

**Approved Minutes
Hartford Planning Commission Workshop
April 18, 2022**

A Planning Commission workshop to discuss the IC-2 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: Colin Butler, Toby Dayman, John Heath, Robin Adair Logan, Bruce Riddle, Chair John Reid, and Selectboard Liaison Kim Souza.

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

Others Present: Bill Kelsey, Andrew Winter, and Nate Stearns.

Chair John Reid called the meeting to order and read the hybrid meeting script which was followed by roll call.

1. **Minutes of March 28th Community Meeting:** Colin Butler requested that consideration of the minutes be postponed until the next workshop to provide more time to review. The Planning Commission agreed.
2. **Discussion of Possible Creation of a new Zoning District in the IC-2 Route 5/Ballardvale Drive/Jasmin Lane area to allow residential and mixed-use development, White River Junction.**

Zoning District Name: Matt Osborn noted that staff suggests eliminating the word “industrial” from the zoning district name to deemphasize this given the addition of residential and mixed-use to the district and other changes. Instead, staff proposes the name “General Commercial/Residential” (GCR). General Commercial is commonly used in other communities and recognizes the many different types of commercial uses allowed in this district. The Planning Commission agreed.

District Objective: Based on the comments received at the community meeting, Matt noted that staff proposes a revised district objective for discussion (which was included in the workshop materials the PC received prior to the meeting). Lori Hirshfield stated that drafting an objective for the district is important since when submitting an application, the applicant must address how the proposed development meets the objective. She noted that the more detailed the objective, the better. The following is the revised zoning district objective:

GCR District Objective: “To provide for well-planned and coordinated commercial, mixed-use and compatible multi-unit residential development served by public transit, town water and sewer along an important Town gateway. The GCR District offers relatively level tracts of land with good highway access and provides opportunities for compact development and taller structures.”

Matt noted that in some zoning districts, such as Quechee Gorge and Quechee Interstate Interchange, there is additional language related to design and the vision for future development. The Planning Commission may want to consider including additional language for the GCR district.

Matt noted that staff has two questions for the Planning Commission to consider which will help guide the District Objective discussion as well as Building Height and Density:

- What is the long-term vision for how this area will develop?
- Given current and future needs, is the vision a reflection of the existing character of the area or working towards a new area character?

Matt noted that although the district includes 13 properties on about 32 acres, most of the lots have limited development potential. There is a sizable area of wetlands that also limits development. There are two undeveloped small lots and a couple of lots that have potential for redevelopment.

Chair John Reid asked what is the vision that we are trying to achieve. Colin Butler responded that since the district is an important gateway to the town and state, we need to protect the visual character of the district. Bruce Riddle agreed. It was suggested that we consider a design review district. Robin Adair Logan agreed. Lori responded that establishing a design review district is a lengthy and somewhat challenging process. She noted that another option is a modified version of form-based zoning by putting more specific criteria in the zoning district objective similar to what was done for the QII Zoning District. Lori stated that staff also is seeking input from the Planning Commission on vision and reflecting the existing character of the area or working towards a new area character as these relate to density, bulk, and visual considerations.

Matt distributed a handout “IC-2 Zoning District Objectives and Alternative” It included the following that includes a second part to the objective that includes criteria for development:

QII Zoning District Design Objective

To provide for well-planned and coordinated development (commercial facilities/services and residential) that can be effectively integrated with the scenic character of the I-89/Route 4 gateway while maintaining safe and efficient traffic flow. This district will balance the needs of the community and those of the traveling public.

In order to enhance Vermont’s traditional settlement pattern (compact villages surrounded by open space) and ensure coordinated development, the following criteria are set forth:

- Protect natural resources, including scenic views and wildlife habitat corridors;
- Preserve existing vegetation wherever possible;
- Apply access management principles;
- Design buildings to fit the character of the site with attention given to mass and scale;

The Planning Commission liked the development criteria and suggested modifying the criteria to better fit the GCR district.

Bruce suggested adding pedestrian accessibility and landscaping to the objective. The P.C. agreed.

It was agreed that staff will work on developing additional language for the district objective that includes the four QII criteria in the objective, as well as walkability and landscaping.

Robin Adair suggested looking at examples from other Vermont communities. The P.C. agreed.

There was discussion about extended stay hotels and the difference with the definition for hotels. Colin stated that he doesn't like the current definition of extended stay hotels since it doesn't have a maximum limit to the length of stay. Lori noted that staff's proposal is to add residential to the district and keep the current use of a hotel/motel district with an extended stay component. She noted that staff will look at the definitions to make the distinctions between rental and extended-stay clearer.

There was concern expressed about land uses that may not enhance the character of the district. Robin Adair responded that the real estate market is undergoing a major change and land is too valuable for many of the uses.

There was a discussion about access management. Matt noted that new applications undergo a review of existing and proposed access, which sometimes require a traffic study.

Building Height: Matt noted that the current height limit is 60' for the IC-2 zoning district. Buildings in this district range from one to four stories. The tallest buildings in the district are the hotels. Existing hotels range from 2-4 stories. The following is a list of the hotels, the number of stories and the building height:

<u>Hotel</u>	<u># of Stories</u>	<u>Building Height</u>
Fairfield Inn	3	36'
Holiday Inn Express	2 & 4	44'10"
White River Inn & Suite	4	44'10"
Hampton Inn	3	34'
Super 8	2	<30

Matt noted that in 2009, the Larkin Family Partnership renovated one of its hotels and increased the building from two to four stories, but we haven't seen any applications approach the 60' maximum height requirement.

Matt reported that Fire Chief Scott Cooney indicated recently that the Fire Department will not impose a height restriction on new construction. Therefore, there is an opportunity to go up in height. However, going above 60' would be a big change for Hartford given what is there today. Staff thinks that before an increase in the height requirement is considered, a more extensive community discussion is needed.

Kim Souza noted that the Fire Department has a new 100' ladder truck.

John Heath stated that he thinks the current maximum height of 60' in the district is fine as it is. Toby Dayman agreed and noted that he would not want to go higher. The Planning Commission consensus was to stick with the 60' standard.

Permitted and Conditional Uses: Matt Osborn noted that currently, we are considering changing the zoning to include multi-unit residential and mixed-use development as conditional uses, eliminating a few uses and switching a few uses from permitted to conditional. He referred to the updated zoning district sheet that includes the new district name, updated draft objective as well as the list of permitted and conditional uses. He also noted the one-page zoning matrix that includes

all of the zoning districts with permitted and conditional uses. The proposed GCR district and uses are highlighted in yellow, and immediately adjacent to the IC and IC-2 zoning district for comparison with the current zoning district uses. Highlighted in orange are uses that the Planning Commission has brought up in previous workshop discussions.

John Heath stated that he questions the appropriateness of motor vehicle sales given their tendency to use a lot of valuable land. There was discussion about eliminating and/or changing motor vehicle sales and fueling facilities from a permitted to a conditional use, and when creating nonconforming uses. Colin recommended making all motor vehicle uses conditional uses in the new district. The Planning Commission agreed.

There was discussion about electric charging vehicle stations and whether these are considered vehicle fueling facilities. The Commission concluded that these are distinct and should be separate.

Colin suggested keeping agriculture as a permitted use. Robin Adair noted that agricultural is not allowed in designated wetlands. It was agreed that staff will seek clarification.

John Heath asked if a garden associated with a housing project would be considered agricultural. Lori Hirshfield responded that she thought a garden would be accessory to the residential use.

Bruce suggested removing “Contractors Yard” from the list of conditional uses due to the outdoor storage that goes along with it. Colin agreed noting that it doesn’t fit in with the district objective. The Planning Commission agreed.

Matt asked if there are other uses that the Planning Commission would like to address. John Heath recommended removing crematories from the district. The Planning Commission agreed.

3. **Next Workshop:** Matt Osborn suggested that the Planning Commission schedule the next workshop. It was agreed to hold the next workshop on Monday, May 16th.
4. **Adjournment:** Bruce Riddle made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Toby Dayman and approved. The meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m.