

**Approved Minutes
Hartford Planning Commission
Community Meeting on the ICR Possible Zoning Change
March 28, 2022**

A Planning Commission community meeting to discuss the ICR possible zoning change was held in Room 1 of the Hartford Town Hall, 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction, Vermont. The meeting also was accessible remotely and several people joined that way.

Planning Commission Members Present: Dillon Bianchi, Colin Butler, Toby Dayman, , John Heath, Bruce Riddle and Chair John Reid.

Staff: Jo-Ann Ells, Zoning Administrator, Lori Hirshfield, Planning Development Director and Matt Osborn, Planner.

Others Present: Susanne Walker Abetti, Marie Alvin, Michelle Boleski, Dennis Brown, Lannie Collins, David Crandall, Heido Duto, Kerry Heavisides, Ellen Hender, Darrell Herrick, Alexis Jamba, Josh Jasmin, Sean Jasmin, Cathy Melocik, Linda Miller, Joyce Perkins, Adam Ricker, Nancy Russell, Nate Stearns and Andrew Winter.

Chair John Reid called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He proceeded to read the remote meeting script which was followed by roll call.

Discussion of Possible Zoning District Change: Ballardvale Drive and Route 5 across from the VA Hospital from I-C-2 (Industrial-Commercial) I-C-R (Industrial-Commercial-Residential). If changed, the I-C-R district would allow multi-unit residential and mixed-use development as a conditional use.

Matt Osborn noted that this item is a follow-up to the January 27th and March 7th Planning Commission workshops where there was consensus to move forward to consider a zoning amendment to change the zoning to allow multi-unit and mixed-use development. Matt stated that during the 2018 Town Plan community forums, we heard strong support for mixed-use development in Hartford and to rethink the strict segregation of uses. Last year, zoning changes were made to add residential and mixed-use development in two zoning districts; one in Quechee and the other in White River Junction. At that time, staff and the Planning Commission agreed to look at other straight commercial zoning districts as well. Matt noted that this is part of a coordinated effort to create more opportunities for housing. He noted that the Town received a grant to hire a consultant to update the Housing Chapter of the Town Plan and the Town is working with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, who received a bylaw modernization grant to review our Zoning Regulations to seek ways to increase housing opportunities.

Matt stated that staff has since heard from Twin Pines Housing Trust about an opportunity to convert a hotel to year-round housing in the IC-2 zoning district. Staff looked at the zoning district boundaries for the proposed district and land uses and is supportive of a zoning change to allow multi-unit residential and mixed-use development. From that, staff developed a list of permitted and conditional uses that are intended to reduce impacts on commercial and residential uses.

Matt stated that the proposed district includes the area across from the VA Hospital and is bounded by I-89, I-91, and Route 5. The proposal includes changing the designation to “Industrial/Commercial/Residential (ICR).” The boundary of the proposed ICR district will have to be split from

the IC-2 district east of I-91. Currently, the Industrial-Commercial 2 district does not allow mixed-use development or residential uses. The proposed ICR zoning district would make multi-unit dwellings and mixed-use (residential and commercial development in the same building) conditional uses. Other proposed changes include moving some permitted uses to the conditional use side or eliminating the use all together. The following are staff's recommended changes from IC-2 to ICR:

Adding Uses to the District as a Conditional Use:

- Mixed-use
- Multi-unit Residential

Eliminating the Following Uses from the District:

- Adult-Oriented Businesses
- Agriculture
- Bed & Breakfast
- Junkyard
- Manufacturing/Industry

Moving the Following Uses from a Permitted Use to a Conditional Use:

- Hospital/Medical Center
- Light Manufacturing/Industry
- Light Manufacturing/Retail Sales
- Parking Facility

Matt Osborn noted that for determining density of the proposed district, staff is recommending consideration of utilizing Floor Area Ratio (FAR) noting that staff is still fine-tuning a specific recommendation.

Matt Osborn stated that the purpose of tonight's meeting is to obtain feedback from the Planning Commission and the public and to answer questions.

Lori Hirshfield provided information on Floor Area Ratio (FAR) which is "the residential floor area on a lot divided by the total lot size." She cited the successful use in the Central Business District (CB) which changed calculating the number of allowed units per acre to FAR (2.0 multiplier) where only looking at the number of square feet dedicated to residential use not the number of units. She used an example of a former vacant lot at the corner of Bridge Street and North Main Street. Under the former CB zoning district regulations, the 9,000 square foot lot would only have allowed 4.5 residential units (9,000 SF ÷ 2000 SF per unit). Following the change in the CB zoning to utilize a FAR instead of units per acre, 22.5 units were allowed and ultimately 17 were built. This is significantly important to encourage compact development for multi-unit development on multiple floors. It also allows developers flexibility in deciding the size and number of dwelling units to meet a variety of market needs.

John Reid stated that the Climate Action Plan recommends increasing residential density. He asked if this change would increase density. Lori Hirshfield responded yes.

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John Heath suggested strict criteria for uses. He thinks motor vehicle sales is not an efficient use of land for the district.

Colin Butler stated that he thinks a closer review of conditional and permitted uses should take place, and agriculture and bed and breakfasts should be allowed in the district. Colin also suggested looking at a larger area of I-C districts for the zoning change. Matt Osborn responded that there are many IC zoning districts in Hartford often with very different characteristics. Including a review of all districts at this time would be a large undertaking and would delay the proposed zoning change and a possible multi-unit housing project. He also noted that the Town is embarking on a bylaw modernization grant with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission and an update of the housing chapter in the Town Plan which will result in a detailed review of Hartford's Zoning Regulations to increase housing opportunities.

Bruce Riddle stated that he thinks it is reasonable to just focus on this area at this time. He added that he is comfortable with the list of permitted and conditional uses noting it would not be prudent to close off too many land uses.

Chair John Reid asked if there are public comments

Ellen Hender introduced herself as a Hartford resident and staff of Vital Communities. She stated that she strongly supports the proposal.

Josh Jasmin stated that the proposal provides more options to property owners which he thinks is a good thing. He noted that he owns Jasmin \Auto an auto repair facility which includes some auto sales.

Bruce Riddle stated that there are wetlands in the proposed district which will restrict development. Josh Jasmin agreed and noted that he has worked with the Army Corps of Engineers and there are some developable portions.

Marie Alvin stated that she supports the proposal noting she thinks this is a perfect spot for housing including a shelter.

Cathy Melocik stated that she thinks this is a great location for housing especially for veterans. She added that she supports the work of the Twin Pines Housing Trust.

Linda Miller stated that the location is ideal for housing single adults.

Heidi Duto asked about the specific location of the housing that Twin Pines Housing Trust (TPHT) is pursuing. TPHT Executive Director Andrew Winter responded that he can't say at this time since there is a non-disclosure agreement with the property owner. Heidi expressed concern about the impact of housing on the hospitality industry.

Bruce Riddle stated that the maximum building height for the district is 60'. He believes the building height should be higher for the district. Lori Hirshfield responded that this height limit was based on the capacity of the Fire Department and she can inquire if this has changed.

Toby Dayman stated that if there is family housing, recreational space needs to be provided.

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Michelle Boleski suggested that each speaker state their name since she doesn't know who is speaking. Chair John Reid agreed to the request.

Darrell Herrick asked about the object of the district. Lori Hirshfield responded that it is to include residential as another option while ensuring compatibility with other uses. Derrick asked Josh Jasmin if the purchase and sales agreement on his property is coincidental with the zoning change. Josh responded that the timing is coincidental, and he doesn't have anything to do with the proposed zoning change.

Kathy Martin asked if it is coincidental that Twin Pines application for housing on Taft's Flat coincides with this proposal. Lori Hirshfield responded that staff has been working to increase housing opportunities since the 2019 Town Plan. The Town is also working with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, who received a bylaw modernization grant to review our Zoning Regulations to seek ways to increase housing opportunities. The town also is working on an update to the Town Plan Housing Chapter. She noted that the purpose of this meeting is to get public feedback before a decision if to begin the formal public hearing process to adopt zoning changes.

Colin Butler stated that the district is an important gateway and this is an opportunity to enhance the corridor.

Next Steps: Chair John Reid asked staff to summarize the issues that need to be discussed at the next workshop. Matt Osborn responded with the following list:

- Floor Area Ratio
- Permitted and Conditional Uses
- Building Height
- Gateway
- Wetlands and Buffers
- Opportunities for Family Housing
- Opportunities for Low Barrier Housing
- Opportunities for Veterans Housing

Matt suggested scheduling a workshop for Monday, April 11th or Monday, April 18th. The Planning Commission agreed to hold the workshop on Monday, April 18th at 6:00 p.m. Matt agreed to arrange for a meeting room.

Adjournment: Chair John Reid thanked everyone for participating in the meeting. Colin Butler made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Bruce Riddle and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 7:37 p.m.