

Town of Richmond  
Rapid Fire Planning Night  
Topics: Economic Opportunity, Vibrant and Appealing Downtown, Small Town Character  
Special Joint Meeting of the Planning Commission and the Town Plan Steering Committee  
February 3, 2016  
5:30 – 9pm

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Present: 16 total

Planning Commission: Brain Tellstone, Bruce LaBounty, Mark Fausel, Joy Reap, Mark Hughes, Sean Foley

Steering Committee: Chris Granda, Ian Bender, Heidi L. Bormann, Brad Elliot

Public: Mary Houle, Terry Light, David Scherr, Morgan Wolaver, Martha Nye, Gretchen Paulsen

Staff: Clare Rock

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Clare Rock, Town Planner, welcomed people and provided an overview of the planning process, project timeline and the expectation of re-writing the zoning following adoption of the new town plan.

Topic Presentations by Clare Rock, Town Planner. Summary of Key Observations from Presentation and Discussion:

Economic Opportunity

Richmond has strong history in an agricultural economy

18% of residents work in town, the majority commute to other locations in Chittenden County.

25-34 year olds are the highest educated demographic – but not much available housing (i.e. rentals) is available for these people

Other aspects of economic opportunity include the need for adequate workforce housing locally (housing which is affordable to the majority of workers, in Richmond this would be for people who work in the service industry and housing which is affordable to critical service workers, such as firefighters, police officers and etc.) Availability of childcare is also a much needed service to support working parents.

Businesses looking to establish themselves in Richmond or who want to expand seek telecommunication availability (high speed internet and cellular coverage) plus the availability of municipal sewer and water. The municipal system currently has excess capacity which could accommodate additional growth equivalent to approx 220 3-bedroom homes.

Land availability for new commercial business is limited. Areas currently within the towns commercial and industrial zoning areas are either mostly built out or have constraints such as floodplain designation.

The local permit process is another aspect of promoting economic opportunity, in Richmond small/minor commercial projects (such as changing the use of a retail space to a coffee shop) requires a 3 month + permit process. Economic Development Specialist have suggested that for a town to be “business friendly” “a fast no is better than a slow yes.”

Survey results indicate people in Richmond want new and expanded businesses to provide a range of basic goods (such as a pharmacy.)

### Vibrant and Appealing Downtown

In Richmond the term downtown and village are used interchangeably – it would be good to have the “downtown area” better defined. In generally it refers the areas centered around the brick commercial block on Bridge Street.

A Streetscape plan was drafted over 18 years ago and about half of the recommendations have been implemented to date. One recommendation is slated for implementation (at least in part) is for the reconstruction of East Main Street (with curbing, green stripe, similar to West Main.) The plan doesn’t include any recommendations for benches or bike racks.

The street trees are maintained on as needed basis by the Highway Department. There is an outdated street tree inventory but it has not been maintained and there is not plan for ongoing care, planting of new trees or replacement of dead trees (but do have a grant to replace 2 dead trees on West Main and one at the Post Office this spring.)

Walkability s generally defined as ¼ mile to ½ mile, where people will leave their car and walk to run errands.

An area of the Village is a designated village center, where commercial property owners are eligible for financial incentives for building upgrades. It’s unclear on if building owners are aware of the benefits.

Currently the ground floor of Bridge Street is fully occupied and no other visible vacancies. Which is good, yet where a new business would establish themselves (such as the desired pharmacy?)

### Small Town Character

Richmond has a history of traditional settlements in the village area and in Jonesville.

We’ve heard from people that we don’t want to be like Williston/Taft Corners, with the proliferation of box stores. Chances are that will not happen in Richmond due to market forces, our proximity to Williston and our relative low population base.

Medium to small box stores such as Dollar General are the scale of box stores which are popping up in small towns. Regulating the scale and style of buildings can help maintain the small character.

We cannot regulate on businesses ownership structures – we cannot prohibit franchises or chain businesses.

Availability of gathering places, such as meeting neighbors on the street or in local business when running errands also promote the small town feel. Richmond misses the On The Rise Bakery, which provided people with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Place (not work, not home, but the other place where we can meet friends and neighbors.)

Volunteerism is another aspect of small town character.

Many similarities of this topic with the Social and recreational Offering Topic discussed at a previous planning night.

Discussion followed, including the following observations or comments:

The PC Chair asked participants where new or expanded business could go in Richmond, as this information would greatly help the PC in the process of drafting the new plan.

One participant suggested that box stores would be constrained in Richmond because of the floodplain and the location of the railroad.

Rock asked participants through a show of hands who would be interested in each topic. Because not many people showed interest in Small Town Character, Rock led the whole group through the process of brainstorming ideas. Once everyone had a chance to add some ideas to the poster, Rock reorganized the ideas on the Impact/Feasibility Chart with input from participants.

Participants then divided into 2 groups. Each group had the list of key observations, topic poster (including vision statement and what achieving our mission means), map, impact/feasibility chart, color codes post-it notes.

Each group was charged with reviewing the list of topic goals (aka “what achieving our mission means” from topic posters) and each group then brainstormed action items for each goal and posted (with sticky notes) on the topic posters.

Each group then prioritized the ideas by organizing the action items on the Impact/Feasibility Chart. Below is a listing of the action items followed by how they fell on the Impact/Feasibility Chart.

Impact/Feasibility Key:

**HI/HF = High Impact / High Feasibility**

**HI/LF = High Impact / Low Feasibility**

**HF /LI = High Feasibility / Low Impact**

**LF/LI = Low Feasibility / Low Impact**

## Economic Opportunity

Richmond Vision is to foster **economic opportunity** by supporting local businesses, developing good jobs, nurturing a diverse local economy, and promoting renewable energy.

- Growing good local jobs and a skilled workforce (Blue)
  - Assess tax impacts of growth **HI/HF**
  - Incentives for businesses that come here **HI/HF**
  - Expedited permit process **HI/HF**
  - Getting water and sewer to the Gateway (zoning district) and start attracting development **HI/HF**
  - Attracting and encouraging businesses that employ several (i.e. approx 12 people range) **HI/LF**
  - Ensure infrastructure affordability, specifically affordable sewer and water **HI/LF**
  - Create more places for business to go **HI/LF**
  - Vo Tech School **HI/LF**
- Supporting renewable energy and energy efficiency (Orange)
  - Solar farm on top of water tank **HI/HF**
  - Partner with GP to be a Rutland-style micro-grid demonstration **HI/HF**
  - Find a site for a Richmond community solar project **HI/HF**
  - Increase new construction building energy codes **LF/LI**
- Ensuring that Richmond is friendly for businesses (Yellow)
  - Promote idea that Richmond is open for business by preparing the Gateway zoning district **HI/HF**
  - Provide places to live for local workers **HI/LF**
  - Conservation Fund idea for economic development **HI/LF**
  - Ensuring more businesses by not beings scared about growth/development  
**MIDDLE**
- Nurturing a local food and farm economy (Green)
  - Bring back “Richmond Dollars” **HI/HF**
  - “Shop Local” efforts **HI/HF**
  - Test a Winters Farmers Market (library? Congo Church? School?) **HI/HF**
  - Community Kitchen & food Coops **HI/HF**
- Promoting tourism and drawing visitors to Richmond (Purple)
  - You tube channel with videos of local attractions **HI/HF**
  - Greater Richmond visibility on the web **HI/HF**
  - Attracting tourists by maintaining what we already have **HI/HF**
  - Round Church as a destination **HI/HF**
  - Wedding receptions / event usage of town green (tents/alcohol) **HI/HF**
  - Hotel (visitors cannot stay local) **HI/LF**
  - Maintaining unique and/or affordable eateries **HF/LI**

## Vibrant and Appealing Downtown

Richmond's Vision is to have a **vibrant and appealing downtown**, with attractive streets and buildings, convenient services and diverse businesses, where people can connect and meet their daily needs.

- Providing safe sidewalks, streets and transportation routes to important town locations and limiting traffic congestion (Blue)
  - Keep a mix of neighborhoods and businesses **HI/HF**
  - Bike path and sidewalk to park and ride **HI/HF**
  - Grant funding for streetscape plans **HI/LF**
  - CCTA bus service to Richmond **HI/LF**
  - Expand intersection **HI/LF**
  - Move gas station **HI/LF**
- Concentrating growth in a compact village center (Orange)
  - Infill businesses around existing businesses areas **HI/HF**
  - Do not overcrowd the village center, we do have old established neighborhoods **HI/HF**
  - Change zone density downtown **HI/HF**
  - Add parking spaces **HI/HF**
  - Higher speed internet **HI/HF**
  - Improve connectivity between office and retail (eating/shops) **HI/LF**
- Ensuring that residents can meet their daily needs in town (Yellow)
  - Would seem to demand a pharmacy **HI/HF**
  - Fix up cemetery **HI/HF**
  - Promote health/urgent care centers **HI/LF**
- Maintaining attractive and well-kept streets and buildings (Green)
  - Streetscape beautification/ landscaping/tree and flower plantings/add more trees **HI/HF**
  - Town wide voting for attractive storefronts **HI/HF**
  - Adopt a sidewalk / intersection program **HI/HF**
  - Outreach to property owners with info/grant info for maintenance and etc **HI/HF**
  - Town Highway efforts encouraged **HI/HF**
  - Improve bike lane safety **HI/HF**
  - Provide seed money to village neighborhood for small street festivals, maybe a rotating fund **HI/LF**
  - Building codes to include upgrading facades **HI/LF**
- Attracting a variety of high-quality businesses, restaurants and local attraction (Purple)
  - Promote pedestrian travel ways **HI/HF**
  - Expand village zoning south of river **HI/HF**
  - High speed internet, stealth towers in village **HI/HF & HI/LF**
  - Provide parking for out of town visitors **HI/HF & HI/LF**
  - Promote off street parking for visitors **HI/HF & HI/LF**
  - Prevent commuter parking near businesses **MIDDLE**
  - Performance space **MIDDLE**

## Small Town Character

Richmond's Vision is to foster and enhance our **small town character**, including our quiet pace and rural way of life, friendly and involved community, and scenic beauty.

- Protecting our working farms, rural lands and agricultural heritage (Blue)
  - Attract food processing facilities (i.e. canning) **HI/HF**
  - Promote farmers market ad Coops and farm stands **HI/HF**
  - Do not allow VYCC to take any property off the tax roles, they have free labor and compete with other farms **LF/LI**
- Creating opportunities for people to meet and build connections (Orange)
  - Senior Center **HI/HF**
  - Dynamic town website **HI/HF**
  - Recreation Director **HI/HF**
  - More organized use to Volunteers Green **HI/HF**
  - More bakery, less bars **HI/LF**
  - Western Slopes Mixers **HI/LF**
  - Pavilion over picnic tables at the park **HF/LI**
  - Turn the band shell around (to face the park and not the road) **HF/LI**
- Increasing volunteerism and community involvement (Yellow)
  - Support senior center **HI/HF**
  - Allow more event signage **HI/HF**
  - Increase sport facilities (basketball, tennis, outdoor rink) **HI/HF**
  - Richmond Holiday Market **HI/HF**
  - Website links and marketing of organizations and events **HI/HF**
  - Credit for kids to volunteer (already happens) **HI/HF**
- Maintaining a peaceful lifestyle, friendly atmosphere and quiet pace (Yellow)
  - Music festival **HI/HF**
  - Maintain what we have (keep Bridge Street full, Buy Local) **HI/HF**
  - River access points maintained **HI/HF**
  - Hike, biking and walking trails **HI/HF**
  - Parking access at natural areas **HI/HF**
  - Have businesses maintain this type of atmosphere (noise ordinance) **MIDDLE**
- Supporting unique, local, independent businesses (Purple)
  - Develop shared services for home-based businesses **HI/HF**
  - Speed up permit process – make it administrative **HI/HF**
  - Annual Fall Richmond Volunteer Festival at VYCC **HI/HF**
  - Music Festival **HI/HF**
  - More events, invite outsiders **HI/HF**
  - Market Richmond Businesses to visitors **HI/HF**
  - Only chain pharmacy could afford building **LI/LF**

Each group then reported back to whole group on the work of their respective groups.

Parting comments from participants included the need to invest in our downtown area, even if this requires a small increase in taxes in the short term. This would include cleaning up around the Welcome to Richmond sign and paying for flowers and other beautification projects. One comments on the Welcome sign – its overcome with invasive species.

Clare Rock thanked everyone for coming and reminded people of the next Planning Night on February 17, 2016. After all the planning nights we will be hosting a mapping workshop which will use information from each planning night and map out a future land use map for Richmond.

