

City of Rochester Planning Board
Monday, April 17, 2023
City Hall Council Chambers
31 Wakefield Street, Rochester, NH 03867
(These minutes were approved on May 1, 2023)

Members Present

Robert May, *Vice Chair*
Peter Bruckner
Matthew Richardson
Dave Walker
Michael McQuade
Don Hamann
Alan Dews
Keith Fitts
James Hayden

Members Absent

Mark Collopy, *Chair, Excused*

Alternate Members Present

Rick Healey
Alexander de Geofroy
Michael McQuade, *Excused*

Staff: Shanna B. Saunders, *Director of Planning & Development*
Ryan O'Connor, *Senior Planner*

(These are the legal minutes of the meeting and are in the format of an overview of the meeting. A recording of the meeting will be on file in the City Clerk's office for reference purposes. It may be copied for a fee.)

I. Call to Order

Vice Chair, Robert May, called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Senior Planner, Ryan O'Connor conducted roll call.

III. Seating of Alternates

Mr. Rick Healey was asked to vote in place of Mr. Mark Collopy.

IV. Communications from the Chair

Mr. May welcomed the newest member of the Planning Board, Alan Dews.

V. Approval of Minutes for

A. April 3, 2023

A motion was made by Mr. Walker to approve April 3, 2023 meeting minutes and seconded by Mr. Hamann. The motion carried unanimously.

VI. Opening Discussion/Comments

A. Public Comment

There were no comments from the public to discuss.

B. Discussion of general planning issues

There were no general planning issues to discuss.

VII. Orton Family Foundation Presentation

Judith Hull, representative of the Orton Family Foundation, presented the Community Heart & Soul Program. Ms. Hull also introduced Sara Lightner as another representative from the Orton Family Foundation. Mr. Hull explained the origin of the project created by Lyman Orton. Ms. Hull explained the geographical areas that have utilized this program. Ms. Hull stated that the Community Heart & Soul program is intended to be interactive and work as a partnership between residents and town officials to build a community. Ms. Hull stated that the process is led by volunteers and the program promotes positive, unbiased ideals and aspects of the community. Ms. Hull stated that the program is based around three principles; what matters most, involve everyone, and playing the long game. Ms. Hull stated that the program consists of four phases; Imagine, Connect, Plan, and Act. Ms. Hull stated that outcomes of this program include strengthening of community pride, new leadership and volunteers, history and culture of the city are honored, economic conditions improve, and trust is built between city officials and members of the community. Ms. Hull provided examples and an explanation of the listed outcomes. Ms. Hull explained the partnership structure of the Community Heart & Soul Program.

Mr. de Geofroy asked how many of the communities that have followed the program have been successful. Ms. Lightner stated that over 120 towns within the last decade have engaged in the program, some were dropped due to the pandemic. Ms. Lightner stated that all communities are different and that there are no definitive markers of success or failure.

Mr. Dews asked what communities Ms. Hull and Ms. Lightner have worked in. Ms. Hull stated that she lived in Sugar Hill, a small town with a population of approximately 800. Ms. Hull stated that she has not worked in Sugar Hill or Newton with the program. Ms. Hull stated that Newton is too large for the program's scope with a population of approximately 87,000 people.

Mr. Walker asked for further clarification on what the Organization does. Ms. Hull stated that the program facilitates coming together to identify the groups in the community and organizes outreach to collect stories beginning with what matters most to the community members. Ms. Hull stated that the stories are used as the basis of the guiding principles of the town. Ms. Hull stated that the program begins to facilitate community action and the program promotes civil engagement regarding the community's goals.

Mr. Walker asked about the costs that were associated with utilizing this program. Ms. Hull stated that the foundation provides materials and oversight. Ms. Hull stated that her cost as a coach is \$5,000 per phase. Ms. Hull stated that there is a cost for the project coordinator and food and materials involved. Ms. Hull stated that in an effort to offset getting started costs, the Orton Family Foundation offers a \$10,000 matching seed grant. Ms. Saunders added that the foundation does accept in-kind donations as a match to the seed grant.

Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department is working on the Culture and Historical and Natural Resources Master Plans and that the Master Plans will be used collectively in the Land Use Master Plan in the future. Ms. Saunders stated that there are multiple Master Plans coming together to develop the overall Land Use Master Plan. Ms. Saunders stated that the City of Rochester has struggled with community facilitated meetings and that the Community Heart & Soul program would help facilitate the community meetings and bring people together over community values in order to build a stronger foundation to work with when developing the Land Use Master Plan and comprehensive rezoning to come.

Mr. Bruckner asked for further clarification on how new and old groups are collectively included in the program. Ms. Hull stated that she has been wanting to collaborate with other groups in New Hampshire that are doing similar things. Ms. Hull stated that building community is a goal among many groups. Ms. Hull stated that one of the unique aspects of Community Heart & Soul is they are engaged in the process for several years and remain so until the tools are in place to encourage lasting change.

Mr. Bruckner responded saying that many groups have emerged and that these groups should not be competing against another, but rather sharing resources and asked if Ms. Hull had experience in that circumstance. Ms. Hull responded that she has had experience when other community groups are involved. While being cautious to not "step on toes", Community Heart & Soul builds on these resources to bring groups together.

Ms. Saunders asked Ms. Hull to review the first steps of the program, such as identifying stakeholders. Ms. Hull responded that before Phase 1 is started the foundation verifies that there is a current partnership between the community and the town. Ms. Hull stated that the foundation would first require town volunteers. Ms. Hull stated that in the beginning phase, the foundation asks the volunteers to inventory the different groups within the town. Ms. Hull stated that this process figures out how and where to engage the most people in the City.

Mr. May stated that the foundation's process sounds similar to what the City does for the Master Plans and asked Ms. Hull if she has had experience using her skills to facilitate better Master Planning in towns. Ms. Hull stated that she has not personally, but that the Community Heart & Soul Program has helped with Master Plans in other communities. Ms. Lightner stated that multiple communities are at different points in their revision process and that Rochester would need deep community engagement for the coming Land Use Master Plan. Ms. Lightner stated the program would help to figure how to best plan for the community engagement to feed into the Master Plan or plan revision. Ms. Lightner stated that there are coaches that have been involved with Master Plan revision and understand the process, Community Heart & Soul can help guide community involvement in this process.

Ms. Lightner gave an example of the City of Essex, Vermont winning a state reward for their Plan Revision. Ms. Saunders stated that the foundation is capacity building for Rochester leadership and that the leadership and volunteers will teach how best to listen, facilitate meetings, and talk through tough value issues, which then feeds into the Master Plan process.

Mr. May stated that the program seems to be enhanced by involvement of youth. Mr. May asked if the foundation has contacted the School Board or School Department. Ms. Hull responded that they have not reached out, but that the schools are an important part of the process, and she would be happy to reach out.

Ms. Saunders stated that the next steps are for the Planning Board to research and review the information provided and that the possible use of the Orton Family Foundation program will be discussed in an upcoming workshop meeting. Ms. Saunders stated that if the Community Development Committee and Planning Board decide to support the utilization of the Community Heart & Soul Program that the next step would be to put together a budget and timeline and present to City Council.

Ms. Saunders and members of the Planning Board thanked the representatives of the Orton Family Foundation for their presentation.

VIII. Review of Inspections and Surety for March 2023

Ms. Saunders reviewed the list of inspections for the month of March 2023 and asked if any Planning Board members had questions regarding the inspections. The Planning Board had no questions.

Ms. Saunders reviewed the current Surety Spreadsheet and stated that there was a new project on the list, the Apple Ridge Apartments. Ms. Saunders stated that their Surety is due to expire at the end of June and that they were sent a letter at the end of March to remind the applicant. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Board can expect to see a submission from the developer soon. Ms. Saunders stated the approval process would only take a couple weeks because the Planning Department is familiar with the project and has already reviewed As-Builts and would just need to engage the Department of Public Works for review. Ms. Saunders stated that any requests will be included on an upcoming agenda.

Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department continues to work with the Norway Plains Project and with Lydall.

Ms. Saunders stated that the Village at Clark Brook was not able to be finalized in time for this month's agenda but will be on next month's agenda.

IX. Release of Surety

A. Granite State Credit Union. Surety release (100%) in the amount of \$80,572.04 plus interest for Site Plan to construct a 2,985 sqft credit union branch with associated parking and utilities located on map 208 lots 4 & 5.

Ms. Saunders reviewed the Surety Release request from Granite State Credit Union on Route 11. Ms. Saunders stated that both the Department of Public Works and the Planning Department have signed the request and recommend a full drawdown of this Surety.

A motion was made by Mr. Walker to release the remaining surety in the amount of \$80,572.04 plus interest and seconded by Mr. Hamann. The motion carried unanimously.

X. Conservation Subdivision Ordinance Rewrite

Ms. Saunders stated that the Conservation Subdivision Ordinance rewrite has been planned for several years. Ms. Saunders stated that the rewrite process stalled when the Strafford Regional Planning Commission reviewed the ordinance to rewrite it. Ms. Saunders stated that the ordinance has not been used but once or twice in the last decade. Ms. Saunders stated that it's been known that changes need to be made when the housing funding became available within the last year. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department has reached out to find out if the funding could be used to rewrite the Conservation Subdivision portion of our ordinance because there are density bonuses. Ms. Saunders stated that the Grantor agreed that the money could be used to rewrite the Conservation Subdivision Ordinance. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department wrote a grant to the housing opportunities portion of the grant and were awarded a grant of \$45,000.00 to rewrite the Conservation Subdivision Ordinance. Ms. Saunders stated that the recent ordinances that have been reviewed were much smaller in comparison. Ms. Saunders stated that ideas for changes have been discussed through the Planning Department but have not yet been presented to the Planning Board. Ms. Saunders stated that the purpose of this ordinance is to design larger subdivisions. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department is working on a Request for Proposal (RFP) to bring a consultant on board to help in the rewrite. Ms. Saunders stated that a sub-committee of Planning Board members would be required to work with the Planning Department staff and the consultant to come up with draft ordinance to present in order to do outreach in the community, historical review, and to see what other communities are doing and create a new draft ordinance to present to the Board in 4-6 months.

Mr. O'Connor presented an overview of the current Conservation Subdivision Ordinance. Mr. O'Connor presented using a PowerPoint with slides showing the current language used. Mr. O'Connor listed the objectives included in the current language of the ordinance. Mr. O'Connor explained the benefits of density bonuses for developers building conservation subdivisions and stated that even with the bonuses, few subdivisions have been proposed. Mr. O'Connor stated that between 2014 and 2022 only one Conservation Subdivision has been approved and has not yet been constructed. Mr. O'Connor used the Conservation Subdivision on Jeremiah Lane as an example. Mr. O'Connor provided an overview of the City of Rochester's Conservation Subdivision Ordinance compared to other City's ordinances.

Ms. Saunders stated that this ordinance has been listed for many years and is not being used. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department feels the reason could be the design criteria or the fact that if a developer were to propose a Conservation Subdivision, they would be required to write an additional request for Conditional Use Permit (CUP), writing criteria, and arguing their case for development. Ms. Saunders explained that the Planning Department is proposing changes to better the process. Ms. Saunders stated that Conservation Subdivisions are intended to work with the natural, cultural, and historical features of the land. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department suggests that conservation subdivisions adhere more to the current land features and surrounding area so that developments fit in with existing land layout.

Ms. Saunders reiterated that members from the Planning Board were needed to form a sub-committee that would meet no more than twice monthly with Planning staff and the Consultant to review progress of the Conservation Subdivision moving forward and asked for volunteers.

The following Planning Board members volunteered to be part of the Conservation Subdivision Rewrite Sub-Committee: Mr. Donald Hamann, Mr. Dave Walker, Mr. Peter Bruckner, Mr. Matthew Richardson, and Mr. Rick Healey

Ms. Saunders asked the Board if there were any questions regarding the Conservation Subdivision Ordinance.

Mr. McQuade stated that Conservation Subdivisions are common in southern states, such as Texas and asked if the reason that developers are not developing Conservation Subdivisions could be that they are not desirable for what the City of Rochester has for space. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department wants to bring in developers and engineers that frequent projects within the City of Rochester and ask their input for what they feel the flaws are in the current ordinance.

Mr. Walker stated that Conservation Subdivision replaced the Planned Unit Development (PUD). Mr. Walker stated that he feels those who review this ordinance should be vigilant when creating a draft and that if developers are choosing not to build Conservation Subdivisions, it may not be due to the way the ordinance is written, but rather they chose not to.

Mr. Dews stated that well-written Conservation Subdivisions Ordinances work very well and that there are many successful ones in surrounding communities.

Mr. Healey stated that the ordinance states Residential-2 (R2) and Agriculture (AG) and asked why not other zones. Ms. Saunders stated that the Planning Department is not sure why, but that other zones will be explored when reviewing for the draft ordinance.

XI. Other Business

A. Planning Update

There were no updates from the Planning Department.

B. Other

There was no other business to discuss.

XII. Adjournment

A motion was made by Mr. Walker and seconded by Mr. Bruckner to adjourn the meeting at 7:24pm. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Jaclyn Millard,
Administrative Assistant II

and

Shanna B. Saunders,
Director of Planning & Development