

Mar 03 2021 9:29 am

Economic Development Committee of the Fitchburg City Council

[virtual session via Zoom]

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

Meeting Minutes

[meeting occurred prior to Legislative Affairs Committee, planned for 7pm]

Members Present:

Councilor Andrew Van Hazinga, *committee chair*

Councilor Marcus DiNatale

Councilor Samantha Squailia

Councilor Marisa Fleming

Others Present:

Councilor Anthony Zarrella, *ZBA chair*

Councilor Andrew Couture

Tom Skwierawski, *executive director of planning & community development*

Mary Jo Bohart, *economic development director*

Paula Caron, *Planning Board chair*

Mike O'Hara, *principal planner*

Chairman Van Hazinga called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. and said that the meeting will address **Phase II Review of Zoning Ordinance Amendments (“Bundle 3”)** [#005-2021] as referenced in Ordinance 172-2020 (Petition 029-20 & Petition 220-2020). Chair Van Hazinga noted that this meeting was occurring immediately prior to the Legislative Affairs Committee session where the exact same material will be taken up. He added that the full City Council will take up the Zoning Ordinance overhaul and amendments, beginning with a first public hearing on March 2 (Phase 2/Bundle 2), followed by a second public hearing on March 16 (Phase 2/Bundle 3). He then asked Tom Skwierawski to lead the group through the individual amendment sections and specific language changes to be considered for Phase 2/Bundle 3.

Tom Skwierawski explained that Phase 2/Bundle 3 involves various major use category changes along with major map changes. He suggested commencing with the *Multi-Family Development* section.

MULTI-FAMILY DEVELOPMENT:

Mr. Skwierawski explained that Legislative Affairs had tabled this section at their last session due to multi-family projects taking on a different feel when smaller (4-8 units) versus when larger (9+ units) and more discussion was needed. He then went through the proposed amendment text, noting edits suggested by the Planning Board, and also noting an array of additional edits suggested by the ZBA for consideration.

Chair Van Hazinga summarized the list of additional edits still to be considered, taking each item

individually. He felt that the edit to the definition of Multi-Family Development was a suitable change. Paula Caron (Planning Board chair) noted that insertion of the word “structures” at the end of that definition would be appropriate as well.

VOTE:

Councilor Fleming moved to recommend approval of those changes to the definition language. Councilor Squailia seconded that motion, and it passed by unanimous consent.

Councilor Van Hazinga also suggested removal of the first bulleted item within the Purpose statement.

VOTE:

Councilor Squailia moved to recommend removal of the first bulleted item, as discussed. Councilor DiNatale seconded that motion, and it passed by unanimous consent.

Chair Van Hazinga proceeded to item (3) on the list of suggested Multi-Family edits, and he stated that within 181.743, it was recommended to delete the sentence beginning with, “The minimum area for a property...” and also to split item (4) into two sections, resulting in a revised 1) and a revised 2) for that particular edit item.

VOTE:

Councilor Squailia moved to approve recommendation of that change to 181.743, and Councilor Fleming seconded the motion, which was adopted by unanimous consent.

Chair Van Hazinga proceeded to item (3) within 181.743 and explained the suggested change to the group.

Mike O’Hara inquired whether the “parking waiver” stated in item (3) may supersede the existing provision that the Planning Board can grant relief from parking requirements through a Special Permit.

Paula Caron inquired whether this change might not be appropriate for the RR, RA and RB districts, which are of lower residential density.

Chair Van Hazinga explained that the current ordinance requires 2 spaces per dwelling unit, and the intent of this change is to provide for greater flexibility across the city.

Councilor DiNatale expressed agreement with the idea of applying this change across the board for greater parking flexibility with regard to Multi-Family projects, and he cited feedback he received from a constituent, which aligned with this thinking.

VOTE:

Councilor Squailia moved to recommend approval of the parking requirement change as discussed for districts across the city, and Councilor DiNatale seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous consent.

Chair Van Hazinga then brought up 181.745 (“Design Standards”).

Mr. Skwierawski explained that the intent of this section is to let developers and applicants know what is expected of them from a project design standpoint. He noted that Councilor Zarrella had previously proposed an edit to remove 181.745 in its entirety because he felt its content would be more logically located within the Planning Board’s rules and regulations.

Councilor Squailia stated that she prefers for “Design Standards” to appear in the Zoning Ordinance itself because that is where developers and applicants will look to find such requirements.

Chair Van Hazinga cautioned that any future changes to the Zoning Ordinance would be subject to a more lengthy and elaborate process than future changes to the Planning Board’s rules and regulations, so it could be easier to modify the design requirements over time if they were located within the Planning Board rules and regulations.

Councilor DiNatale expressed preference for having the Design Standards stated within the Zoning Ordinance.

VOTE:

Councilor Squailia moved for the Design Standards language to remain, expressly stated, within the Zoning Ordinance. The motion was seconded by Councilor Fleming, and it passed by unanimous consent.

SIGNAGE:

Chair Van Hazinga proposed an array of nine (9) suggested edits to the Signage section previously identified by ZBA chair Zarrella.

Councilor DiNatale stated that he would favor an overall approval of Councilor Zarrella’s suggested list of signage edits that were put forward for consideration by Chair Van Hazinga.

Chair Van Hazinga suggested that it could be best to leave 181.5355 to be addressed by Legislative Affairs Committee since Councilor Zarrella serves on that committee and could provide additional insight towards the intent of the change.

Councilor Squailia asked about 181.5337 and the regulation of temporary off-premise signage. She asked how this would affect the promotion of such major events as Civic Days, the Greek Festival, etc. It was the consensus of the committee to edit 181.5337 to eliminate the limit on the number of temporary signs per event and to lengthen the allowed time period to one month.

Chair Van Hazinga proposed amending the changes to the Signage section, as proposed, with one exception which would be item (9) to be taken up by Legislative Affairs.

VOTE:

Councilor DiNatale so moves, Councilor Squailia seconded that motion, and it passed by unanimous consent.

EARTH REMOVAL:

Chair Van Hazinga brought up an array of edits suggested by ZBA chair Zarrella for the Earth Removal section.

Mr. Skwierawski shared three different edits proposed by the DPW department regarding Earth Removal.

VOTE:

Chair Van Hazinga asked for a single motion to approve the various edits and changes being proposed to Earth Removal. Councilor Squailia so moved, and Councilor Fleming seconded that motion which passes by unanimous consent.

SITE PLAN REVIEW CAPABILITIES:

Mr. Skwierawski explained that the primary focus of this section was on 3-family residential, container farming, contractor yards, salvage yards, etc.

Chair Van Hazinga then described an array of edits proposed by ZBA chair Zarrella for consideration, including the striking of reference to “municipal” in 181.9511 and 181.9512.

Councilor Squailia stated that she opposes the removal of municipal projects from Site Plan Review oversight.

Mike O’Hara noted that in several cases, such as the City Hall campus project, the site plan actually improved through the iterative Site Plan Review process.

After discussion, it was the consensus of the committee to keep the inclusion of “municipal in this section.

Chair Van Hazinga suggested deleting 181.9513 and reinserting as a separate section as a formatting matter.

VOTE:

Councilor Squailia so moved the proposed change to Section 181.9513, and Councilor Fleming seconded that motion which passes by unanimous consent.

Chair Van Hazinga then recommended, out of consideration of time, that the group continue its discussion and review of the remaining “Bundle 3” items at the next Economic Development Committee session occurring the following evening at 5pm. These items included:

- Adaptive Industrial District

- Commercial Recreation District
- Dimensional Table
- Use Table
- Zoning Map
- Deletion of Prior Overlay Districts

Mr. Skwierawski reminded the group to visit www.axisgis.com/fitchburgma prior to tomorrow night's meeting in order to review the new, proposed Zoning Map and compare it with the existing Zoning Map.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Van Hazinga asked for a motion to adjourn. Councilor Squailia so moved, and Councilor Fleming seconded that motion which passed unanimously (4:0).

The Economic Development Committee of the City Council adjourned at approximately 6:50pm.