

The Altavista Planning Commission held a regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, March 6th, 2023, at 5pm, in Council Chambers at Town Hall, located at 510 7th Street, Altavista, VA.

Members present: John Jordan, Chairman
Marie Mitchell, Vice Chair
Reggie Bennett, Vice Mayor
Meghan Bolling
Ashby Robinson, Jr. – present by conference call

Staff present: Sharon D. Williams, AICP, Community Development Director
J. Johnson Eller Jr., Town Attorney
Crystal Hailey, Assistant Town Clerk

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman John Jordan called the Altavista Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Chairman Jordan informed everyone that Commissioner Ashby Robinson was joining the meeting via conference call. With all Commissioners present, Chairman Jordan confirmed a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Jordan confirmed there were no amendments needed to the agenda.

Upon a motion by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, and seconded by Vice Chair Marie Mitchell, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to approve the March 6, 2023, meeting agenda as presented.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & INVOCATION

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Jordan asked the Commission if they saw any corrections that were needed to the February 6th, 2023, meeting minutes. There were none.

With a motion made by Vice Chair Mitchell, and seconded by Vice Mayor Bennett, the minutes for the Commission's February 2023 meeting were approved as presented, with a 5-0 vote.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION - There were no citizen comments during this meeting.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Altavista's Director of Community Development and Planning Commission Secretary, Sharon D. Williams, AICP, presented both of the following public hearings and facts pertaining to each:

1. ORDINANCE AMENDMENT OA-23-05: to amend *Section 86-32*: Use Types of the Town of Altavista Zoning Ordinance – to amend the definition of Utility Services, Major to exclude solar farms.

Ms. Williams stated that in 2022, a developer submitted a request to amend Altavista's Zoning Ordinance to allow utility-scale solar developments with a Special Use Permit (SUP). She informed the Commission that Town Council took no action on the request. She reminded the Commission of the discussion had at the February Planning Commission meeting when centered around the definition of *utility services, major*. To eliminate any ambiguity, Ms. Williams recommended that the definition be amended to read "This use type shall not include utility scale solar facilities".

Chairman Jordan opened this Public Hearing at 5:03pm.

Chairman Jordan asked what would happen if another developer submitted a similar request.

Ms. Williams stated that per town and state code, a similar request for solar development would not be considered within one year of Council's action.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett asked if the proposed amendment would affect residential use.

Ms. Williams answered, it would not. She said rooftop units were permitted. She informed the Planning Commission that the General Assembly continued to make rules aimed at the reduction of fossil fuels. She recommended that the town adopt a code to regulate solar development before the General Assembly mandated it.

Chairman Jordan asked if staff intended to discuss solar as part of the Zoning Ordinance update.

Ms. Williams said she believed the matter should be discussed further; however, she would move in the direction given by the Town Manager, Planning Commission, and Town Council.

Commissioner Ashby Robinson shared that solar uses were discussed during that morning at the first session of the Certified Planning Commissioners' training. He said he learned most localities in Virginia were going through the same option, consideration, and decision process. He informed the Commissioners that the idea to utilize the roofs of commercial and industrial buildings for utility scale solar had been discussed. Mr. Robinson stated the agreement would be between the company that owned the building and the power company that sourced the solar units to obtain power.

Chairman Jordan expressed his concern with allowing multiple solar units to be placed on top of a commercial building. He stated the weight of the units could cause major issues.

There being no public comments, Chairman Jordan closed the public hearing at 5:13pm. He asked the Commission if they had any other questions regarding this matter. They had none.

Upon a motion by Vice Chair Mitchell, seconded by Vice Mayor Bennett, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to recommend Town Council approve the text amendment as presented.

2. ORDINANCE AMENDMENT OA-23-06: to amend *Section 86-192(6), 86-352(6), and 86-382(6)* of the Zoning Ordinance to delete Recycling Center as a permitted use in Altavista's R2-Medium Density Residential, C2-General Commercial, and M-Industrial Zoning Districts; and 86-566, to delete the parking requirement for this use.

Chairman Jordan opened the Public Hearing at 5:14pm.

Ms. Williams stated as part of the process to initially zone land purchased from Campbell County, staff discussed the most desired zoning district and whether the permitted uses were appropriate. She said the desired district was industrial but there were nuisance uses that concerned staff. Ms. Williams referenced Recycling Centers and stated that it was staff's opinion that the use should not be permitted in the Industrial (M), Medium Density Residential (R-2), or General Commercial (C-2) Zoning Districts.

Chairman Jordan asked Ms. Williams to elaborate on the reason for staff's recommendation.

Ms. Williams shared photos of two recycling centers; one maintained well and one not. She stated, when a recycling bin was full, people tend to discard their items on the side of the bin and if left unattended, could be unsightly and become a nuisance.

Chairman Jordan asked Town Manager Gary Shanaberger to share his thoughts on the matter.

Mr. Shanaberger stated that the code which referenced recycling centers mentioned collection "facilities", which had a broad definition of what was allowed under that use. He said it was staff's concern that such a facility could become an issue or nuisance if not maintained.

Chairman Jordan asked, if the use could the use be reinstated in the future.

Ms. Williams stated that a Zoning Ordinance was considered a living document that could be amended at any time by Town Council.

There being no public comments, Chairman Jordan closed the hearing at 5:20pm. He asked the Commission if they had any further questions. There were none.

Upon a motion made by Vice Mayor Bennett and seconded by Vice Chair Marie Mitchell, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to recommend Town Council approve the text amendment as presented.

OLD BUSINESS

There were no old business items on the agenda for this meeting.

Vice Chair Mitchell referenced one of the public hearings held at the February Planning Commission meeting with the recommendation to delete Resource Extraction as a permitted use in the Zoning Ordinance. She asked Ms. Williams to summarize a presentation given to Town Council on resource extraction at the February 28th work session.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that Town Council received a presentation on resource extraction from a parcel of land at the north end of town. She stated the presentation was parcel specific, while the text amendment was townwide. It was her opinion that the presentation tainted the process because Town Council was not informed that the use was allowed on almost 200 parcels in town, while the developer spoke to the properties of interest to him. She also stated that the developer failed to disclose that one parcel was zoned General Commercial (C-2) and had to be rezoned for the proposed use. Ms. Williams stated that Town Council would hear the Planning Commission's recommendation during a Public Hearing scheduled for March 14th, that soil extraction (commonly known as borrow pits) was not an appropriate use within the Town of Altavista; and she would share the Commission's concerns for the long-term effects the project may have on the land, and how long it took to reforest and stabilize the land.

Vice Mayor Bennett recommended that those with concerns attend the March 14th meeting and voice their concerns during the Public Hearing. He said citizen input was always considered when Town Council made decisions.

Chairman Jordan asked what the plan was after the project was completed.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated that the developer's reclamation plan was to replace the dirt removed with trees.

Vice Chair Mitchell shared her concerns with the proposed project proximity to a river and creeks.

Chairman Jordan asked if there were Town Council members who favored of the soil extraction project.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated there was interest among Town Council due to the proposal to gift the land to the town after the project was completed. He said the prospect to utilize the land for an additional park area in seemed desirable to some Town Council members.

Commissioner Robinson stated that he learned at the Certified Planning Commissioners' training that should Altavista delete resource extraction from the Zoning Ordinance that the Commonwealth of Virginia could permit the use if it was deemed a viable use to benefit the state.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated, while the matter before Town Council was for soil extraction, the term resource extraction carried a wide definition, which included mining for minerals such as copper and uranium. He stated, if allowed to remain in the Zoning Ordinance, the use could become an issue.

Vice Chair Mitchell reiterated that Town Council needed to consider the matter as a whole. She said the Town of Altavista had numerous industrially zoned parcels and each one would be affected by Council's decision, and the properties adjacent to those parcels.

There were no further questions or comments from the Planning Commission.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Recommendation of Student Planning Commission

Ms. Williams introduced the two Altavista Combined Schools students, she and Vice Chair Mitchell recommended for student Planning Commissioners, Senior Micah Andrews, and Junior Rayna Steele. She stated the students were engaged and asked pertinent questions during their meeting.

Vice Chair Mitchell stated that she and Ms. Williams believed the two students were very intelligent and both would make great additions to the Planning Commission.

Chairman Jordan asked the two students to give a brief introduction of themselves.

Micah Andrews stated that she was a member of several clubs at school that were very important to her. She informed the Commission that she was accepted to the University of Virginia and would be studying political science, with aspirations to become a lawyer.

Rayna Steele stated that she loved her hometown of Altavista and thanked the Commission for the opportunity to give back to her community. She said she was unsure at that time which college she would attend, but had intentions of becoming a physical therapist or athletic trainer.

Ms. Williams stated that she and Vice Chair Mitchell recommended that the Planning Commission make a recommendation to Town Council to appoint both students to the Altavista Planning Commission, Miss Andrews as a Commissioner and Miss Steele as an alternate.

Upon a motion made by Vice Chair Mitchell and seconded by Vice Mayor Bennett, the Planning Commission voted 5-0 to recommend to Town Council to approve the appointment of Micah Andrews as a student Planning Commissioner, and Rayna Steele as an alternate student Planning Commissioner.

MATTERS FROM STAFF

Ms. Williams presented the Commission with updates from staff.

- The Altavista Planning Commission's 2022 Annual Report was submitted to Town Council and was accepted.
- Moseley Heights - Neighborhood Improvement Project: Ms. Williams stated that staff was continuing its efforts on the planning grant for this project. She said neighborhood participation was low and the Town had requested an extension from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development to complete the task.
- Novelty Street Properties: Ms. Williams shared with the Commission that she was informed the properties had been sold; however, that area was currently zoned Industrial (M), which did not permit residential use. She said for the homes to be occupied it had to be rezoned. Ms. Williams stated that she informed the new owners of this requirement.
- Ms. Williams stated that she was a Certified Planner through the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), and a member of the American Planning Association (APA). She informed the Commission that she had received an invitation to be one of twenty members

throughout the nation, chosen from to rewrite the exam that was given by AICP to become a Certified Planner.

Chairman Jordan and the other Commission members congratulated Ms. Williams on the honor of being nominated for the task.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business to discuss, Chairman Jordan adjourned the meeting at 5:48 p.m.

John Jordan
Planning Commission Chair

Sharon D. Williams, AICP
Planning Commission Secretary