

TOWN OF HIGHGATE
Planning Commission Mtg.
September 17, 2019 @ 6pm

Approved Minutes

NOTE: All actions taken are unanimous unless otherwise stated.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Luc Dupuis, PC Chair, opened up the meeting @ 6:08pm.

Present for this meeting were:

Planning Commission Board Members; Luc Dupuis – Chair; Tom Conley – Vice Chair; Ken Thompson; Richard Noel; Bruce Ryan
Town of Highgate Staff: Heidi Britch-Valenta – Town Administrator & Planner; Wendi Dusablon – Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk
Public / Other: Dominic Cloud; Clarence Miller; Michael Kravetz; Evangeline LaRocque; Charles Christolini; David Danyow; Michelle Monroe ; Bob Chase ; Jeff Carr; Tim Smith; Sue Cota; Henry Rainville; Greta Brunswick; Steve LaFar; Woody Rouse; Richard Flint; Sharon Bousquet

II. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – Dominic Cloud, St. Albans City Manager

Heidi introduced Dominic Cloud, St. Albans City Manager, who is here with a presentation. We are all aware of the progress made in St. Albans and we are hoping to benefit from the ripple effect of that. With the State looking to upgrade and expand the airport and the Village Core group working diligently, we hope to get the best and highest use of the Village Core (former Machia) property that the Town of Highgate purchased two years ago. Dominic shared the story of St. Albans and offered a behind the scenes look and lessons they learned along the way. It began for him in 2008 when he became the City Manager. The entire project can be traced back to 1981 and the St. Albans Revitalization Plan. He shared many photos and spoke about the state of St. Albans around 2008. There were vacancies on Main Street, unemployment numbers were up, the population was declining, and their grand list was flat. He shared numbers on their growing grand list and what it took to get there. A graph was discussed, showing the five years preceding the TIF (tax increment finance), and the five years after the TIF. Information was also shared on how a TIF works. The lessons St. Albans learned along the way are: *most development projects will require public investment *more public investment produces more public control *strengths have real value in development context, yet are not widely deployed *community vitality is evaluated by the condition of both public and private properties *willingness to utilize strengths can produce superior results in a shorter amount of time and the returns are enjoyed for a long time. Dominic spoke about Walmart opening up around 2008 and it was the greatest thing that could have happened to downtown St. Albans. It created a sense of crisis about the downtown. There was a lightbulb moment when they realized they could drive the development they desired by participating in the economics of the deal. Many photos of the streetscape were shared and there was discussion on integrating public and private space. He recapped the many projects that have happened in St. Albans over the last 10+ years which include: streetscape project; St. Albans House renovation; Ace Hardware building; new State office building; new parking garage; new hotel. The city has assisted businesses with grant funding to spruce up the exterior of their buildings and it has been a win/win. Within the district the tax base has grown by 40%. There was further discussion on taxes, tax rates and how municipal and education taxes can be used with regard to a TIF. Investing in your community isn't about money, it is about strategy. The streetscape project has turned out beautifully and the city continues to invest in their streetscape as well as host many events, such as the Food, Wine & Beer Festival in Taylor Park. The police station was relocated and, working with a developer, a deal was put together to give Community College of VT (CCV) an opportunity to come downtown. A classic mixed-use project was put together with retail, CCV and NorthWest Medical Center (NMC) to all share one building. Dominic noted that parking became an issue and there was an opportunity to demolish a building that had low income housing units located on the back side of the mixed-use building. A deal was reached with Champlain Housing Trust to solve the parking issue and also construct 63 new housing units. The values

they developed are: *private investment will follow public investment *if communities don't invest in themselves, others won't either *communities that are willing to assume risk and partner with the private sector will get the development the community envisions *successful economic development projects require strong political and administrative leadership and persuasion. The presentation was complete and he opened it up for questions. Steve LaFar, Clarence Miller and Michael Kravetz had questions about funding, replacement of buildings, and what motivated St. Albans to seek change. Dominic explained that back in 2008 the city had to lay off their full-time fire department. It took a number of steps like that for the city council to see what needed to happen. Expenditures were still growing and the tax base was flat – voters wanted more. There was a sense of crisis and incrementally they started the improvements with curb appeal without having to raise taxes. These incremental projects began to raise confidence. Tim Smith added that success breeds success and that it was not just a downtown revitalization. \$5 million was invested in neighborhood sidewalks and curbs. Heidi asked how you become someone that people can't say no to? There are key relationships to consider – the relationship with staff/counsel/Selectboard and their relationship with the voters. Voters want to know what they will be getting for their money. St. Albans has never asked the taxpayers to pay more for them to have the same thing. Charlie Christolini added that he has experience with development and you need to know what you want, who you are going to be selling to, and why. Jeff Carr asked what funding opportunities are available out there for towns like Highgate. There was discussion on our tax rate and ways to generate capital. The Village Core Master Plan Committee is working on what it will require for public investment to happen and how do we assemble the funding sources to make a project happen. For a developer it's all about the return on their investment. The money is out there, and the more skin you have in the game gets their attention. Nobody will fund it if the town does not have any skin in the game. Clarence Miller had questions about projects producing jobs. Woody Rouse asked about the TD Bank building on Main Street and what will happen there. TD is exiting their lease early so there are funds to help bring someone else into the space. Conversations have begun with folks that are interested. This was a wonderful presentation and group discussion. Greta Brunswick from NRPC added that their funding was just replenished. There was more discussion on the direction the town wants to take with the main house on the Village Core property – demolish it or restore it. That will be up to the voters and we need to also know what grant opportunities are available to us in either direction. There were comments about the original design concepts from BUILD and the scale of the project and what is the right fit for Highgate.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Richard Noel to approve the minutes from August 20, 2019, as written. The motion was seconded by Tom Conley – **APPROVED.**

IV. OTHER BUSINESS & UPDATES

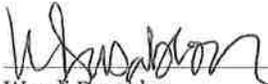
- Motion by Richard Noel to authorize Luc Dupuis to sign the MPG resolution and letter of support for wrap around services for the wastewater study at the Village Core property. The motion was seconded by Bruce Ryan – **APPROVED.**
- The PC has reviewed the Tax Stabilization Plan several times. Ed Adrian, town attorney, has reviewed it and his additions are highlighted in the draft. Some additions to section B under cancellations have made that section stronger. There were no changes to the agreement that goes with the plan. Motion by Richard Noel to accept the Tax Stabilization Plan and to forward it on to the Selectboard. The motion was seconded by Tom Conley – **APPROVED.**
- FEMA will be reassessing the flood maps. Comments are accepted until Oct. 7th. Heidi suspects there will be changes based on the flooding that happened in early 2018. Heidi also updated the board on several meetings coming up if any PC members were interested in attending. Some are local and some require day travel to other parts of VT. The town received a \$5,000.00 PACIF grant, so the bollards will be placed both inside and outside of the public works department. The VCMP committee will be interviewing four consultants on Sept. 24th. The VCMP committee will also be meeting on Oct. 1st to recap the community celebration and close out that grant. She will invite Greta from NRPC to the VCMP meeting on Oct. 1st also.

- For the Oct. 15th Planning Commission meeting the PC would like to invite the public works department and the library to begin the Capital Budget process. The PC would also like to discuss impact fees in October as well as go back to the project list and prioritize. The Hazard Mitigation Plan needs to be updated by February as well. For the November PC meeting, the PC would like to meet with the recreation department and the fire department on the Capital Budget.

V. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Bruce Ryan to adjourn the meeting @ 8:19pm. The motion was seconded by Richard Noel – **APPROVED.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by:


Wendi Busablon, Town Clerk & Public Meetings Clerk

10/15/19
Date

Minutes approved by:


Luc Dupuis, Planning Commission- Chair

10/15/19
Date