

**Christiansburg Planning Commission
Minutes of August 17, 2020**

Present: Thomas Bernard
Felix Clarke Jr.
Jessica Davis
Hil Johnson, Chairperson
Jeananne Knies, Vice - Chairperson
Ann Sandbrook
Will Drake, Secretary Non-Voting

Absent: Ashley Briggs
Mark Curtis
Johana Hicks
Jennifer D. Sowers

Staff/Visitors: Jude Cochran, staff
Jared Crews, staff
Jennifer Wilsie, New River Valley Regional Commission

Chairperson Johnson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Christiansburg Town Hall at 100 E. Main Street, Christiansburg, Virginia.

Public Comment

Chairperson Johnson opened the floor for public comment. With no comments, Chairperson Johnson closed the floor for public comment.

Approval of Planning Commission Minutes for the July 20, 2020 Meeting

Commissioner Sandbrook made a motion to approve the July 20, 2020 Planning Commission meeting minutes. Commissioner Clarke seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.

Presentation on the New River Valley Housing Study by Jennifer Wilsie, New River Valley Regional Commission.

Chairperson Johnson opened the discussion.

Jennifer Wilsie, New River Valley Regional Commission, gave an overview of the ongoing regional housing study being conducted in the New River Valley. Ms. Wilsie presented on both regional and local topics, including:

- Purpose and scope of the housing study
- Groups and stakeholders involved in the study
- Regional and local demographics

- The regional housing profile, with information on Christiansburg including distribution of households, median incomes and home values, and housing types
- Characteristics of the Christiansburg housing market with a focus on the low median number of days homes remain on the market (seven) and the low market vacancy rate (as low as one percent)
- Effects of the tight housing market, including difficulty for employers in recruiting employees and challenges for professionals looking to locate close to local amenities
- Observations and trends in the regional and local housing market including information on sale prices

Ms. Wilsie noted strategy recommendations for the Town of Christiansburg moving forward include:

- Preserving existing housing stock, particularly townhomes
- Connecting housing with overall community development efforts
- Expanding the accessory dwelling unit program
- Coordinating 460 Business corridor improvements with Montgomery County and the Town of Blacksburg
- Considering the establishment a community land trust

Ms. Wilsie noted the low number of days on the market makes it difficult for all types of buyers since housing demand is so high and supply is so low. The short amount of time that homes are on the market forces buyers to act quickly and provide strong offers, making it especially difficult for first time home buyers.

Vice-Chairperson Knies requested information on how the housing study determined Christiansburg to have a diverse housing stock and what variables were considered. Ms. Wilsie stated the Town's housing stock offers many different types of housing at different price points, which makes Christiansburg desirable to all types of buyers or renters.

Vice-Chairperson Knies commented on the number of undergraduates living in the Town of Christiansburg and asked whether the study had captured data on the overall number of undergraduates. Ms. Wilsie explained it would be difficult to determine the total number of students in the Town.

Chairperson Johnson and Ms. Wilsie discussed the demand within Town for townhomes, patio homes, and single-level homes and how they have been increasingly desirable to young professionals and baby boomers.

Ms. Wilsie stated the complete housing study report, once finalized, will provide in-depth regional and local analysis. Chairperson Johnson noted how beneficial the data provided by the study is for the Town.

Vice-Chairperson Knies questioned whether the study recommends the need for any specific type of housing in the Town of Christiansburg. Ms. Wilsie stated more housing is needed along the entire income spectrum.

Commissioner Sandbrook questioned the effects of Covid-19 on development. Ms. Wilsie noted the uncertainty of Covid-19's effects on future development. Ms. Wilsie stated the buying and selling of homes is still occurring and will most likely continue at its current pace. Ms. Wilsie and the Commission discussed the increase in construction costs due to Covid-19.

Commissioner Clarke questioned how long the trend of homes being on the market for a short period of time will last. Ms. Wilsie noted once more housing stock is available, the median days of housing on the market should increase.

Vice-Chairperson Knies questioned whether houses are selling at a rate higher than tax assessed value. Ms. Wilsie stated she has heard of this occurring anecdotally, noting an increase in housing stock would better align home values and prices.

With no further comment, Chairperson Johnson closed the discussion.

Discussion on potential amendments to Chapter 42, "Zoning" of the Christiansburg Town Code for the purpose of clarifying the allowance of architectural projections such as roof eaves, windows, porches and decks into minimum required yards.

Chairperson Johnson opened the discussion.

Mr. Drake gave a brief overview of the draft zoning ordinance amendment regarding structural projections. Mr. Drake defined several projections that would be permitted by the code amendment, including eaves, gutters, bay windows, chimney, fireplaces, porches, decks, and entryway covers.

Mr. Drake presented the proposed maximum allowable projection from a home and over the required setback line as well as the minimum distance projections must remain from property lines for each of the permitted projections. Mr. Drake provided illustrations of homes with projections along with hypothetical requests and how they would be addressed by the proposed code amendment.

Chairperson Johnson noted the code amendment would offer citizens and developers clarification, guidance, and flexibility regarding structural projections.

Chairperson Johnson asked whether the proposed code amendment was understandable and clear to the commissioners who did not serve on the Development Subcommittee.

Commissioner Sandbrook questioned whether this proposed code amendment had been shared with any local developers for their feedback. Mr. Drake noted staff will reach out to the developer who brought the code issue to the Planning Commission.

Mr. Drake explained the Planning Commission would hold a public hearing on the proposed code change and make a recommendation to Town Council, which would also hold a public hearing before voting on the amendments.

With no further comment, Chairperson Johnson closed the discussion.

Other Business

Chairperson Johnson opened the discussion.

Mr. Drake noted the effort to distribute face masks as part of the "Be Committed, Be Well" messaging campaign.

Mr. Drake stated Andrew Warren, Assistant Town Manager, would like to present the Christiansburg Placemaking Study to the Commission. The Commission agreed the next scheduled meeting on August 31 would work well.

Mr. Drake noted Town Council approved both the Montgomery County Public School bus garage facility and the Vinnie Avenue Planned Housing Development requests.

Vice-Chairperson Knies asked Mr. Drake to work on scheduling a presentation by the Dialogue on Race organization.

With no further business, Chairperson Johnson adjourned the meeting at 8:41 p.m.



Hil Johnson, Chairperson



Will Drake, Secretary Non-Voting