

Burlington Planning Commission

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*Andy Montroll, Chair
Bruce Baker, Vice-Chair
Yves Bradley
Alexander Friend
Michael Gaughan
Emily Lee
Julia Randall*

Burlington Planning Commission

Tuesday, October 25, 2022, 6:30 P.M.

Remote Meeting via Zoom

Minutes

Members Present	A. Montroll, J. Randall, Y. Bradley, B. Baker, E. Lee, M. Gaughan, A. Friend
Staff Present	M. Tuttle, C. Dillard, S. Morgan,
Public Attendance	S. Bushor

I. Agenda

Call to Order	Time: 6:30pm
Agenda	No changes.

II. Public Forum

Name(s)	Comment
S. Bushor	S. Bushor asked whether there were materials available to learn more about the Neighborhood Code initiative. She also asked for details on the Vermont Development Conference.

III. Chair's Report

A. Montroll	No report.
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IV. Director's Report

M. Tuttle	<p>The Mayor plans to revisit and provide updates on the 10-point Housing Action Plan at the next City Council meeting on November 7.</p> <p>In partnership with the Regional Planning Commission, Planning staff have begun work on the impact fee study. There are three submissions for the RFP for a consultant.</p> <p>The RFP for a transportation demand management study consultant has also been posted.</p>
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V. Update on BTV Neighborhood Code Initiative

Action: Commissioner Discussion		
Motion by: n/a	Second by: n/a	Vote: n/a
Type: n/a	Presented by: S. Morgan and M. Tuttle	

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Commission Discussion:

- This is the third of the three zoning amendments called out in the Mayor's 10-point Housing Action Plan.
- Middle Housing is defined as "house-scale buildings with multiple units in walkable neighborhoods." M. Tuttle showed examples of middle housing—side-by-side duplex, townhouse, courtyard building, etc. Over time, middle housing has become increasingly difficult to build, due to cost, car-centric lifestyles, and zoning codes.
- M. Tuttle clarified that "missing middle" can sometimes refer to a missing middle class, but the focus of this presentation is middle housing.
- S. Morgan shared a presentation developed by AARP. Middle housing offer smaller unit sizes, which in turn create more housing choices that blend in with existing neighborhoods and keep housing affordable. It also allows for multigenerational housing and can expand the tax base.
- Key middle housing users include older adults, younger households, and single-person and single-parent households. In Burlington, these groups make up over 1/3 of the population. A study found that the median price of a single family detached home is not affordable for a 2-person household making 100% AMI in Burlington. Middle housing targets those who make 80% to 120% AMI, like teachers and nurses.
- S. Morgan shared an image of Burlington's land use plan via three maps. One map showed areas of planned growth (20% of the city's land), though not all of these areas will solely offer housing. They might also offer office and business space. Another map represented the 40% of land area planned to sustain, which is where middle housing could help increase housing stock. In residential neighborhoods, 80%+ of land is zoned for low-density development. A displacement study conducted in Portland, OR found that neighborhoods without plans for growth are at an increased risk of gentrification.
- S. Morgan provided an abbreviated history of Burlington's residential zoning since 1947 and its relevance to the middle housing today. Throughout the late 20th century, there were more zoning requirements that lowered density, limited housing types, and increased parking.
- Other communities have changed their zoning laws to allow for up to four units on every city lot, or have ADU and neighborhood infill policies. One common barrier to zoning changes is that the maps don't reflect what is actually happening on the ground, i.e. 40% of Burlington's properties don't conform to today's zoning. Other barriers include on-site parking requirements, density limits and zoning standards that effectively prohibit middle housing types. Many of the lots in Burlington are not big enough to accommodate the current duplex standards.
- As an example, Durham NC's expanded housing choice amendment allows for higher production of diverse housing types. Burlington's current zoning don't allow a range of housing types. S. Morgan provided examples of lots where multiple, small cottages could be built but the current zoning would not allow for that.
- Planning staff are looking into form standards, as used in other communities, to encourage middle housing. In South Bend IN, this was described as "eliminating the suburban bias." This city also incentivized middle housing by creating a modern-day Sears catalog of housing options. Memphis TN also utilized some of these strategies and went further by adjusting the building code as well.
- Planning staff have identified the following opportunities: explore ways to "re-legalize: historic neighborhood patterns, identify solutions to common zoning barriers, find opportunities to build on neighborhood' unique character through more context sensitive zoning tools, and example the scale of development allowed in low-density areas along major streets served by transit.
- M. Gaughan commented on historic, unused properties throughout Burlington, like old barns, and the difficulty to redevelop them. He added that this might be good opportunity to explore homeownership with partners such as VFHA. M. Tuttle added that historic preservation professionals are also hopeful that historic properties can be redeveloped easily. She shared that

VFHA is working on the “value gap” of housing, which is the gap between the cost of building housing versus what the housing can reasonably be sold for.

- B. Baker noted that it is difficult to accommodate for smaller units with standards of dwelling units per acre. He recommended finding a zoning device that allows for the proper scale, but is not prescriptive on the number of units. He also noted that updating the building code would be important for this effort and used the high-cost sprinkler requirement on multi-unit housing as an example.
- Y. Bradley echoed this statement and recommended that Planning staff review the regulatory requirements and associated building costs. The cost of construction is often higher than the assessed value. He also noted that inclusionary zoning may affect affordability and the missing middle issue. He described that developers may lose profits on the affordable units and therefore need to make up the lost profits on the other units.
- E. Lee noted that many retirees have moved to Burlington for the availability of smaller units in walkable neighborhoods. Some may think that these housing options only attract students or poor people, but these units are attractive to people who may be in transition in their life. S. Morgan responded that AARP supports this initiative as these housing options help older adults age in their homes.
- A. Friend shared that the Commission has worked extensively on form-based code and that this presentation was a paradigm shift, but exciting. He also noted that increasing density in low-density residential may be controversial. J. Randall agreed that the density may be controversial, especially in the New North End. She pointed to the rendering of the small cottage court in the presentation as a powerful example of what could exist in that area. Planning staff looped back around to the maps in the presentation that showed lots that do not meet the minimum size and lots that are non-conforming. J. Randall recommended reviewing a density minimum. M. Gaughan added that this work could complement the long-range New North End plan.
- M. Tuttle offered that along with the impact fee study, the City is working on other economic analyses. B. Baker added that cost of construction is one thing, but cost-per-unit is also a useful perspective in this conversation. M. Tuttle responded that presenters at a recent conference went through an exercise of developing a real-life triplex with the challenges of zoning and building costs/fees. The exercise demonstrated that building a triplex was nearly impossible and could affect pricing of the units. A. Montroll stated that this would be a good exercise to repeat with Burlington’s zoning and building codes to see what the existing barriers are. He also gave the example of the barriers that existing for building ADU’s, i.e. lot size and owner occupancy.
- J. Randall offered that many people may be unfamiliar with the term missing middle housing, but may be more familiar with and more favorable toward the term infill.

VI. Commissioner Items

Action: n/a		
Motion by: n/a	Second by: n/a	Vote: n/a
Type: n/a	Presented by: n/a	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The next meeting is November 15. 		

VII. Minutes and Communications

Action: Approve the minutes and accept the communications		
Motion by: J. Randall	Second by: A. Friend	Approved Unanimously
Minutes Approved: October 11		
Communications Accepted: in the agenda packet and posted at https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityPlan/PC/Agendas		

VIII. Adjourn

Adjournment	Time: 7:45 pm	
Motion: A. Friend	Second: E. Lee	Vote: Approved Unanimously