

The Altavista Planning Commission held a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, June 6th, 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
 Reggie Bennett, Vice Mayor
 Marvin Clements
 Meghan Bolling

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

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman John Jordan called the Planning Commission Meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

Vice Chair Marie Mitchell was absent for this meeting. With all other Commissioners present, Chairman Jordan confirmed a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Chairman Jordan asked if there were any amendments needed to the agenda, to which there were none.

Upon a motion by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, and seconded by Commissioner Marvin Clements, 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 staff recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Jordan asked the Commissioners if saw any amendments that needed to be made to the meeting minutes presented, to which there were none.

With a motion made by Vice Mayor Bennett, and seconded by Commissioner Clements, the March 7th and April 4th, 2022, meeting minutes were approved with a vote of 4-0.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION:

Chairman Jordan opened the floor for public comment. There being no one to come forward, Chairman Jordan closed the floor and moved forward with the meeting.

PUBLIC HEARINGS: There were no public hearings scheduled for this date.

OLD BUSINESS:

a. 2040 Comprehensive Plan: Goals and Objectives - Housing

Community Development Director Sharon D. Williams referenced Vice Chair Marie Mitchell not being in attendance for the meeting that evening. She said, since Vice Chair Mitchell was on the Town of Altavista's Steering Committee for its Acquire-Renovate-Sell Program pertaining to housing, she believed it was important for the Vice Chair to be present during the Planning Commission's housing conversation. Ms. Williams asked Chairman Jordan if the housing discussion could be postponed until the end of the agenda, started that evening, and then finished at the Commission's June meeting, in order to include Vice Chair Mitchell in the discussions.

Chairman Jordan and the Commission agreed with the suggestion and moved forward with the next agenda item.

b. Campgrounds

Community Development Director Sharon D. Williams reminded the Commission of a discussion previously held about a campground development. She said that use was not currently permitted in the town's Zoning Ordinance. Ms. Williams said staff reviewed ordinances from counties, cities, and towns with a population of 25,000 persons or less to determine how camping was regulated. She said almost all the localities that allowed camping, did so in its agricultural districts, which Altavista did not have. She said some allowed it in commercial districts, and none permitted it in industrial districts. Ms. Williams stated that except for one locality, all required a Special Use Permit (SUP) and asked for the Commission's input on the matter.

Commissioner Meghan Bolling asked where the proposed campground property was in Altavista.

Ms. Williams stated the property was adjacent to property previously known as the Lane Company.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett added that the property was between the old Lane property and the Staunton River that ran through Altavista.

Chairman Jordan asked how many acres the said property encompassed.

Town Attorney John Eller stated the property was twenty-six (26) acres.

Chairman Jordan asked if the property was in the floodplain.

Ms. Williams answered, yes, the entire property was in the floodplain.

Vice Mayor Bennett informed the Commission that Town Council discussed adding a few camping spots at English Park during their FY2023 draft budget discussions. He stated they did not proceed, since a private development had been proposed. Vice Mayor Bennett said, with new festivals being held in Altavista, Town Council believed a campground would be an asset for the town and potentially help Altavista become a tourist destination.

Chairman Jordan asked if Town Council was aware that the said property was in a floodplain.

Mr. Bennett answered yes. He said, due to its proximity to the property previously held by the Lane Company, a brownfields study needed to be conducted to determine if contaminants were present.

Ms. Williams stated the parcel had a lot of hurdles to overcome, including a traffic study for access to Pittsylvania Avenue. She reminded the Commission that the camping discussion was not for one (1) piece of property, but for town-wide consideration.

Commissioner Clements asked what would be the town's next steps if camping was approved and permitted within town limits.

Ms. Williams stated, if the Planning Commission and Town Council believed camping was a needed use in the Town of Altavista, she recommended it be added as a permitted use in the business zoning districts.

Commissioner Bolling asked Ms. Williams if she believed a Special Use Permit should be required.

Ms. Williams answered yes, she recommended, no matter which zoning district the use was allowed in, that a Special Use Permit (SUP) be required.

Ms. Bolling asked if consideration of a text amendment would be based on all types of camping.

Ms. Williams stated yes, that was part of what the Commission needed to discuss.

Town Attorney John Eller informed the Commission that the previous Town Ordinance, before the 2012 update, allowed camping in the Town of Altavista.

Ms. Williams stated, if camping was approved, the decision of what types of camping would also need to be decided; primitive, cabins, RV, or all types.

Chairman Jordan reminded the Commission that each type of camping required a certain number of amenities, such as bathrooms for primitive camping and cabins, and sewer hookup for RVs.

Commissioner Bolling stated in some campgrounds, only portable toilets were supplied.

Vice Mayor Bennett informed the Commission that the town recently investigated placing portable toilets on Eagle Trail in English Park and found they were not permissible in a floodplain and would have to be further away from the river, which was not very practical for its desired use.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that the Commonwealth of Virginia had strict regulations for privately-owned campgrounds pertaining to the number of camping spaces allowed, which depended on how many restrooms and showers were offered at the site.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated he believed it would be beneficial to the Commission if the owners of the riverfront property had a drawing available showing their intended plans for the site.

Chairman Jordan reminded the Commission that staff was only seeking direction at that time on whether the Commission wished to consider a text amendment to allow campgrounds in the Town of Altavista.

Commissioner Clements said he did not believe the Commission had enough information on the matter to make an informed decision at that time, including which zoning districts should permit camping and if adequate facilities could be provided.

Chairman Jordan shared his favor in allowing campgrounds but agreed with Commissioner Clements that more information was needed. He asked Ms. Williams, if the Commission agreed to permit campground uses, would the request for additional information be something they could request then, or would the desired information come later in the process.

Ms. Williams stated, at that time, she and the Town Attorney only sought the Commission's direction on whether they desired to allow camping in Altavista. She said, if staff moved forward with researching the matter, they needed a clear idea of what the Commission believed was a feasible sized lot. She said most localities did not allow campgrounds under 5 acres.

Vice Mayor Bennett shared his favor with staff moving forward with researching the item.

Commissioner Clements stated he believed campgrounds would enhance tourism in Altavista, as well as increase revenue, however, he wanted to have information regarding the environmental impact that such a use may or may not have on its surrounding environment.

Ms. Williams asked what minimum acreage the Commission was comfortable with to permit a campground use.

The Commission was in consensus for staff to use a minimum of five (5) acres.

Ms. Williams recommended the Commission consider, if campground use was approved, that a site plan and SUP be required.

The Planning Commission concurred with Ms. Williams' recommendation.

Ms. Williams asked which type/types of camping the Commission wanted to allow.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested allowing all three types of camping: cabins, RVs, and primitive. He said that was the fairest option.

Chairman Jordan agreed with allowing all three (3) types of camping and stated he believed it was important to be flexible. He reminded the Commission that the final decision for each request would be determined by a SUP, which were approved by Council.

Town Attorney John Eller stated staff would determine how many 5-acre parcels were empty and potential areas for campground use.

The Commission discussed if bathrooms would be permissible on campground properties that were by the river or in a floodplain.

Mr. Eller informed the Commission that there was a portion of the Zoning Ordinance that addressed the matter and recommended the ordinance be revised if a campground amendment were approved.

Ms. Williams asked the Commission to share any information or campground names that might be helpful to staff in gathering the information they requested.

Vice Mayor Bennett suggested staff look at what the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, formerly Game and Inland Fisheries, did in floodplain situations.

With no further comments regarding campgrounds, Chairman Jordan moved forward in the agenda.

c. Home Occupations

Ms. Williams referenced a previous discussion, from the April 2022 Planning Commission meeting, regarding home occupations and the concern that certain personal services listed in the town's Zoning Ordinance were not appropriate, such as physician and dentist. She said that staff was recommending the two be eliminated as permitted uses. Ms. Williams said personal services were typically quick services where customers were only at the residence for short a period of time. She stated doctors and dentists often had multiple customers waiting and could cause traffic issues. Ms. Williams shared staff's recommendation to amend the home occupation ordinance to only permit a limited number of personal services and gave the Commission a draft of staff's recommended changes. She asked the Commission for their input on whether to keep the ordinance as it existed, amend it, or delete it and draft a new one.

Chairman Jordan referenced the draft document and asked if item 1 and 2 within paragraph c. were the only changes being recommended, which removed physician and dentist and added the reference to limited personal services.

Ms. Williams answered yes. She shared the Town of Hurt's current ordinance on home occupations, supplied by Town Attorney John Eller, and pointed out that their ordinance categorized personal services as minor and major.

Mr. Eller informed the Commission that the Town of Altavista and the Town of Hurt both had the same home occupation ordinance listing minor and major services until Altavista's Zoning Ordinance update in 2012. He stated, if a home occupation was listed as minor, the homeowner could conduct the business by right, and if it was not on the minor list, it was considered major, and a Special Use Permit (SUP) was required.

Commissioner Clements shared his favor with the Town of Altavista returning to a listed group of acceptable minor occupations and major occupations requiring a SUP.

Mr. Eller stated the Town of Hurt had forty-five (45) occupations listed as minor, but the Town of Altavista could choose which home occupations they wanted listed in their own ordinance.

Mr. Eller stated that he shared the Town of Hurt's version to offer the Commission another option for consideration. He said the Town of Altavista's home occupation ordinance did not clearly state what a homeowner would do if their desired home occupation was not listed, but the Town of Hurt's specified they would need to request a Special Use Permit. He stated either way, the homeowner would have to meet all criteria specified in the town ordinance.

Chairman Jordan asked which version of a home occupation ordinance was the easiest for staff to work with when considering a home occupation request.

Mr. Eller said he believed categorizing home occupations into minor and major titles in the town's ordinance, and defining the criteria for each, such as a SUP for services considered major, was the most comprehensive way to address this matter.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked how virtual physician services would be categorized.

Mr. Eller said that virtual services were considered minor because they did not have any negative impacts to a neighborhood, such as increased traffic.

Ms. Williams stated, if the Commission desired, she and Mr. Eller would take their comments and suggestions and draft an amendment to Altavista's home occupation ordinance, like the Town of Hurt's minor and major categories, for the Commission's consideration at their next meeting.

There was a consensus of the Planning Commission for staff to draft the amendment document.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Flagpoles

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that a business owner had contacted her and asked about the height restrictions for flagpoles at a place of business. She stated that she reviewed the ordinance and discovered that flagpoles were not listed in the Zoning Ordinance. She said under state code, if something was not permitted, it was prohibited. Ms. Williams said the inquiry came from a business in the Downtown Revitalization Overlay (DRO). She stated that the average flagpole height was twenty-five (25) to thirty (30) feet and the business had already purchased the pole. Ms. Williams stated if there was a text amendment to permit it, a height limit needed to be established. She asked the Commission for their input and direction for staff.

Commissioner Clements asked which businesses already had flagpoles.

Vice Mayor Bennett answered with a few places he knew: the post office, McDonalds, Town Hall, and the entrance at War Memorial Park.

Mr. Eller stated any flag poles that already existed in a business district would not be subject to the restrictions of a new ordinance.

Ms. Williams said she would provide a visual reference for the Commission's consideration to decide on height restrictions.

Commissioner Bolling asked if there was a negative reason to why a business could not have a fifty-foot (50') flagpole.

Commissioner Clements answered mainly the esthetics of being that large. He said he believed businesses should be considerate to the area around them when erecting flagpoles.

Chairman Jordan said, along with an ordinance for flagpoles with a determined size, he suggested requiring an application be submitted for a Special Use Permit if someone want a pole height over the specified allowance.

The Planning Commission concurred with Chairman Jordan's suggestion.

Chairman Jordan asked, if the town permitted flagpoles in business districts, were there any restrictions on what could or could not be displayed on the flags.

Vice Mayor Bennett said localities had to be careful on what they restricted because the Supreme Court did not favor restrictions on personal beliefs.

Town Attorney John Eller stated such restrictions were considered against the First Amendment to the Constitution as it pertained to freedom of speech.

After some discussion regarding what other localities allowed, Chairman Jordan asked staff to gather additional information on and present to the Commission to make a final decision.

Ms. Williams stated staff would research flagpole heights and offer the Commission recommended flagpole heights for the districts that currently did not permit them.

UPDATES

a. Moseley Heights – Community Cleanup Day

Ms. Williams informed the Commission of a neighbor cleanup recently conducted in Mosley Heights and stated it was well attended by volunteers. She recognized Vice Mayor Bennett for his attendance on that day.

Vice Mayor Bennett said there was a great turn out of volunteers, including himself and Tim George from Town Council, members of a local soccer team, and many local citizens. He said the volunteers collected a total of fifty (50) bags of trash, and he believed there was great pride in the Mosley Height community after the event. Mr. Bennett said the event started at 9am, finished around noon, and the volunteers were given a hotdog lunch. Mr. Bennett stated he would like to see the same type of event happen in other areas of town to help keep the town clean.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that if other groups were interested, the town supplied the trash bags, trash pickers, and safety vests. She said when finished, the Public Works Department would pick up the trash bags the following Monday. She said the town asked that all supplies not used be returned to the town.

b. DAWN (Donation-A-Week Neighbor) – Special Use Permit

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that DAWN submitted a request for a Special Use Permit for their food pantry to open a new facility at 717 7th Street. She said DAWN had requested the

town waive the \$400 SUP fee, which would be considered at the May 10th Council Meeting, and they had requested a Phase I Environment Assessment of the building paid by the town's Virginia Brownfields Restoration and Economic Redevelopment Assistance Fund (VBAF) grant.

Regarding Item a. of Old Business – Housing Goals and Objectives

Chairman Jordan stated, since Vice Chair Mitchell was not in attendance that evening, he suggested this item be discussed at the next Planning Commission meeting on Monday, June 6th.

There was a consensus of the Commission to discuss the Housing Goals and objectives on June 6th.

Ms. Williams stated that housing was specified goal for the town in 2022. She asked the Commission to think of what they wanted to address and accomplish during the housing discussion.

Adjournment:

With no further business to discuss, Chairman Jordan adjourned the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

John Jordan
Planning Commission Chair

Sharon D. Williams, AICP
Planning Commission Secretary