



Long Range Planning Committee Meeting
January 12, 2024
8-9:30 am

In Person in Council Chambers & Virtually via Zoom

In attendance: Allen Paul, Marvin Gates, Rick Shinay, Robyn Saunders, Peter Freiling, Portia Hirschman (via Zoom)(alternate), Rachel Hendrickson, Jon Anderson, Don Hamill, Autumn Speer, Karen Martin, Eric Sanderson

I. Review Minutes December 8, 2023

Marvin Gates motioned to accept the minutes, second by Rick Shinay. Approved 5-0-0.

II. Elect Chair and Vice Chair.

Peter Freiling nominated Allen Paul as chair, second by Robyn Saunders. Approved 5-0-0.

Allen Paul nominated Rick Shinay as vice chair, second by Peter Freiling. Approved 5-0-0.

III. Review and make a recommendation to Ordinance Committee to consider increasing the building height permitted in the TVC District(s)

Autumn presented several options to increase maximum building height in the TVC zoning districts in the Oak Hill and Dunstan areas. The original staff recommendation was to add Planning Board discretion for up to a 20% increase in height for design features and rooftop screening requirements. This would allow for an additional 9-10 feet to accommodate utility screening for elevators etc., as well as a more varied architectural aesthetic in these areas to avoid flat roofs at the maximum height. It would not affect residential density or allow for more than the currently permitted 4 stories. At the LRPC meeting in December, it was discussed that adding additional height over the staff recommendation would be in line with the comprehensive plan and help to encourage growth in desired locations. Staff also presented two options based on that conversation; one increasing height for the TVC district to 65' and another for 75'.

Marvin Gates indicated his concerns with this proposal and how it could affect growth and traffic concerns as indicated in the 2023 survey presented to Council in January. Moving this proposal forward would pose perception issues by the public. The Committee went on to discuss that the Comprehensive Plan designates these areas as growth areas, and the town should be directing any growth there as appropriate. Robyn and Peter noted this could drastically impact affordability and the housing crisis by directing any growth where public services and utilities are already available. Allowing a higher building height beyond what the Committee is reviewing today would be a great

opportunity to leave more room for open space, reduce impervious area, and increase stormwater management capability. While the current proposal does not deal with that kind of height increase, they emphasized this and how it could create a congruent town center between Oak Hill and The Downs.

Don Hamill raised his concerns, noting the Appointments & Negotiations Committee appointed Marvin Gates and Peter Freilinger to represent the public on the Long Range Planning Committee. He requested the notes from that Appointments Committee meeting be included with future materials and the minutes from this meeting. His primary concerns include safety and additional traffic in the area, especially with respect to Maple Avenue. The residents of Maple Avenue are involved in discussions with the Town Manager and Public Safety staff to implement safety measures in this area. Autumn responded that a meeting with residents of this area is scheduled for January 16th at 6:30PM and those concerns would be able to be discussed then. She did clarify that if a particular project has 51% or more designated affordable units, parking requirements can be reduced in the effort to encourage use of public transit and pedestrian facilities to mitigate traffic in town.

Rachel stated the Planning Board would like to have discretion to potentially increase the maximum allowed height from 45 to 54-55 feet for certain architectural features or utilities, as long as specific parameters are outlined for the Board in the Ordinances. She has concerns on how this proposal could impact Dunstan, as much of the existing building heights are minimal in this area. She was supportive of increasing height away from Route 1 but cautioned and requested specifics for buildings located close to Route 1 or other public streets.

Planning Board discretion with these potential new height allowances was discussed, with Autumn recommending to move forward with a compromise where the Board could increase the height for utility screening but not to explicitly increase the allowable building height. Allen was hesitant on this, and indicated his concerns that applicants often make the case for things that are or aren't required, so he would rather explicitly increase the height altogether. He echoed earlier points that increasing height closer to the 75 feet allowed at The Downs would further creation of a cohesive downtown area via building up instead of building out creating sprawl.

Jon Anderson encouraged the Committee to think about what this change would mean for the town in the long term, however, directing growth to growth areas may get the town to a tipping point where transit becomes more feasible. The traffic piece is key, especially with MaineDOT designated High Crash Locations in this area, and he questioned the impact this proposal could have on that. He also emphasized how the town can make green space happen if building height increases leaving more room for other site features.

At this point in the meeting, Marvin Gates made a motion to move forward recommending the original proposal to Council, which was seconded by Rick. Robyn discussed limiting height increases to only allow utility screening and varying roof lines is a missed opportunity, especially with respect to our Comp Plan goals and affordable housing. Portia suggested to remove the Planning Board discretion and flat out allow 55 feet as a maximum height in the TVC zone. Jon agreed with this point, and Don

expressed his concern indicating the Council heavily relies on the Committee's recommendation. He volunteered to write a Councilor Corner article for the public regarding today's deliberation and the proposal. Additionally, further hearings could be beneficial prior to any Council action or recommendation from the Ordinance Committee to the full body. Staff offered to provide information to the Communications Committee on the proposal and potential impact to assist with the outreach process.

With the Committee generally feeling taking away the Planning Board discretion was appropriate, Marvin withdrew his motion and Rick withdrew his second. At this point Peter Freilinger made a motion to recommend to the Ordinance Committee to allow 1 additional story (5 stories total) and a maximum building height of 60 feet. This was seconded by Robyn Saunders. The motion passed 3-2-0 (Allen Paul, Marvin Gates) Portia Hirschman was also in favor of the proposal, but was not a voting member as an alternate. Allen and Marvin requested their opinions on their "no" vote be included in these minutes. In short, Allen thought this was too big a move, and that a height closer to 55 feet would allow for an incremental approach to get to taller heights (i.e. 60-75 feet maximums), while Marvin noted the recommendation to 60 feet and an additional story was concerning for growth, traffic, and safety items identified by residents in the 2023 survey.

IV. Review and make a recommendation to Ordinance Committee concerning Chapter 405B Site Plan Standards and Commercial Design Standards Merger/Update – Draft Site Layout Standards

Autumn gave an overview that looking at layout and siting of buildings, parking location, and reducing setbacks to this effect will give the town a more cohesive aesthetic, especially along Route 1 (on which development varies widely). Peter Freilinger suggested the language on page 1 of the proposal include "mixed use" in the section reading "The primary goal of the site plan review process is to produce attractive...commercial, mixed use, and multifamily development sites". Robyn and Allen noted what happens with Route 1 moving forward, including the width of MaineDOT right of way and authority over Route 1 affects what the town can do. Allen noted in reviews past it was stated only 25% of traffic on Route 1 was pass through, so implementing any road diets (islands, reducing road width, etc.) could pose problematic. Portia added sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure would be needed to avoid bikers and walkers from being constrained between the road and buildings close to Route 1. Autumn suggested the Committee look at building architecture by neighborhood. This item was then tabled due to time constraints.

V. Public Comment

VI. Staff Updates

Autumn noted interviews will be underway shortly for the town's vulnerability assessment, and that a RFQ is out for the town's open space master plan.

VII. Committee Member Updates

Robyn indicated her concern for development and how it impacts flooding as we have seen in the last few storms in the last several weeks. Portia added the Transportation Committee is starting work on the Transportation Master Plan.

Jon Anderson updated the Committee that there will be a Councilor Corner on January 25th to go over what the town wants for a school proposal and solutions on what to move forward with, including breakout sessions to pin point our values as town and how they relate to this project. He encouraged the town to think about how the Gorham connector could impact zoning and commercial development. Is there an opportunity?

VIII. Adjourn – Next Meeting February 9, 2024

Robyn made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Rick. Passes unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 9:40AM

DRAFT