Marie Mitchell, Vice Chair
 Marvin Clements
 Reggie Bennett, Vice Mayor
 Vacant

Staff present: Sharon D. Williams, AICP, Community Development Director
 and Planning Commission Secretary
 Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

Absent: John Eller, Town Attorney

Others Present: Kelly Hitchcock, Planning & Development Director, CVPDC

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman John Jordan called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:08 p.m.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

With all current Planning Commission members being present, Chairman Jordan confirmed a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Chairman Jordan asked if there were any amendments to be made to the agenda, to which there were none. Upon a motion by Vice Chair Marie Mitchell, and seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 to approve the meeting agenda as presented.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & INVOCATION:

Chairman Jordan delivered an Invocation for the meeting and afterwards, the Planning Commission and attending staff recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Chairman Jordan opened the floor to nominations for Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair.

With a nomination by Vice Chair Mitchell, seconded by Commissioner Marvin Clements, there was a unanimous vote for John Jordan to continue as Chairman.

With a nomination by Vice Mayor Bennett, seconded by Chairman Jordan, there was a unanimous vote for Marie Mitchell to continue her seat as Vice Chair of the Planning Commission.

INTRODUCTION OF TOWN MANAGER

Altavista Community Development Director Sharon D. Williams introduced Altavista's new Town Manager, Gary Shanaberger. She said since Mr. Shanaberger began his position, he had expressed his support for Town Staff, Town Council, and the town's Boards and Commissions. Ms. Williams invited the Town Manager to say a few words.

Mr. Shanaberger shared his excitement to be Altavista's new Town Manager and stated he was looking forward to working with the Planning Commission, Economic Development Authority, and Town Council. He told the Commission he had an open-door policy, and they could contact him at any time.

Chairman Jordan and his fellow Commissioners welcomed Mr. Shanaberger to the Town of Altavista.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Jordan asked the Commission if they had any questions or revisions pertaining to the December 2021 meeting minutes, to which there were none.

Upon a motion made by Commissioner Marvin Clements, and seconded by Vice Chair Mitchell, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 to approve the minutes from their December 2021 Planning Commission meeting as presented.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION:

Chairman Jordan opened the floor for public comment.

There being no speakers to come forward, the public comment period was closed.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

There were no public hearings scheduled for this date.

OLD BUSINESS:

a. 2040 Comprehensive Plan - SOAR Analysis Results

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that she and Ms. Kelly Hitchcock, Planning & Development Director, Central Virginia Planning District Commission (CVPDC), would be co-presenting a summary from the results of the completed analysis. She stated the Planning Commission's comments were compiled to reflect the Planning Commission's future aspirations for the town. Ms. Williams shared the proposed results for each category.

Community Resources

- Continue to implement the Altavista Parks and Trails Master Plan to help develop and prioritize improvements to English Park. Investments in Park development should be evident through incorporation of improvement projects in the Capital Improvement Plan.
- Development of new program for senior citizens; using either Town funding or leveraging partnerships with community organizations (i.e., the YMCA) to expand current offerings.
- Create new arts and culture activities by partnering with the Arts Council.
- Establish a clear vision and plan for implementation of improvements to the Booker Building.

- Establish better communication methods for the Town to best advertise events and programming to maximize community participation.
- Pursue funding opportunities to procure funds to provide additional access points to the river.
- Erect a community garden for town citizens to plant, cultivate, and harvest fruits and vegetables.

Other Considerations

- The addition of a dog park was suggested, however, there the addition of a dog park within English Park is currently in the Town's approved FY 2023 Budget as part of the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
- There were discussions about potentially connecting the walking trail behind the old Lane Company Building to the existing bike trail in English Park. This item may be revisited in the future when more consensus is built amongst separate town committees and commissions.
- One opportunity would be to hold more movies in the park, however, the cost or licensing fees for showing movies could be cost prohibitive.

With there being no questions from the Commissioners, Ms. Williams moved to the next category.

Resiliency & Hazard Mitigation

- Develop a better system to communicate information about residential solar incentives to homeowners.
- Installation of electric vehicle charging stations throughout the Town.
- The Town should pursue available funding opportunities to transition Altavista Community Transit Buses from gas to electric.

Other Considerations

- The town could consider offering town citizens a curbside recycling program in the future, if the cost was not deemed prohibitive.

Ms. Williams reminded the Commission that the Town of Altavista was recently designated a SolSmart Bronze Community and the town continued to search for incentives to encourage residential solar use.

Chairman Jordan stated, although there had been some interest over the past year, the Planning Commission did not intend to consider any solar farm request applications until the town established its official set of guidelines. He shared his favor of residential solar use and the need to advertise available options to town property owners and suggested it be promoted.

Ms. Williams said the Town Manager shared staff's concerns and it was ultimately Town Council to make the final decision.

There being no additional comments, the Commission proceeded to the next category.

Housing

- The Town should aid in rehabilitation of blighted properties which will lead to less blight and an increase in safe, habitable housing.
- Develop new partnerships with local agencies to rehabilitate existing or provide new housing.
- Adopt new incentives to encourage developers to invest in Altavista.
- New subdivision ordinances should be developed and adopted to support new development.
- A new property maintenance code should be adopted to help eliminate blighted properties.

Other Considerations:

- While affordability of housing had been identified as a strength, it could also be interpreted as a disincentive for developers, as the return on investment may be low due to lower housing/rent prices.

Ms. Kelly Hitchcock informed the Commission that the CVPDC had applied to Virginia Housing (VH) to fund a regional housing assessment. She stated that if funded, a consultant would be hired to assess the housing stock in each locality.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked about the timeframe for the analysis.

Ms. Hitchcock answered the process would take six to eight months from the procurement of a consultant to completion of the analysis, and she expected results by the end of calendar year 2022.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked if the analysis would be specific to Altavista or for Campbell County as a whole.

Ms. Hitchcock stated it was for Campbell County, but the scope of work would include the towns.

Chairman Jordan references the statement under Other Considerations, which depicted Altavista's housing market as both a strength and a weakness, and asked if the housing analysis would address that issue.

Ms. Hitchcock answered that it would. She said the analysis would provide an overview of what was needed in Altavista and be a reference tool for developers.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated citizens needed to be better informed of financing options.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that, as part of the town's Acquire, Renovate, Sell (ARS) Grant Program, the town was required to form a project team that would be part of their work. She stated that Virginia Housing and USDA offered home buyer education and it was the town's goal to educate citizens on all available options.

Ms. Hitchcock stated the housing analysis would include an evaluation of the available lending services. She said the consulting firm would collaborate with local developers and lenders to discuss the localities' needs to determine how to address their issues.

Ms. Williams suggested that the Planning Commission, Town Council, and AEDA meet to discuss incentives that could be offered to developers.

With no additional comments the Commission moved to the next category.

Transportation

- Increase availability of the Altavista Community Transit Service by implementing Sunday Service, extend transit route to provide access to English Park from Downtown by utilizing the backup transit bus.
- Develop a partnership with school officials to encourage safer pedestrian practices at the Combined School.
- Distribute marketing and educational materials to inform citizens about the Virginia Breeze bus service.
- Invest in additional wayfinding signage to help direct citizens and visitors to amenities and services.

There being no questions, the Commission moved to the next category.

Town Services

- Develop a plan to best utilize the space available at Green Hill Cemetery.
- Development and Implementation of a Town-wide Broadband Study.
- Introduction of a bi-annual electronics recycling event and coinciding document shredding day.
- Expanded Town investment in Marketing and Tourism resources, which would increase awareness of amenities and businesses in Altavista.

Other Consideration

- A safe zone for online transactions was proposed, however, this had already been included in the Altavista Police Department's Capital Improvement Program.

There being no questions, the Commission moved forward with the last category.

Town Amenities

- Develop the Vista Theater into a performance center.
- Establish a clear vision and plan for implementation of improvements to the Booker Building.
- Create a business plan, proforma, marketing plan, and implementation plan for the Booker Building.

- Specific recommendations for the Vista Theater should be incorporated into the plan once the Town received public input.

Ms. Williams shared her appreciation for Ada Hunsberger's work on the Soar Analysis to capture the Planning Commission's input.

NEW BUSINESS

a. 2021 Planning Commission Annual Report and 2022 Goals

Ms. Williams stated that under the Code of Virginia, the Planning Commission was required to submit an annual report to the governing body. She gave the Commission an overview of the 2021 Annual Report and discussed the 2022 Work Plan. She suggested that the Comprehensive Plan be added as a goal for 2022 and asked the Commissioners if they had additional suggestions.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked if the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Street rezoning should be a goal.

Ms. Williams stated it would be addressed during the update to the Future Land Use Map.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked Ms. Williams if she had a recommendation for additional goals.

Ms. Williams answered that the Planning Commission should continue to focus on Altavista's housing needs, to which they agreed.

Upon a motion made by Vice Chair Mitchell, and seconded by Commissioner Marvin Clements, the Planning Commission voted 4-0 to adopt the 2021 Planning Commission Annual Report and to send the report to Town Council.

b. Discussion of Potential for Ex-Officio Student Representative

Ms. Williams reminded the Commission that with the resignation of Jennifer Morton there was a vacancy that needed to be filled. She referenced the December 2021 discussion about the potential of appointment of an Ex-Officio Student Representative and asked if the Commission wanted to recommend the idea to Town Council.

Chairman Jordan asked if the Bylaws would need to be amended to reflect the change.

Ms. Williams answered, if the request was approved, that Town Code and the Planning Commission Bylaws would need to be updated.

It was the consensus of the Planning Commission to forward the request to Town Council.

Commissioner Clements stated he believed it was a great opportunity to receive input from up-and-coming citizens and provided them an opportunity to shape the future of their hometown.

c. Moseley Heights Neighborhood Plan

Ms. Williams stated that she had been contacted by several citizens in the Moseley Heights neighborhood who believed their neighborhood was being neglected by the town. They expressed interest in street trees, lights, and improvements to houses. She said Moseley Heights was an older, well-established community with a strong foundation. Ms. Williams informed the Commission that the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) offered grants for neighborhood studies and asked if the Planning Commission would support an application for a Planning Grant.

Commissioner Clements stated he believed it would be worthwhile for Altavista to pursue any available opportunity for improvements to all neighborhoods.

Chairman Jordan agreed and shared his support.

Vice Mayor Bennett stressed the importance of residents' input in the plan if the grant was awarded.

Ms. Williams stated staff would assist the consultant with advertising and hosting a neighborhood meeting.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked if the grant could be used for more than one neighborhood.

Ms. Williams answered it could, but recommended the town focus on one neighborhood at a time. She said, if the town submitted a successful grant application, they could reapply each year and, with the help of the Planning Commission, determine the neighborhoods with the most need.

Chairman Jordan asked if the grant was only for planning.

Ms. Williams stated the DHCD Grant for Neighborhood Planning was for the purpose of assessing and determining what improvements could be accomplished in the neighborhoods of interest. She said thereafter, the town could seek additional grants to help fund implementation.

It was the consensus of the Planning Commission that staff apply to DHCD to fund a Neighborhood Plan for Moseley Heights.

Ms. Williams moved forward to item e. on the agenda and stated she would return to item d. at the end of the agenda discussion.

d. Planning Commission Recommendation to Town Council

e. Comprehensive Plan Goals and Objectives

Ms. Williams referenced the draft Goals and Objectives included in their packet and stated that she and Ms. Hunsberger had reviewed the current Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans, including the Economic Development (Comoin) Study, the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and transportation plans to remove duplicate or outdated material. She said the Commission would discuss the draft document at their next meeting.

Chairman Jordan thanked Ms. Williams, Ms. Hitchcock, and Ms. Hunsberger for their work on the SOAR Analysis and Goals and Objective draft document. He stated he believed the Comprehensive Plan update would be a smoother accomplishment due to their hard work.

Ms. Williams, along with the Commissioners, thanked the Town Manager for attending the meeting that evening.

At this time, the Planning Commission returned to item d. on the agenda and went into Closed Session to discuss the matter of recommending a new Commissioner to Town Council to fill the current vacancy.

Vice Chair Mitchell read aloud the following Closed Session document.

Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1) Discussion, consideration or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining or resignation of specific public officers, appointees or employees of any public body.

With a motion made by Vice Chair Mitchell, and seconded by Commissioner Clements, the Planning Commission voted in favor 4-0 and went into Closed Session at 6:28 p.m.

The Planning Commission returned from Closed Session at 6:45 p.m. and Vice Chair Mitchell read the Certification of a Closed Meeting. The Commission voted 4-0 that they certified the session was convened in accordance with Virginia law.

Upon a motion made by Vice Chair Marie Mitchell, and seconded by Commissioner Marvin Clements, the Planning Commission voted 3-0 to recommend that Meghan Bolling be appointed to fill the Planning Commissioner vacancy and if for some reason she was unable to accept, they recommended Yoko Maddy. Vice Chair Mitchell abstained from the vote.

Adjournment:

With no further business to discuss, Chairman Jordan adjourned the meeting at 6:48 p.m.

John Jordan
Planning Commission Chair

Sharon D. Williams, AICP
Planning Commission Secretary