

Planning Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

September 9, 2019

Town Council Chambers

Present

Mayor L. Boucher, Chair

Councillor W. Cormier

Councillor D. MacInnis

T. Barkhouse

C. Hughes

R. Sers

J. Bain, Director of EDPC, Planning & Development Services

P. Dec, Planner

A. Dunphy, Planner

J. Lawrence, CAO

S. Scannell, Director of Community Development

D. Halfpenny, Secretary

Absent

Deputy Mayor D. MacInnis

Guests

Jenny Lugar, WSP

Christina Lovitt, WSP

Councillor D. Roberts

Councillor M Farrell

Councillor A. Murray

Councillor J. MacPherson

D. Wilson, Deputy Clerk

K. Proctor P. eng Director of Public Works

L. Basinger Strategic Initiatives Coordinator

Call to Order

The Chair called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m.

Mayor L. Boucher thank everyone for attending and remarked that she looked forward to good discussions which will lead to some decisions to finalize changes to the Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw. She turned the floor over to J. Lugar.

J. Lugar provided a quick recap and provided an agenda for the workshop. She acknowledged that there will be a focus on accessory dwelling units to clarify the uses and densities, She advised that the entire decisions are based on matching priorities as outlined in policies and determining

whether to keep as is, modify or ditch all together. Discussion could be made for each case she noted. She advised that today's session is intended to dive back in , have PAC committee air concerns, determine what it wants to recommend. She noted that Flag Lot Policy could be removed and replaced with acceptable 3 types of secondary suite, garage suite, and garden suite (little home based back of original building). This is intended to match the goal of increasing diversity of housing such as physically accessible housing and gentle increase in density. Houses she stated would be a maximum of 1100 sq ft with maximum building height as per the zone.

J. Lugar noted that Garage Suites are intended as extra living quarters, not intended to be a bunch of little mini apartments.

M. Farrell commented that a garage suite is not a whole lot different than having a basement apartment. She explained that many of the homes in the Town of Antigonish were built with an apartment to ensure the success of the homeowner. She identified that it probably is not intended for multiple living there, more like duplex scenario.

J. MacPherson advised he still had issues with houses being in front and back adjacent neighbours yard as it could create privacy issues, and that the number of bedrooms is a major concern.

W. Cormier agreed with J. MacPherson that the number of bedrooms needs to be capped. He advised that it is his experience that it is difficult to enforce what a developer puts inside. He noted that dens get turned into bedrooms and he referred to the difficulties in number of bedrooms pertaining to lodging house issues.

J. Bain reminded PAC members to be very specific in the definitions and policy. He relayed information from J. Martin, Building and Fire Inspector that the national building code has requirements for egress windows for each bedroom and the fire code requirements call for proper fire separations, etc. all of which are legally enforceable.

J. Luger reiterated that only one option could be used per household and that if there was currently a basement apartment there would not be an option for a garage suite or granny suite.

R. Sers identified that he lives in an area with homes with apartments and it isn't a problem. He noted that perhaps in instances where there are absentee landlords there may be more issues.

J. Lugar commented that the type of servicing for water and sewer needs to be determined for the accessory buildings. She asked K. Proctor, P. Eng, Director of Public Works if he could clarify which would best work for the Town. She advised that the issues of affordability is important to the developer. She noted that the lots could not be separated.

K Proctor advised that there are considerations based on where shut offs are and where the service is going. The developer needs to provide their plan of servicing to determine the best option whether an additional line at the developers expense or to extend existing services from original home to the accessory suite.

J. Lawrence commented that it is important for new owners to do it right going forward. He stated that one service to the property is paid for by the town but anything else is at the owner's expense and that it should be clearly expressed upfront to the landowner that there are costs associated.

J. Lugar noted that subdivisions could be developed by Development Agreement of site plan approval, should have separate laterals, keep services together and in an orderly fashion. Costs would need to be determined for owner to replace an existing line by staff which would determine if a base charge needed to be increased. She advised that it would require a plan that satisfies the needs of the MPS and that it would require the correct environment to do it properly. She acknowledged that there are very few large tracts of land available to develop.

P. Dec noted that he agreed with building separate services and charging the homeowner to ensure proper water pressure, etc.

Flag Lots will no longer be allowed in the proposed 2019 MPS. J. Lugar noted when looking at the pillars there is a need to address the housing shortage, listening to what the public has said, and working with a plan to address future needs.

W. Cormier expressed concerns about lodging houses and expressed concern that the registry has not been put in place yet.

L. Basinger provided an update on the status of the lodging house registry advising that it was a work in progress with plans to roll out at the same time as the new MPS and LUB.

Councillor A. Murray commented that it is important to advise the real estate agents that lodging houses above four bedrooms are not an option.

J. Lugar stated that the public has indicated that there is not enough housing stock that meets the needs of the community. She explained that gentle density such as the garden suite provides an option. She noted that large developments are great but not everyone wants to live in a large apartment building. Preserving the character of the neighbourhood is important and with architectural guidelines in place this will happen. She noted that as many angles as possible are covered to allow for development to meet the needs of the community. She advised that she has not seen a jurisdiction that deals with the issue of housing in only one way and acknowledged that it is hard to predict every need. She noted there is more than just the student housing market to consider.

Discussion followed and it was agreed that there should be no additional lodging houses permitted in the Town of Antigonish.

Councillor M. Farrell advised she is fine with creating more opportunities, she noted that diversity is good, providing more opportunities with smarter design is an important piece that provides better control. She acknowledged that she is comfortable with Engineering to look after the servicing details and to have the rules in place for owners to do it properly.

D. MacInnis agreed that he is in favour of creating more housing opportunities and that he feels it is a growth opportunity for the town.

D. Roberts acknowledged that she is in favour, she noted that she is supportive of giving individuals the opportunity to invest in the Town, providing they are following the proper building code and fire code regulations and obtaining the necessary municipal servicing permit. She commented that there are some people that move out to obtain accessible housing.

T. Barkhouse commented that the population of StFX has remained reasonably consistent over the past five years and therefore, with a fixed volume of students requiring off campus housing the shift to eliminate rooming houses would open up more opportunities for older larger homes to be converted into units making the neighbourhoods more attractive to young families, The older neighbourhoods would then offer more variety of housing options and disperse the student population throughout the town.

J. Bain commented that professional he sees no problem with the development of accessory housing options. He advised they work well in other areas. He reminded the committee to ensure that details were absolutely clear regarding types of permitted accessory housing..

J. Lawrence agreed commenting that the devil is in the details and advised that it is important to be very concise when dealing with UARB.

C. Hughes commented that she is in favour as there are controls in place for the size and architectural design, options are available for accessibility provisions such as barrier free units.

J. MacPherson and W. Cormier advised that they are still concerned over privacy issues but agreed they would be more comfortable if a restriction on the number of bedrooms were put in place,

J. MacPherson noted he still couldn't give his support and voted not in favour.

Councillor A. Murray commented that it provided great options for housing.

T. Barkhouse advised that the accessory buildings were scale appropriate and that he was okay with them as a permitted use.

Planner A. Dunphy commented that it was super important to provide the necessary diversity of housing.

R. Sers noted that it was easily supportable and he had no problems . He did comment that by registering what is out there, and having proper enforcement of the building and fire code it will provide safe housing options.

D. Wilson advised that she thought it was a great idea.

J. Ludgar reiterated that not everyone wants to live in an apartment, people want to have feet on the ground options for garden, green space.

Mayor L. Boucher commented that there are so many points in favour such as the flexibility to locate to smaller units, reducing opportunities for larger student parties in the back yards, alleviate housing challenges, greater opportunities for older larger homes to be repurposed into multiple units, and more affordable housing options. She acknowledged that garage conversions would still require permits to ensure proper development approval and inspections associated with the necessary building permit as with all other types of accessory building. She advised that she is in

favour of responsible, safe housing. She invited PAC members to put forth a motion and vote on accessory building housing options.

It was moved by Councillor D. MacInnis and seconded by C. Hughes, “the Planning Advisory Committee recommend that Council consider accessory dwellings with a maximum of 2 bedrooms and a maximum gross total floor space of 1100 sq ft.” Motion carried.

The Mayor thanked the committee for its input and for steps taken to move forward towards the creation of a clear productive vision.

J. Lugar reviewed other factors to be considered within a residential neighbourhood, as current document allows for more units in the R3 zone, and proposed would see three or four units by site plan approval and up to six units by Development Agreement. She noted that this would allow for the preservation of historic buildings. She encouraged all present to discuss to ensure what makes sense for the future. She acknowledged that in order to reduce parking requirements it will require strong political will and that there will be a painful few years. She acknowledged that to discourage students from bringing cars to campus StFX University must be part of the solution ensuring that students are aware that Antigonish has strict parking enforcement. The landlords association has to be informed and it will be necessary to provide direction to staff to enforce violations. She cited an example of other university towns that have decreased parking and created more walkable campuses.

J. Lugar reiterated that three and four unit buildings could only be developed in areas that had the proper setbacks and fit in with the scale and size of homes around it.

W. Cormier note this makes perfect sense as it would deal with working primarily with existing structures and it has been his experience to see that these types of apartments allow for more control than the rooming house type of housing. Converting older homes into multiple units performs very well as there are more built in controls.

J. Lugar noted that prefab tiny home on foundation, nice little bungalows with front door facing the street, Prefab houses allowed in RN-1 and RN-2 would fit on the smaller lot sizes.

J. Lugar reminded group that lodging houses with more than 4 bedrooms are currently a nonconforming use and are grandfathered and if sold would maintain it's grandfathered status but if the use is abandoned longer than six months it can't be reestablished.

Mayor L. Boucher acknowledged that it is a huge undertaking and that it is important to progress slowly to ensure consideration for community growth and to ensure good development takes place..

C. Lovitt reminded those present that the special projects coming forth would support the controls.

Discussion followed concerning the importance of clear definitions. Clear identification of legal non-conforming in the LUB, heritage building requirements and registration of lodging houses., downtown mixed use on Main Street and commercial periphery.

Site Plan Approval process and discretion of Planners to ensure exterior appearances are complementary to a neighbourhood

Mini-homes permitted in manufactured home parks only. Clear definition for modular homes.

J. Lugar explained that in the Commercial Periphery zone in the current documents allows for older homes to be used as Dr. offices, lawyers offices, etc. The proposed documents would allow for such businesses as a restaurant, brewery, etc.

P. Dec explained that anyone can apply to have a change in zoning if they are adjacent to zone which has for example commercial use.

Discussion followed on now allowing bars on St. Marys Street. St Ninians Street having a commercial ground floor with the Waffle Bus.

Flood Plain

J. Lugar did a review of Flood Plain concerns for 1-20 asking if a total ban on building should be listed or if there were any exception with proper floodplain mitigation pending legal opinion.

Discussion followed on a special designation for the Antigonish Market Square area.

Lodging Houses

J. Lugar reiterated that existing lodging houses are grandfathered and if sold they continue to be grandfathered and only revert back to original zoning if use is abandoned beyond six months. Any new rooming houses would have to be constructed under Development Agreement and would have to meet code, hours of operation, parking requirements, etc. She advised the only way to say no to rooming house development would be to remove from both zones as a permitted use. She advised it depends what is written in policy and any additional requirements as defined.

Discussion followed on whether rooming houses should be eliminated completely as a permitted use.

Parking Requirements

Parking requirements were discussed to review ways to encourage walkable neighbourhoods, parking enforcement, parking kiosks, expanded paid parking areas, cash-in-lieu in all zones.

Mixed Use

J. Ludgar noted that renting to people without cars is important. There are no restrictions on the buildings with the flexibility to convert from commercial to liveable space.

Site Plan Approval

J. Lugar advised that Old Town has specific design guidelines to ensure the exterior appearance of the building complement the neighbourhood. These guidelines are at the discretion of the planner.

J. Bain advised that EDPC staff may require further design training and additional skills.

Misc/Other

C. Lovitt did a brief review.
No Stand alone units on the Main Street.

Shipping containers permissible if retrofitted for living provided proper architectural and engineering design.

J. Lugar note the definition would have to stated converted for residential use.

Mini home would be confined to manufactured home parks.

J. Bain explained the difference to a stick built home and a manufactured home that is a prebuilt house that arrives in four parts and is assembled on site.

All agreed there are not a lot of building lots in the Town of Antigonish and therefore mini homes should be confined to the parks. A manufactured prefab home could be erected in RN-1 or RN-2 zone.

C Lovitt advised that the future of Airbnb is being looked at provincially and therefore best to wait and see how it develops.

J. Lugar recapped for clarification of progress from discussions: that the working group wanted a timeline added to the Development Agreement; more stringent regulations put in place for types of services in live work areas; clarity in the size of live work units; limited redevelopment in Commercial Development Designation through the Development Agreement process;. Expanding the Commercial Development Designation; Active Transportation Plans will involve trade offs but are to remain an important priority.

J. MacPherson commented that no full residential buildings on Main Street are to have frontage on the first floor that it needs to be commercial.

P. Dec advised that no with the change to the commercial periphery that was introduced in the May 10, 2017 minutes from the Planning Advisory Committee allowed for the space to be converted to residential or commercial dependent on market conditions. He noted however, that K. DeCostes new development will have commercial space on the ground floor but if conditions changed he is permitted to change the usage to residential.

J. Lugar asked if James Street should new developments on James St be permitted to have drive throughs. She advised that it is not the best tax revenue and doesn't create the best economic development. She commented that James Street is location with the potential to become an enhanced, walkable neighbourhood. She noted that there currently are big gaps in the streetscape but with vision James St could become an attractive location.

Discussion followed, it was noted that James Street currently has several drive throughs and if other franchise sought to locate on James Street they should be provided the same opportunity. There

was some concern over discouraging investment on James Street and why anyone but students would want to live near all the franchise type restaurants.

J. Lugar explained that changing the type of investment on James and showing the potential could create a new reality of what James Street can be.

P. Dec commented that by trying to arrange regions to create a more prime location makes for a more livable environment.

J. Lugar explained that James St has the potential to be a really great street, add in some residential , a Farmers Market, perhaps a microbrewery., etc. She acknowledged that yes there is higher volume of car traffic but it is close to StFX, close to grocery stores, and other amenities.

C. Lovitt back to review of consensus items, no new drive throughs permitted, take out lodging houses, no parking changes for StFx keep as per 1994 parking bylaw.

P. Dec advised that Lane Hall is coming down and StFx is working on their master plan of creating a walkable campus and decreasing parking.

Discussion followed on parking being pushed off campus and into the community. Shoppers Drug Mart was noted as being a location that is often used by students.

J. Lugar reiterated that charging for parking is one way to eliminate off campus parking and that a strong enforcement strategy with buy in from StFX to promote don't bring cars to campus, not a parking friendly environment. She noted that it would be painful for a few years but it has worked in other university towns with positive results. It just requires a strong will of Council and buy in from StFx to discourage students from bringing their vehicles.

It was agreed that further work was needed to finalize. C. Lovitt will make changes and send around the final draft. P. Dec will review and note whether additional session will be required to iron out details and advise of possible dates to resume.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

Motion to Adjourn.

"It was moved and seconded that the Planning Advisory meeting be adjourned." Motion carried

The meeting was adjourned at 4:29 p.m.