

**Newport City Planning Commission
Minutes**

Tuesday November 2, 2021 at 6:00 PM

Commission Members: John Monette
 Kevin Mead
 Carole O’Connell
 Denis Chenette
 Amanda Chaput

A duly warned meeting of the Newport City Planning Commission was held on Tuesday, November 2 2021, in the Council Room in the Newport City Municipal Building. Present were: Chair John Monette, Planning Commission Members Denis Chenette, Carole O’Connell; Kevin Mead and Amanda Chaput appeared remotely. Also present in the room were NVDA’s Alison Low and City Manager Laura Dolgin. Nicole Gratton appeared remotely.

Agenda:

1. **Call to order:** Chair Monette called the meeting to order at 6:03

2. **Approve the minutes of the planning commission meeting held on October 5, 2021:** Motion made by Denis Chenette and seconded by Amanda Chaput; unanimously approved.

1. **Guest Speaker:** St. Johnsbury Assistant Town Manager, Joe Kasprzak.
Joe explained St. Johnsbury’s (StJ) path of rental code compliance was a result of a Rural Community Visioning process. The housing stock is deteriorating and there are hurdles, particularly with people looking to work remotely. StJ invoked a housing needs assessment study, funded by a VCDP Planning Grant, in 2016. It has taken years to go from concept to implementation. The study was completed in 2017, with a goal of building an economically sustainable thriving community:
<http://docs.stjvt.com/index.php/town-government/public-meetings/housing-committee/329-st-johnsbury-housing-needs-and-assessment-study/file>

This document provided tangible data that framed a discussion among a large group of stakeholders, and elevated housing issues from the anecdotal to the strategic. There was a benchmark for every neighborhood. Lots of recommendations came out but capacity towards implementation was the driving force of priorities. A strong housing committee was formed who looked at a variety of tools to include a residential tax stabilization program, code compliance, inspected properties and a charge for an annual registration fee. Group norms and common outcomes were established. A parallel piece was looking to other communities, state agencies, and legal aid (Wendy Morgan), to tap into learning experiences. Their Restorative Justice center took the lead on hosting quarterly landlord exchanges and other public dialogue sessions. StJ brought in compliance officers to testify, did not charge the first year, and had 86% participation, then 94% and now at 98%, and the most recent registration rate will also be in the high 90 %. The registration generates revenue for some programming and grants for rental housing improvements. The funding is not restricted to affordable housing because rental housing registration fees are paid for by all landlords and we did not want to restrict funding to only those landlords that serve affordable housing tenants. Funded with 50% of proceeds, and then

added \$10K from economic reserves, which added to \$30K in year 1, which left them the possibility of issuing 10 \$3K grants, or any array of smaller projects that equaled the total funding allocation. Of course Covid threw in a curve ball with getting projects completed and lack of contractors.

Thus far, St J has granted close to \$32K for over \$92K of projects. It has been a learning experience about how to invest. The Municipality is all about infrastructure; and the private sector has been all other development. Costs don't equate assessment and that makes things very challenging. A public private partnership, including the state of Vt and local gov't is required to make this work. It took 18 months to get through the public meetings, pc meetings, and to ensure the language was set properly. Examples of other struggles include finding a code compliance officer, and inspecting 400 units out of 1300 that are listed as rental housing in town. Vacant buildings are also addressed by requiring a \$100 permit. They began with 59 vacancies, now down to the low 40's.

The mini-grant program gets assigned to a small committee that reviews the applications and makes award recommendations to the select board. An example of the makeup of the committee: Restorative justice, regional planning commission, Rural Edge, habitat for humanity, usda rd, interested residents, business people, real estate rep. A Quarterly landlord exchange also takes place where issues in the rental housing sector takes place. The board thanked Joe Kasprzak for his time and information. It was very helpful.

It appears that having a handle on current housing inventory and opportunity makes sense. A housing study would be a good step to get into data. Our Municipal Plan will benefit to have a section on facilitating public dialogue to run parallel with specific recommendations to ensure the plan does not sit on a shelf. Involve larger employers from workforce housing point of view, AARP, Senior Housing, USDA RD, USDA RD, NEATO, Heatsquad, housing champions, to participate in larger discussions. It could be called something like a housing symposium.

4. City Plan Development: Some light edits in the housing section including the mention of accessory dwelling units, and think about the public private dialogue that is more organic than just government. After some discussion, it was suggested that a Housing Symposium may be an appropriate platform for generating this dialog. Alison produced another paper copy of the plan, with an electronic version emailed to the members.

Next meeting will have the development and vibrancy section in advance of the next meeting, along with other changes. The next meeting will have the NCDD Rick Ufford-Chase, and Rich Tetreault and Karen Geraghty as guest speakers. Where does NCDD see themselves in 3 and 5 years and 10, and what do they need to achieve those milestones. Guiding questions. This will drive the conversation about vibrancy. ** Update of 11/3/2021: NCDD is not able to make this meeting but can make the December 7th meeting. The next meeting will have Tyler Maas of the Vermont State Housing Authority as guest speaker

An invitation has been extended to the PC board members to participate in a phone call with Tracy Dolan, from the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program. Scheduled for Thursday afternoon at 3:00 for 30 minutes.

NVDA is mapping water and sewer and the sidewalks can be added. This can complement the bylaw modernization grant, as well as other initiatives such as the Neighborhood Development Areas (an idea that we have not explored yet, but may be a tool to consider as we progress in the plan.)

5. Old Business No old Biz

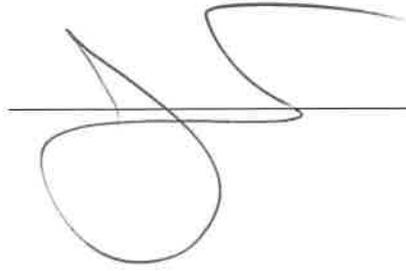
6. New business. No new Biz

7. Set a draft agenda for the next regularly scheduled meeting, November 16, 2021 @ 6:00 pm Next Agenda will read exactly as tonight, but for item # 3 will be Tyler Maas of the Vermont State Housing Authority as guest speaker

8. Adjourn Motion to adjourn made by Denis Chennette and seconded by Carole O'Connell, at 8:15

Respectfully submitted by Laura Dolgin, City Manager
Unofficial Until Approved

Approved this 15th day of Feb., 2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' shape with a loop at the bottom and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Planning Commission Chair