

The Altavista Planning Commission held a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, April 4th, 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 5:00 p.m.

DETERMINATION OF QUORUM:

With all 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.

Ms. Sharon D. Williams, Director of Community Development, asked that an additional item, d. Home Occupations, be added to the agenda in Section 11. Updates, and Chairman Jordan agreed.

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

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 informed the Commission that Ms. Williams had been out of the office for two weeks for a personal matter, therefore the March minutes were not available for approval at that time.

Ms. Williams assured the Commissioners that the March meeting minutes would be complete and ready for consideration at their May 2nd meeting.

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.

INTRODUCTION OF ASSISTANT TOWN MANAGER

Chairman Jordan welcomed Altavista's new Assistant Town Manager, Matt Perkins and asked him to share a few words about himself to the Commission.

Mr. Perkins stated his last position was as a Project Manager at the Central Virginia Planning District Commission (CVPDC) for projects which included infrastructure, community development, and housing. He shared his appreciation for the work the Planning Commission did for the community, and stated he looked forward to working with them.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

There were no public hearings scheduled for this date.

OLD BUSINESS:

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that staff had been contacted by two solar farm representatives who had requested to present at the meeting; however, no one was present at that time and she was unsure if they still intended to attend, but she wanted to make the Commission aware.

a. 2040 Comprehensive Plan – Goals and Objectives

Ms. Williams stated the meeting would focus on economic development, and housing would be discussed if time allowed. She stated if not, the topic would be moved to the May meeting. She reminded the Commission that the 2040 Comprehensive Plan update would combine the previous plan with the results of the SOAR Analysis and other town plans to create one unified document that reflected the Town's overall vision.

Economic Development

GOAL 1: Attain an environmentally sound, diversified, and stable economy that provides a sufficient tax base and quality of life resources that support the citizens and attracts businesses and visitors.

Objectives:

1. Continually seek to attract high quality commercial and industrial firms; and support efforts that are conducive to expansion and the success of existing businesses.

Ms. Williams referenced an item in the category, "Develop a partnership plan to help existing businesses grow and attract new businesses", and stated it was the town's intent that the new Spark Innovation Center would assist with that goal. She also referenced the recommendation that the town support vocational and other suitable training schools and stated the town was looked for ways to partner with the Virginia Technical Institute (VTI). Ms. Williams referenced the Town's Dearing Ford Industrial Park and stated it was part of Objective 1, in "Creating and develop a community owned industrial site or park to allow for expansion of existing industrial base, while encouraging new investments and uses". Ms. Williams said the objective item "to continually evaluate, implement, and enhance the town's Comprehensive Plan as needed" also included the same for the Economic Development Strategy and the Altavista Economic Development Authority (AEDA) Economic Development Strategic Plan. Ms. Williams referenced the item "to work with the business and industrial community through a business visitation program" and stated,

the town worked with Campbell County Office of Economic Development, the Altavista Chamber of Commerce, and the Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance, and sought to partner with others such as a Virginia Community Capital, which had access to additional loan programs. She said it was important to actively collaborate with local and regional economic development partners in business retention and expansion efforts.

2. To be determined

Ms. Williams stated that she was skipping Objective #2 for now and would address it at the next Planning Commission Meeting. She said the Commission needed to determine the roll that the Altavista Economic Development Authority (AEDA) and Altavista On Track (AOT) would have in the town's plan for economic development. Ms. Williams informed the Commission that AOT was having a Strategic Plan developed for them by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). She said once complete, AOT's Strategic Plan needed to be in the Comprehensive Plan update; to show the support of the Planning Commission, Town Staff, and Town Council. Ms. Williams asked if the Commission had any questions on that item.

Commissioner Marvin Clements asked if workforce development would have a part in the Comprehensive Plan. He stated it was an essential part of economic development and suggested it be a standalone objective under that section.

Chairman Jordan agreed that workforce development was an issue that effected all businesses.

Commissioner Clements referenced Liberty University and the Virginia Technical Institute (VTI) and stated he believed they could both be beneficial in Altavista's workforce development plan.

Ms. Williams referenced Career Works, a regional resource that helped businesses, localities, and educational entities meet their workforce needs, and said a representative from Career Works contacted the previous Town Manager about working with Altavista; however, a partnership was not formed.

Commissioner Clements stated it was important to have employment ready applicants for both its existing businesses and prospective industries.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked if Central Virginia Community College (CVCC) had a workforce development program.

Assistant Town Manager Matt Perkins said they had targeted classes, such as CDL training, but nothing specifically pertained to workforce development. Mr. Perkins mentioned Traci Blido, Virginia Career Works Executive Director for Workforce Development, and said she would be a good person to contact on that matter.

Ms. Williams referenced Town Council, the Chamber, AOT, the AEDA, and other town partners and stated they all had their own ideas for economic development; however there had been no coordination among the groups. She asked the Commission what part they thought the town should play to bring town partners together on that matter.

Commissioner Clements said he believed the town should take the lead and provide a way for all the groups to work together.

Vice Mayor Bennett stated the town tried to accomplish that through a Steering Committee, but the group only met a couple of times. He said Altavista was centrally located between Campbell County and Pittsylvania County which gave the town the strongest opportunity to grow the workforce in Altavista and its surrounding communities.

Ms. Williams asked the Commission if they believed the focus should be on technical or vocational skills.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked if the Comoin Study addressed workforce development.

Ms. Williams said it might have; however, the plan was never executed.

Commissioner Clements suggested identifying what types of training the town's local industry needed most, whether it was technical, vocational, or both and find out what potential new industries needed.

Ms. Williams stated collecting the data could be a task for an intern.

Mr. Perkins shared that Tim Saunders with Career Works conducted business outreach and collected the data that was mentioned; however, it did not include Pittsylvania County. He said Mr. Saunders was a good resource for the information.

Chairman Jordan asked what the first steps were to implement a workforce development program.

Ms. Williams stated the town would need a dedicated person to oversee the program; therefore, the identification of that person was the first step. She stated that if the Commission wanted to recommend a workforce development program, Town Council would need to determine if they wanted to dedicate the resources needed to execute the program. She said when the Comprehensive Plan update went before Council for consideration, the workforce program was one of the items that needed to be further discussed.

Vice Chair Mitchell referenced the Camoin Study and said the study addressed the fact that the town did not have an Economic Development Director, which could help bridge the gap between the town and local businesses and industries.

Vice Mayor Bennett shared his concern that the town paid for studies and plans which were not utilized.

Ms. Williams referenced the minutes from a previous meeting where Chairman Jordan suggested the Planning Commission meet with Town Council a few times per year. She asked if it was the desired of the Commission to recommend that to Council.

Vice Mayor Bennett shared his desire to meet for Town Council to update the Commission on items the Commission had recommended.

Vice Chair Mitchell stated, since the Camoin study was adopted by Council she believed it needed to be in the Comprehensive Plan update, along with the other existing town plans being combined with the update.

Ms. Williams said she believed the study was not well received because of the way it was delivered. She said it included goals to be implemented by the town and its partners; however, the responsibility of those partners should have been discussed with them before the plan was adopted by Council.

Vice Mayor Bennett shared an analogy about an Orchestra Conductor and how the Conductor was responsibility for bringing all the musicians together to create a cohesive melody. He said without that leadership, each musician played individual songs which caused confusion. He stated he believed the town needed to have a conductor to do the same with its partners and committees.

The Planning Commission concurred with the Vice Mayor.

With no further comments on this matter, Ms. Williams moved to the next objective

3. Sustain and Enhance the Downtown and Main Street Commercial Corridor.

Ms. Williams reminded the Commission that in 2021 the Main Street District was extended to Charlotte Avenue. She said this objective encouraged business owners to enhance their presence by doing exterior façade improvements and explained the town offered incentives to help and stressed the importance of increased awareness of the program. She said improved visual esthetics in an area helped draw interest for new businesses.

Vie Chair Mitchell asked Ms. Williams to explain the incentive program.

Ms. Williams said the town offered grants and loans to businesses in the Downtown Revitalization Overlay District (DRO) and Altavista On Track (AOT) had a grant program that extended the entire Main Street District.

Commissioner Clements agreed the town needed to increase marketing for its incentive programs and suggested it partner with the Chamber of Commerce to offer the information in a packet for current and new business owners.

Vice Mayor Bennett asked where the information existed for an individual that wanted to start a business in Altavista. He said he believed there should be a step-by-step guide on how to obtain the needed permits and licenses.

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that AOT previously offered such a guide; however, the information was either not correct or out of date.

Chairman Jordan suggested a guide for how to start a business and information that pertained to town grants and loans be distributed to Altavista businesses.

Vice Chair Mitchell stated that task should be the responsibility of the town's Main Street Coordinator and acknowledged the position was vacant.

Ms. Williams said when filled that person visited with downtown businesses to inquire about their needs. She informed the Commission that staff and AOT recently revised the Main Street Coordinator's job description and hoped the town could find a more seasoned candidate that was comfortable talking and interacting with local businesses. Ms. Williams concluded Objective 3 and stated it was important for the town to strengthen its existing businesses and recruit new ones to develop a stable and sustainable economic climate in Altavista's Downtown.

4. Support development within the town that respects and enhances its character, land use, and natural resources.

Ms. Williams stated that goal included the town appropriate use of land use controls and would require the town's current Zoning Ordinance be revised. She said it was important to coordinate new commercial and industrial development with the provision of community facilities, infrastructure, and services. She said it helped grant applications score points when those items were included in adopted plans. Ms. Williams stated it was also beneficial to encourage the redevelopment of brownfield sites, such as the old Lane Company property, and the reuse of properties and buildings that already existed, like the Claire Parker Foundation had done over the past couple of years.

Ms. Williams concluded Economic Development goals and objectives and asked Chairman Jordan if he wanted to continue with Housing at the next Commission's meeting, to which he concurred.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business items were scheduled or discussed.

UPDATES

a. Moseley Heights Planning Grant

Ms. Williams gave the Commission an update on the progress of this item. Ms. Williams said, when speaking with the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) about the matter, they recommended a three-step approach to include the initial planning with a facilitated discussion with the neighborhood, a study on needs, and a competitive construction grant. She said she would make an application for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for the first phase. Ms. Williams said she anticipated the project was a two-year process and asked the Commission if they had any questions and if they wanted her to continue, to which the Commission had a unanimous consensus to do so.

b. Reappointment of Vice Chair Mitchell

Ms. Williams announced the reappointment of Marie Mitchell, by Town Council, to another four-year term on the Planning Commission.

c. DAWN – Relocation and Special Use Permit (Donation-A-Week Neighbor)

Ms. Williams informed the Commission that DAWN was currently under contract to purchase the Moorefield Cleaners property, located at the corner of 7th Street and Franklin Avenue and were expected to close on June 1st. She informed the Commission that they would apply for a Special Use Permit (SUP) for the food pantry use and anticipated the Commission would hold a Public Hearing in July, followed by a Town Council Public Hearing in August. Ms. Williams said Town Staff would ask Town Council to allow DAWN to use the town's brownfields grant for an environmental study of the facility, due to the chemicals used by the dry cleaners.

d. Home Occupations

Ms. Williams referenced Section 86-454, *Home Occupations*, of the Zoning Ordinance, specifically paragraph c., Permitted Uses of home occupations. Ms. Williams shared that she was recently contacted by a citizen that wanted to open a nursery in their home as a home occupation. She said when she looked at the regulations, she saw that under the personal service uses permitted there were several uses that were not appropriate for a home-based business. Ms. Williams stated, she consulted with the Town Attorney, John Eller, who concurred, and he recommended the matter be addressed sooner rather than later. She asked the Commission for their input and direction.

Vice Mayor Bennett said that he was familiar with a few homes in Altavista that offered daycare, or previously offered, daycare and asked Ms. Williams why she believed it was not appropriate.

Ms. Williams explain that daycares and babysitters had two different meanings. She said babysitters were allowed to watch a limited number of children, above that number, they were considered a daycare and subject to additional requirements, which included licenses and permits. She said having a daycare in a residential district could become a traffic issue for the neighborhood.

Town Attorney John Eller stated, even if item c. listed a home occupation as permissible, it would still need to meet the criteria of a home occupation under item d. that referenced regulations and restrictions. He stated item d. addressed the potential for traffic issues.

Vice Chair Mitchell asked Ms. Williams for her recommendation.

Ms. Williams stated, at that time, staff was requesting direction from the Commission whether they wanted staff to move forward with preparing a draft document for their review, with the proposed amendments to Section 86-454 of the Town Code pertaining to home occupations.

There was a unanimous consensus of the Planning Commission for Ms. Williams to work with Mr. Eller to draft the proposed amendment for further discussion.

Chairman Jordan asked which of the home occupations listed in item c. were under her consideration.

Ms. Williams answered she would remove physician and dentist from the list of permitted uses.

Chairman Jordan asked Ms. Williams if the town's current regulations for home occupations included the requirement of a Special Use Permit (SUP).

Ms. Williams answered it did not; however, a Zoning Permit was required.

Commissioner Clements asked if the code for home occupations was only for the R-1 (Low Density Residential) and R-2 Zoning Districts.

Ms. Williams answered it was not because the Zoning Ordinance allowed residential uses in all of its zoning districts.

Chairman Jordan asked if it was viable to require a SUP for every home occupation.

Mr. Eller informed the Commission there was a large cost involved with a SUP request.

Ms. Williams said each SUP request had to go before Council for a public hearing and there was a cost to advertise. She stated that requirement was not small business friendly. She said the Commission could make recommendations if they believed there were certain home occupations that should require a SUP. She reminded the Commission that home occupations should not impact the residential character of a neighborhood or increase foot or vehicular traffic.

Ms. Williams asked for the Planning Commission's authorization to revise the home occupation ordinances for their review and consideration.

The Commission concurred with Ms. Williams and Mr. Eller moving forward with the process.

Commissioner Clements asked staff to provide pros and cons with each proposed change.

Chairman Jordan asked Ms. Williams if staff ever received complaints about home occupations.

She said she did.

Vice Mayor Bennett referenced the Altavista Area YMCA which was located in a residential district and asked what the difference was between the YMCA and a home-owned daycare.

Vice Chair Mitchell said sometimes ordinances change over time to adapt to the growth of a locality, which was the case with the YMCA.

Ms. Williams stated the YMCA's Daycare Center was considered a business and equipped for a daycare service, while a residential home was specifically meant for residential occupancy, not a business. She said the YMCA had adequate space to accommodate the traffic flow and parking needs, while a residential home did not and could cause traffic issues in the neighborhood. Ms. Williams said a business also had other requirements, such as emergency exit signs, adequate lighting, and being handicap accessible, therefore, she did not believe it was appropriate to offer more than a babysitting service from a residential home.

Ms. Williams said the Planning Commission's input was very important and she and Mr. Eller would be mindful of their comments and recommendations when drafting the proposed amendments to the Home Occupation regulations in the Zoning Ordinance.

There were no additional comments from staff or the Commission regarding this item.

Adjournment:

Chairman Jordan referenced the minutes from the Commission's previous meeting not being available and asked that those minutes be sent to the Commission ahead of the May meeting.

With no further business to discuss, Chairman Jordan adjourned the meeting at 6:37 p.m.

John Jordan
Planning Commission Chair

Sharon D. Williams, AICP
Planning Commission Secretary