

The Altavista Planning Commission held a regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, June 5th, 2023, at 5pm, in the Council Chambers of 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.
Micah Andrews, Senior Student Commissioner – joined the meeting by phone
Rayna Steele, Junior Student Commissioner

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. He informed everyone that Commissioner Andrews was joining the meeting by phone conference.

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 AGENDA

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

Upon a motion made by Vice Chair Marie Mitchell, and seconded by Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett, the Planning Commission voted 7-0 to approve the June 5, 2023, meeting agenda as presented.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Jordan stated that he did not see any corrections needed to the April 3, 2023, minutes.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Mitchell, and seconded by Vice Mayor Bennett, approving the minutes for the Altavista Planning Commission's April 2023 meeting as presented, by a 7-0 vote.

PUBLIC EXPRESSION - There were no citizen comments.

PUBLIC HEARINGS - There were no public hearings conducted on this date.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Short-term Rental Discussion

Presented by Sharon D. Williams, Community Development Director, and Planning Commission Secretary. This matter was first introduced to the Planning Commission at their April 2023 meeting, when Ms. Williams informed the Commission that in 2022, an amendment to the Code of Virginia required localities to accept all transient lodging tax payments for short-term rentals,

even if they did not know exactly where or which property it came from, as some rentals go through second-party companies, such as AIR B&B and VRBO. Ms. Williams shared the Virginia Code's definition of Short-term Rental (STR), and Staff's recommendation for Altavista's Zoning Ordinance: a room or group of rooms, all within a single dwelling unit, permitted in the district in which such dwelling use is located, used or intended for use as lodging for less than thirty (30) consecutive nights by the traveling public and similar transient guests, in return for compensation on a daily basis. The term "short-term rental" is intended to be distinguished from hotels, motels, tourist homes and lodging houses, shelters, group homes, and similar forms of housing. She offered the Commission three options for consideration.

- Option #1: Amend the Town's Zoning Ordinance to allow short-term rentals as a By Right Use, in the R1-low density residential, R2-medium density residential, C1-local commercial, C2-general commercial, and DRO (downtown revitalization overlay district) zoning districts.
- Option #2: Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow short-term rentals, with a Special Use Permit (SUP), in the Town's R-1, R-2, C-1, C-2, and DRO Zoning Districts.
- Option #3: Amend the Zoning Ordinance to allow short-term rental in the R-1 and R-2 Zoning Districts with a Special Use Permit; and as a By Right use in the DRO, C-1, and C-2 Zoning Districts.

Ms. Williams stated, if Option #1 was approved, the Town would need a registration policy. She shared some of Staff's recommended rules and regulations that could be tailored to Altavista's policy, which included having a safety plan and point-of-contact information. Ms. Williams asked the Commission if they believed there should be a limit on the number of nights per calendar year that a room/unit could be rented.

Vice Chair Marie Mitchell shared that she was ok with the C-1 and C-2 districts being allowed to have short-term rental uses; but believed the R-1 and R-2 districts should need a Special Use Permit

Ms. Williams reminded the Commission that there were residential homes currently in commercial districts, and to take into consideration the current Zoning Ordinance, with the possibility of future zoning changes for that issue, especially on 3rd, 4th, and 5th Streets in Altavista.

Chairman John Jordan asked if there was any reason why a zoning district should be allowed to have short-term rentals "By Right". He shared his favor with all districts needing a SUP.

Ms. Williams stated the use was very new to Altavista and its community. She said if the Town created a policy that required a Special Use Permit for short-term rental in all Town districts, the policy could be reviewed and amended at any time in the future, if Council so desired.

Vice Mayor Reggie Bennett shared his favor with STRs being required to obtain a SUP, instead of the Town's policy having broad rules that my work for one but not another.

Commissioner Robinson stated, during his Planning Commissioner's class, they discussed this matter, and he was also in favor of Altavista's STR policy having a Special Use Permit requirement

Ms. Williams stated, along with a SUP, that Staff also recommended the Town's STR policy include the requirement to register the business with the Town; which should include a life-safety inspection with a county building official, and a safety plan for its occupants.

Vice Mayor Bennett questioned if a SUP would need amending if the use changed, such as a two-bedroom house being remodeled into a three-bedroom house.

Ms. Williams confirmed that, in such a case as that, Staff was unable to overrule Town Council's authority, and the amendment to the SUP would need to go before Council for secondary approval. Chairman Jordan asked if Altavista was responsible for conducting periodic inspections of STR properties registered in the Town.

Ms. Williams stated the STRs would be treated like any other use that required a Special Use Permit; if found not in compliance with their permit, Staff would initiate the process to request compliance, and if not complied with, Staff would recommend to Council to revoke the SUP.

Vice Chair Mitchell referenced Staff's recommended rules and regulations for STRs in Altavista, with the minimum age of eighteen to rent from an STR business. She said that an individual had to be twenty-five years of age to rent a vehicle at most car-rental businesses.

Student Commissioner Micah Andrews suggested reviewing the rules of AIR B&B, to compare their requirements and restrictions with those proposed for Altavista, to consider if any of their rules would also be viable for the Town.

There was a unanimous consensus of the Planning Commission to recommend Option #2 to Town Council: to amend Town Code to require a Special Use Permit in all circumstances for approval to operate a short-term rental business in the Town of Altavista; and to recommend that Town Council direct Staff to create a policy, with Altavista's STR rules and regulations, that would require STRs to register their business with the Town before a SUP would be approved.

Ms. Williams referenced the STR Rules & Regulations that she proposed for consideration. She said the document was a starting place for a registration policy on this matter, but there were many items that still needed to be discussed, such as the number of occupants, parking and the number of vehicles to be allowed, safety plans, etc. Ms. Williams said the Planning Commission and Town Council could add or delete items as they deemed viable for Altavista's policy. She stated that, when complete, a public hearing would be scheduled for the Commission and Town Council to approve the code amendment and STR policy.

NEW BUSINESS

Civic, Institutional, and Community Uses

Ms. Williams referenced Altavista's Zoning Map and shared a photo of the map as a visual reference for the Commission during this discussion. She pointed out that civic institutions, such as Town Hall, the US Post Office, and the YMCA, were not specifically designated on the Zoning Map, but showed as C2-general commercial. She asked the Commission for their input on whether they should remain as they were currently categorized, or if the Town should consider creating a new zoning district for such uses. Ms. Williams shared Staff's proposal for a new zoning district,

“Community, Cultural, and Educational (CCE)”, that would cover civic and community uses such as the three aforementioned facilities, as well as schools, hospitals, child care, libraries, museums, adult care, service organizations, etc. Ms. Williams stated, by creating the new district, and distinguishing it on the Town’s zoning map in grey (the accepted civic color by all localities), would help Staff, the Planning Commission, and land developers to easily identify those areas.

The Planning Commission unanimously agreed in favor of Staff moving forward with the process of creating a new zoning district for civic, community, and institutional uses; to be clarified in grey on the Town’s Zoning Map.

Chairman Jordan asked if Staff was still planning to propose a “transitional zoning district” as previously mentioned when the Commission discussed a property on Lynch Mill Road.

Ms. Williams answered yes, however, the proposal was currently just a draft, and she intended to bring the matter to the Commission when the draft was complete and ready for consideration.

MATTERS FROM STAFF

Ms. Williams shared a few recent updates with the Planning Commission.

- Lynch Road/West Road: Complaint of airstrip usage
This item will be introduced to the Commission at an upcoming meeting, to consider whether airstrips should be allowed in the Town of Altavista.
- Rezoning Amherst Avenue and Novelty Street
This item will be introduced to the Commission sometime later in the year, to consider a proposal for rezoning (2) blocks of housing in this area of town.
- Moseley Heights: Neighborhood Block Grant
The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) approved Phase II of this project, with \$60,000 to continue the community study for this neighborhood’s needs.
- Citizens Academy
Staff proposed this program to help educate citizens of land use types and land use issues, and the governmental processes used to address those issues.
- \$200,000 Grant Application
Staff would be submitting an application that evening for a Home-Repair Grant, to be used for revitalization of neighborhoods like Moseley Heights, and 3rd, 4th, and 5th Streets.

MATTERS FROM THE COMMISSION

Chairman Jordan recommended, with the Planning Commission Secretary, Ms. Williams, being out on medical leave during June and July, that the Commission not meet again until August.

There was a consensus of the Planning Commission that concurred with Chairman Jordan.

Student Commissioner Micah Andrews informed the Commission that evening was the last meeting that she would be attending; stating that she was accepted into a summer program and thereafter began college in mid-August.

Ms. Williams said that she and Vice Chair Mitchell would contact the new Altavista Combined School principal and ask for a continued partnership with Altavista’s Planning Commission, and

to recommend another junior student to replace Rayna Steele, which would be moving into the Senior Student Commissioner position as of August 2023, with Ms. Andrews' departure.

Student Commissioner Andrews suggested that, moving forward, a Senior Student Commissioner's last meeting be in June, to coincide with them graduating.

Chairman Jordan concurred, as did all other Commissioners. Chairman Jordan, also stated, if there was a major project the Commission was working on at the same time a Senior Student Commissioner was due to graduate, that he would welcome them to the July meeting to help complete the project.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Jordan asked if there were any other concerns or items to discuss that evening, of which there were none.

With no further business to discuss, Chairman Jordan adjourned the meeting at 5:55 p.m.

John Jordan
Planning Commission Chair

Sharon D. Williams, AICP
Planning Commission Secretary