

**Draft Minutes of the
Hartford Planning Commission Public Hearing
GCR Zoning Bylaw Amendment
September 8, 2022**

Attendance

Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment Members: Colin Butler, Toby Dayman, John Heath, Robin Adair Logan, Bruce Riddle and Chair John Reid

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

Others: Selectboard Liaison Kim Souza,

Members of the Public: Ray Cuture, Ellen Hender, Darrell Herrick, Bill Kelsey, Beth Long and Meghan (no last name provided).

Chair John Reid called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. and read the hybrid meeting script and followed with a roll call.

John Reid noted that the proposed amendment is intended to implement recommendations of the 2019 Hartford Town Plan to create more opportunities for housing and mixed-use development. The amendment will create a new General Commercial/Residential (GCR) zoning district by adding multi-unit residential and mixed-use as a conditional use and changes to some permitted and conditional uses: The section of the Industrial Commercial Two (IC-2) zoning district that is located across from the VA Hospital and is surrounded by Interstates 89/91 and Route 5 includes parcels on Route 5 as well as parcels on Ballardvale Drive and Jasmin Lane. The district contains approximately 32 acres. John noted that the full text of the proposed revisions and a full description and maps of the proposed changes are available on the Town website <https://www.hartford-vt.org/> and at the Hartford Town Hall in the Hartford Department of Planning & Development and Town Clerks Office, and at the Hartford Village Library, West Hartford Library, Quechee Library, Wilder Library and Bugbee Senior Center. If you have questions or want to request materials, you can contact Town Planner Matt Osborn.

Town Planner Matt Osborn provided background on the proposal. During the 2019 Town Plan community forums, there was strong support for mixed-use development in Hartford and to rethink the strict the segregation of uses. Last year, zoning amendments were approved to add residential and mixed-use development to two zoning districts that prohibited residential and mixed-use development (one in Quechee at the intersection of Route 4 and Waterman Hill and one in White River Junction at the intersection of Route 4 & 5). Following those zoning changes last year, the Planning Commission and staff agreed to look at other straight commercial zoning districts as well. This is part of a coordinated effort to create more opportunities for housing. The Industrial-Commercial 2 district does not allow mixed-use development or residential uses.

Matt noted that the proposal includes changing the designation from Industrial-Commercial 2 to “General Commercial/Residential (GCR) and allow mixed-use development (residential and commercial in the same building) and multi-unit housing as conditional uses. Since January, staff and the Planning Commission have held five workshops on the proposal. In addition, a community meeting was held on March 28th 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 noted that the area is a gateway to Hartford and staff and the Planning Commission spent a lot of time crafting the zoning district objective to clearly articulate the development attributes that are desirable. Staff and the Planning Commission have looked at the zoning district boundaries for the proposed district and

land uses. From that, staff and the Planning Commission developed a list of permitted and conditional uses that are intended to reduce impacts on commercial and residential uses.

In addition to adding mixed-use and multi-unit housing as conditional uses, other proposed changes include moving some permitted uses to the conditional use side or eliminating the use all together. The changes include:

Eliminating the Following Uses from the District:

Adult-Oriented Businesses
Agriculture
Bed & Breakfast
Contractor's Yard
Crematory
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
Motor Vehicle Fueling Facility
Motor Vehicle Sales
Parking Facility

Matt noted that to encourage higher densities in this built-up area, a floor area ratio is being proposed compared to the traditional dwelling units per acre method. This is similar to what is used in Downtown WRJ, but at a reduced level. The FAR encourages smaller housing units which are badly needed. A floor area ratio of 1.0 is proposed. This would allow a 30,000 square foot lot to have up to 30,000 square feet of residential development providing other site development requirements are met.

John Reid asked the public if they have questions about the zoning amendment.

Ray Couture, resident of Quechee and also from the Valley News asked why the zoning amendment is being proposed at this time. Matt Osborn responded that it stems from the 2019 Town Plan update that had strong support for mixed-use development and desire to get away from the strict segregation of uses. He also added that there is a severe housing shortage which exists in the region. He also noted that it follows zoning amendments approved last year to add residential and mixed-use development in two zoning districts which previously prohibited residential and mixed-use development.

Ray Couture asked if property owners in the district were notified about the zoning amendment. Matt responded that letters were sent to property owners prior to the March 28th community meeting. They were also mailed a notice about this public hearing. Matt stated that he hasn't received any objections by property owners about the zoning amendment.

Ray Couture asked about the type of development the Town wants to see. Matt responded that the Planning Commission and staff developed a detailed zoning district objective to guide developers of what attributes the Town is trying to encourage. There is also a list of permitted and conditional uses.

John Reid stated that the Planning Commission is concerned about the appearance of the area since it is a gateway. He would like to see well-thought designs.

Kim Souza asked if the Planning Commission considered going above the 60' height restriction for the zoning district. John Heath responded that the Planning Commission discussed it but decided to stay with the present 60' height restriction.

Beth Long of the Twin Pines Housing Trust stated that Twin Pines supports the zoning amendment. She added that she had spoken with representatives from the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission and Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development and they are supportive as well. She asked Matt if the Town had received a letter of support from either organization. Matt responded no.

Ellen Hender, a White River Junction resident and employee of Vital Communities voiced support for the amendment.

Darrell Herrick voiced opposition to the amendment citing that the area is an important hospitality district and he would not want to see it impacted. He also expressed concern about housing and lodging being located in the same building. He asked if the State of Vermont has specific requirements about separation. Matt Osborn responded that he wasn't aware of any requirements. He noted that residential and mixed-use development would require a Conditional Use Permit from the Zoning Board of Adjustment noting that approval isn't automatic. Lori Hirshfield added that there are many mixed-use buildings in Hartford and some have combined entrances and others are separated. Robin Adair Logan stated that she understands Mr. Herrick's viewpoint and noted that specific applications are reviewed by the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Following public comments, John Reid stated that he would break down the zoning amendment into three parts. He proceeded to list them:

1. Create the General Commercial/Residential (GCR) zoning district.
2. Change the Industrial/Commercial Two (IC-2) zoning district to GCR for the designated area across from the VA Hospital.
3. Amend Section 260-23 A4 to include the newly created GCR zoning district.

Matt Osborn suggested that a fourth item be included:

4. Amend Section 260-23A4 to include the newly created GCR zoning district.

Colin Butler asked staff if the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission supports the zoning amendment. Lori Hirshfield responded that staff has received verbal support but nothing in writing. Colin asked that staff request a letter of support from TRORC. Matt Osborn noted that although there is statutory requirement to notify the Regional Planning Commission and Department of Housing and Community Development, they typically don't respond to bylaw amendments. Lori responded that staff will ask TRORC for a letter of support.

Bruce Riddle moved to close the public hearing. Colin Butler seconded. The public hearing was closed.

Colin Butler voiced his preference for the Planning Commission and staff to evaluate all Hartford commercial zoning districts for opportunities to create more housing rather than doing one zoning district at a time.

Bruce Riddle moved to create the General Community/Residential (GCR) zoning district. Colin Butler seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Bruce Riddle moved to change the Industrial/Commercial Two (IC-2) zoning district to General Community/Residential (GCR) for the designated area across from the VA Hospital. Robin Adair Logan seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

John Reid moved to amend Section 260-23A4 to include the newly created GCR zoning district. Bruce Riddle seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Bruce Riddle moved to amend the Planning Commission Reporting Form to include a change to Section 260-23A4 that adds the newly created GCR zoning district. John Reid seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Bruce Riddle moved to present the zoning amendment to the Selectboard for their consideration. Robin Adair Logan seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Adjournment: John Reid made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bruce Riddle seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 p.m.