Approved
Minutes
Hartford Planning Commission
March 11, 2024

THIS MEETING WAS CONDUCTED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE VERMONT OPEN MEETING LAW IN PERSON WITH ELECTRONIC PARTICIPATION AVAILABLE

Present: John Reid, Bruce Riddle, Toby Dayman, Dillon Bianchi, John Heath, Colin Butler, Dylan Kreis, Kim Souza, Selectboard Liaison, and Jo-Ann Ells, Zoning Administrator

Absent: None

Administrative Matters

1. Public Comment

None.

2. Nomination of Matt Osborn as Acting Zoning Administrator

Bruce Riddle moved to nominate Matt Osborn as Acting Zoning Administrator for a 3-year term. Dylan Kreis seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Minutes

Bruce Riddle moved to approve the minutes of February 5, 2024. Colin Butler seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Sketch Plan Review

Redevelopment of Coolidge Block, David Briggs

David Briggs introduced himself and noted that he had submitted materials to the Planning Commission prior to the meeting.

He acknowledged that the redevelopment of the Coolidge Block is a big project and will involve a lot of discussions with the Town, State, tenants and general public. He explained that a developer will be part of the application, and that the existing building requires removal.

David Briggs noted that materials submitted to the Planning Commission included a massing study prepared by the architectural firm that designed The Village Assisted Living Facility. He stated that given a number of factors, a hotel was no longer part of the redevelopment plans and that the current plan is for housing on the upper floors, commercial space on the first floor and parking below ground. He added that he was interested in recent discussions regarding the creation of a downtown geothermal heating district. He talked about the impact and expense of demolition including the challenge to dispose of asbestos and lead paint, and interruption to the Village of White River Junction. He noted that he anticipated the project would take 13-18 months to complete. He concluded by stating that he hoped to choose a developer by mid-summer.

John Reid asked about plans for the adjacent Gates Building. David Briggs stated that it was his intent to preserve the building.

David Briggs explained that his vision was to preserve the hospitality aspect of the building, and explained that while a hotel was not being considered, an event center was part of the redevelopment plan. He added that he wanted to continue to have artisan tenants and was discussing the possibility of a medical clinic.

John Reid commented that he believed that the Town Manager was the appropriate contact for the Town regarding David Briggs' idea to have the project be a collaborative endeavor with the Town. David Briggs noted he has spoken with the Town Manager and Selectboard and has held a community meeting and will meet with existing tenants soon.

Kim Souza, commenting as an individual and not a Selectboard member, noted that the idea of a collaborative effort with the Town for the underground parking would lessen the demand on existing public parking.

Colin Butler suggested that there should be some assurance that the project will remain as proposed after the developer becomes the owner. He added that given a developer has yet to be chosen, the vision might change. He suggested David Briggs determine if any of the Town's rules pose a roadblock, and expressed concern on the impact on the existing small tenants during construction.

The Planning Commission tabled the remainder of the administrative agenda in order to attend a meeting to discuss the update to the Economic Development Chapter of the Town Plan.

Adjournment

At 6:40 p.m., Dillon Bianchi moved to adjourn. John Heath seconded, and the Hearing was adjourned.

Respectively Submitted,

Toby Dayman

Toby Dayman, Clerk

Planning Commission Terms

Toby Dayman 06-28-24
Colin Butler 07-12-24
Bruce Riddle 02-07-25
Dillon Bianchi 09-05-25
Dylan Kreis 6-26-26
John Reid 02-05-27
John Heath 03-11-27