Minutes

Planning Commission February 10, 2021, via Zoom 5 p.m.

Present: Christine Armstrong, Ellen Celnik, Kent Hansen, Jerilyn Virden, Linda Romans, Brett Stanciu, Carol Fairbank, Lise Armstrong, Ann Kramer, Barb Paterson, Betsy Hunt, John Schweitzer, Katherman Needleman, Bill Hardy, Dede Stabler, Jennifer Ranz, Julie Brochu, Linda Ely, Mary Parker, MacNeil, Bob Durand, Naomi Ranz-Schleifer, Rusty Newhouse, Sheila Lapoint, Jeff Bennett, Day Patterson, Stephanie Herrick, Amy and Jess Nichols, David Miltenberger, Robin Sherwood, Mimi Haley, Judy Dales, Janet Rehinquist, Bob Kasten.

Absent Members: None.

Meeting called to order at 5:06 p.m.

1. Approve January’s Meeting Minutes: Motion to approve by Jerilyn. Seconded by Christine, carried.

2. Committee/Task Force Updates:
   a. Housing Committee Update: In its regular meetings, the committee continues to focus on rental unit numbers, affordability, and to take zoning action to improve affordability. The committee is working with Rural Edge, a housing nonprofit in the Northeast Kingdom. Micheal Porazzao is a new committee member.
   b. Connected Greensboro Update: Greensboro has a significant portion of the area’s underserved population. Federal funding should be released in the next 6 to 9 months in the process for high-speed internet. In the interim, Starlink will soon be available.
   c. Lake Water Quality Task Force: The Stewards of the Greensboro Watershed and the Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District was preapproved to apply for a large grant to foster shoreland restoration progress and provide data around phosphorous contributions from watersheds among other tasks. Notice of grant funding will be released in June.

3. Bylaw & Zoning Discussion, Working Session & Voting
a. Extended Village District:
   i. Discussion and Edits: Kent said the housing committee re-examined the Extended Village District Bylaw after it was tabled at the last meeting and decided not to make alterations. This zone is a transition from half-acre zoning to ten acre zoning and provides accessibility. Some discussion ensued about confirming setbacks. Agriculture and Accessory Agriculture will be Permitted Uses.
   ii. Brief Public Comment: Naomi Ranz-Schleifer asked if the housing committee had spoken with the wastewater study committee and if that committee’s work had affected this bylaw proposal? Should this proposal wait for that work? MacNeil, who is a member of the wastewater study committee, noted that the wastewater committee is determining the best location for a project. That work may not be relevant. Julie Brochu suggested that five acres might be a better option than two acres. MacNeil said the two acres aligns with the Vermont homestead of two acres and is an efficient way to approach property taxes. Two acre zoning doesn’t mean five houses could be built on a ten acre lot. Jerilyn noted the proposal is 500’ deep, so that zone is only along the road. Kent noted this proposal aims to have more options for affordable housing. Michael Porazzo wondered if there should be a traffic study. Jess Nichols noted there are other reasons for traffic than local residents. Kent said one of the charges the housing committee faces is where does Greensboro grow? The logical place is next to villages.
   iii. Kent moved that Extended Village Zone be adopted. All in favor. No abstentions.

b. Short Term Rental Bylaw:
   i. Discussion and Edits: Christine said the STR committee had reviewed public comment and trimmed the bylaw. Carol asked for the rationale of including a three-day minimum rental period and a requirement to rent the entire dwelling in the Shoreland Protection District. Linda said that online advertising indicates many SPD rentals are booked for their entirety for a 5-day minimum. Many are advertised at over-occupancy. The three-day minimum is for people on the lake who live there and don’t rent and don’t want their experience altered. They also pay high taxes. We need something for the people
on the lake who are not renting. Kent suggested removing the requirement to rent the entire dwelling in the Shoreland. Christine said the original impetus behind the bylaw was concern that houses would be bought as rental units, and commercial interests would have too much influence in the lake area. Ellen suggested a compromise would be to eliminate the requirement to rent the entire dwelling but keep the three-day minimum.

Some discussion ensued about whether renters could register with the zoning administrator. Carol voiced that a three-day minimum excludes low and middle income people from visiting Greensboro. Affordable housing incorporates inclusion, but this bylaw takes the town away. Linda noted it’s not the role of zoning bylaws to make things like cheese or beer or circus camps affordable for everyone. A STR is a business. Christine reiterated that the mission is to protect the rural character of Greensboro and the town’s natural resources. The biggest driver in the town is the lake economy. Jerilyn agreed that water protection quality is paramount and noted that was addressed in the Shoreland Protection District bylaw.

Kent suggested removing the three-day minimum and the requirement to rent the entire dwelling in the Shoreland.

ii. Brief Public Comment: Jeff Bennett questioned the requirement to rent the entire dwelling and the three-day minimum. He noted that the minimum would prohibit weekend rentals. He questioned the data behind corporations buying up houses for rental income. Some discussion ensued about the requirement to sketch the property layout and buildings. Brett Stanciu noted a simple sketch would be satisfactory. Naomi Ranz-Schleifer asked if a STR permit could be appealed by neighbors. Linda answered yes; this bylaw would reflect all other bylaws. Brett noted STRs are a business that is currently not enforced, although all other businesses are required to have a permit. Rusty Newhouse supports this bylaw and thanked the Commission members for their work. He noted that renters could rent for two nights, and leave the dwelling empty for the third. He noted that renting around the lake has increased and this will help protect the water quality. Bob Durand said this bylaw is proactive. He supports
1% tax as a vehicle to help save the lake. Jennifer Lucas said she participated in the bylaw drafting as a landowner and renter. She is in support of the three-day minimum. The $60 is reasonable. She said the IRS does not consider STRs a business and suggested homeowners look at the details on the State for safety requirements. Kent suggested removing C1 and C2. Christine voiced that this proposal codifies existing behaviors and protects the character of the community and natural resources. Carol asked for data. Linda noted there is a difference of opinion. Ellen proposed leaving in C1. Carol proposed removing C1 and C2 and called a vote. Carol, Kent, Jerilyn, and Ellen voted in favor of these edits. Christine and Linda voted nay. No abstentions.

iii. Vote. Jerilyn made a motion to pass the STR bylaw as amended with the removal of section C1 and C2, the three-day minimum rental requirement and the requirement to rent the entire dwelling, in the Shoreland Protection District only. Carol seconded. Jerilyn, Kent, Carol, and Ellen voted in favor. Linda and Christine voted nay. No abstentions.

4. New Business: Public hearings for the proposed changes to the bylaw were set for Wednesday, March 24, and Wednesday, March 31, at 6 p.m. Warnings will be posted and mailed to nonresidents. Copies of the bylaws will be posted on the website. Paper copies will be available in town. A new Commission member will be needed in March. The Planning Commission will review letters of interest and make a recommendation to the Select Board.

5. Next Regular Planning Commission Meeting: A Special Planning Commission meeting was scheduled for Monday, February 22, at 5 p.m. This will be held in executive session for educational purposes. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 10, at 5 p.m.

    Motion to adjourn at 7:27 p.m. by Jerilyn. Seconded by Kent.

Respectfully submitted,

Brett Stanciu, Zoning Administrator