

**TOWN OF ROCKY MOUNT
PLANNING COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
March 3, 2015
6:00 p.m.**

The Planning Commission of the Town of Rocky Mount, Virginia met in the Council Chambers of the Rocky Mount Municipal Building, located at 345 Donald Avenue, Rocky Mount, Virginia, at 6:00 p.m. on March 3, 2015, for its regular monthly meeting with Madame Chair Janet Stockton presiding.

Commission Members Present: Derwin Hall; Ina Clements; John Tiggle; Madame Chair Janet Stockton; Vice Chairman John Speidel

Commission Members Absent: Bud Blanchard; Jerry Greer

Staff Members Present: Josh Gibson, Town Planner; Deanna Alexander, Deputy Clerk

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Additions or Corrections: None

Motion: To approve the agenda as presented

Motion By: Commission Member Clements

Second: Vice Chairman Speidel

Action: Approved by a unanimous vote of members present

APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CLERK AND SECRETARY

Motion: To approve Deanna Alexander as Secretary to the Planning Commission

Motion By: Vice Chairman Speidel

Second: Commission Member Clements

Action: Approved by a unanimous vote of members present

REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION OF MINUTES

Let the record show that prior to the meeting, Planning Commission received the following draft minutes for review and consideration of approval:

February 3, 2015 - Regular Meeting Minutes

Additions or Corrections: None

Motion: To approve the minutes as presented

Motion By: Commission Member Tiggle

Second: Vice Chairman Speidel

Action: Approved by a unanimous vote of members present

PUBLIC HEARING

Let the record show no public hearings at this time.

OLD BUSINESS

Old Business Item No. 1: Staff Report on classification of Central Business District – Bed & Breakfast, Tourist Home, Hotels and Special Use Permit

Staff Remarks:

Josh Gibson, Town Planner, came before the Planning Commission to present the staff report memorandum on Lodging in the Central Business District.

Memorandum To: Janet Stockton, Chair, and Planning Commissioners From: Matthew C. Hankins, Assistant Town Manager and Zoning Administrator Josh Gibson, Town Planner Date: February 26, 2014 Re: Lodging in the Central Business District. Planning Commissioners: At the February 3, 2015, meeting of the Town of Rocky Mount Planning Commission, Mr. Hankins presented information regarding the allowance of hotels in the Central Business District (CBD) zoning classification. He suggested the Commission consider permitting additional lodging categories in the CBD either by right or by special exception as a way to facilitate economic growth and contemplate future needs. During the discussion, staff and the Commission identified some inconsistency

and overlap among the definitions for different types lodging. Staff was asked to (1) examine the lodging definitions in the Town Code and identify potential opportunities for improvement, and (2) research options for introducing non-dwelling based lodging in the CBD. The following staff report examines current lodging definitions, potential changes and possible options for addressing by right hotels in the district.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Some lodging types are defined and limited by the number of rooms, while others are defined and limited by the number of occupants, creating confusion and some inconsistency.
- Many of the lodging types defined in the Zoning Ordinance are not actually permitted in any zoning district, neither by right nor special exception.
- Allowing hotels by right in the Central Business District seemed to be a concern, so some options are presented below, including (a) the establishment of simple design guidelines for new businesses in the district and (b) establishing a new definition for lodging in the Central Business District (“Boutique Hotel”)
- The zoning ordinance currently incorporates flexibility for allowing uses in the CBD not contemplated as by right or special exception: Article 29-1-32 in CBD regulations states that “*Any use not specifically listed will be reviewed on an individual basis and if approved, permitted by granting of a special exception by town council,*” which could include hotels and other types of lodging. This authorization is unique among commercial district regulations, and may suffice for providing future guidance. It should be noted, however, that this clause is situated in an odd location amongst a list of by right uses and may easily be overlooked by those interested in locating businesses in this District.

I. TOWN ZONING ORDINANCE LODGING DEFINITION NOTES (See Fig. 1 below)

- There is little functional difference between *Hotels* and *Motels* as they are currently defined, and each is only mentioned alongside the other throughout the Ordinance. Unless we wish to further differentiate, they could be combined into one lodging category.
- The *Bed and breakfast* definition could be expanded to include more rooms so as to not constrain existing and future businesses; Bedford and Roanoke County both allow up to five rooms, Town of Blacksburg allows up to 12 rooms. Other localities remove the room limit entirely and specify “in a residential structure” as the defining characteristic (ours addresses this by defining *bed and breakfasts* as home occupations.
- *Boarding house* and *tourist home* are very similar, the only current difference being that one must be a dwelling and the other need not be (although the intent of the code seems to imply that it should).
- *Tourist Court, Auto Court, Motel, Inn, Cabins, or Motor Lodge* definition can be simplified; currently a catch-all category.

FIGURE 1. Lodging as Currently Defined in the Zoning Ordinance

LODGING TYPE	ZONING ORDINANCE DEFINITION
HOTEL	A building designed or occupied as the more or less temporary abiding place for 14 or more individuals who are, for compensation, lodged, with or without meals, and in which provision is not generally made for cooking in individual rooms or suites.
<i>Defining code characteristics:</i>	<i>Single building and occupancy of 14 or more individuals paying for lodging - OR - Single building and capacity to house 14 or more individuals paying for lodging</i>
MOTEL	Any group of dwelling units, combined or separated, used for the purpose of housing more than 14 transient guests, each unit of which is provided with its own toilet, washroom and off-street parking facility.
<i>Defining code characteristics:</i>	<i>Similar to "Hotels" but can include grouped buildings and no capacity requirement</i>
BOARDING HOUSE*	A building where, for compensation, lodging or meals are provided for at least five and up to 14 persons.
<i>Defining code characteristics:</i>	<i>Similar to "Hotels" but occupancy is limited to 5-14 people. Based on similar localities and codes, the code likely originally intended for this use to be confined to a "dwelling" but it is defined in the Town's code as any "building"</i>
BED AND BREAKFAST	A home occupation involving the rental of up to four rooms to overnight guests and offering breakfast meals only to said guests.
<i>Defining code characteristics:</i>	<i>Home occupation rather than commercial building use; the occupancy is not regulated but the number of rooms is (maximum of four)</i>
TOURIST HOME	A dwelling where only lodging is provided for compensation for up to 14 persons (in contradistinction to hotels and boarding houses) and open to transients.
<i>Defining code characteristics:</i>	<i>Similar to Boarding house but: (1) must occur in a dwelling (2) no minimum threshold, and (3) a specific mention of "transients"</i>
TOURIST COURT, AUTO COURT, MOTEL, INN, CABINS, OR MOTOR LODGE*	One or more buildings containing individual sleeping rooms, designed for or used temporarily by automobile tourists or transients, with garage or parking space conveniently located to each unit. Cooking facilities may be provided for each unit.
<i>Defining code characteristics:</i>	<i>No occupancy or room minimum/maximum; may be grouped or single building; cooking facilities per unit are typical</i>

**defined but not explicitly permitted in any zoning classification*

Possible Changes (see Figure2, below):

- Hotel/Motel combined
- Boarding House and Tourist Home combined/simplified
- Tourist Court, Auto Court, Motel, Inn, Cabins or Motor Lodge removed (not currently addressed in any zoning district)

- All lodging types re-defined by occupancy for consistency
- Room maximum removed from *Bed and Breakfast*

FIGURE 2. Possible Changes Lodging Definitions
(Green = addition; Red Strikethrough = deletion)

LODGING TYPE	ZONING ORDINANCE DEFINITION
HOTEL/MOTEL	A building or group of buildings designed or occupied as the more or less temporary abiding place for 14 or more individuals who are, for compensation, lodged, with or without meals, and in which provision is not generally made for cooking in individual rooms or suites.
MOTEL	Any group of dwelling units, combined or separated, used for the purpose of housing more than 14 transient guests, each unit of which is provided with its own toilet, washroom and off-street parking facility.
BOARDING HOUSE	A building dwelling where, for compensation, lodging or meals are provided by the owner/operator for at least five and up to 13 persons as a more or less temporary abiding place open to transients. Included in this use are tourist homes (which do not provide board) <i>(currently allowed in R3 only)</i>
BED AND BREAKFAST	A home occupation involving the rental of up to four rooms to overnight guests and offering breakfast meals only to said guests.
TOURIST HOME	A dwelling where only lodging is provided for compensation for up to 14 persons (in contradistinction to hotels and boarding houses) and open to transients. (currently allowed in R3 only)
TOURIST COURT, AUTO COURT, MOTEL, INN, CABINS, OR MOTOR LODGE	One or more buildings containing individual sleeping rooms, designed for or used temporarily by automobile tourists or transients, with garage or parking space conveniently located to each unit. Cooking facilities may be provided for each unit.

**NOTE: These modifications would necessitate additional changes throughout the Zoning Ordinance where the labels of lodging types will need updating*

II. BOUTIQUE HOTELS: NEW DEFINITION

Understandably, commissioners and staff have shown reluctance to permitting standard-size hotels by right in the Central Business District as they may pose a risk to the character of the historic district. One approach to diversifying lodging options while alleviating concerns about disruptive uses is to incorporate a smaller-scale hotel definition with limits on size and scope. This is becoming more common with revitalization efforts in other localities, and often also permits mixed uses explicitly in the definition.

Sample language: *“Building designed or occupied as the more or less temporary abiding place in the Central Business District (CBD) zoning district featuring no less than 8 rooms and no more than 12 rooms with individuals who are, for compensation, lodged, with or without meals, and in which provision is not generally made for cooking in individual rooms or suites. In addition to the 8-12 rooms/suites, it may also permit a public restaurant, a boutique, a wine tasting room, a room to host small parties (possibly weddings receptions), etc. that would also be open to the public, indoor/outdoor events.”*

This definition differs from *Boarding House* because it need not be located in a dwelling, nor provide meals, and may include additional uses. It differs from *Hotels/Motels* because of size and scope.

III. POSSIBLE DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR CBD

Another possible approach to mitigating potentially disruptive uses in the CBD is by incorporating some design guidelines for the district, either as a whole, for certain uses, new uses, or some other specified group. The language below is just an example. Before incorporating even simple design standards into any district, further research and planning would be required.

EXAMPLE LANGUAGE: Downtown building design in the Central Business District

- (a) This section applies to (1) all new structures in this district and (2) additions of one thousand (1000) square feet or more to existing structures in the district, and (3) special exception applications in the district*
- (b) The use of contemporary interpretations of earlier design styles of surrounding structures in the Central Business District is encouraged; this might include characteristics such as scale, massing (size and general shape), roof shape, window size, shape and spacing, and exterior materials.*
- (c) Site plans shall include drawings, renderings, or perspectives of a professional quality which illustrate the scale, massing, roof shape, window size, shape and spacing, and exterior materials of the structure.*

IV. SUMMARY

1. The Town's definitions for *Bed and Breakfast* establishments are constraining on current and future businesses, and staff recommends amending the definition to either (a) increase the maximum number of rooms permitted in an establishment or (b) remove the maximum entirely; *Hotels* and *motels* definitions are similar and easily grouped together.
2. A new, smaller hotel category could help facilitate appropriate lodging downtown.
3. Design guidelines are intended to provide guidance for new or updated buildings or uses in the Central Business District, but the details would need additional staff work if the Commission is interested in exploring them.

Discussion by Planning Commission:

Open discussion ensued with Commission Members and Mr. Gibson regarding parking, lodging definitions, boutique hotels and, tasting rooms for wine and beer. Chair Stockton asked for the definition of "transient". Transient is defined as a person who is staying or working in a place for only a short time. Synonyms were discussed among members: hobo, vagabond, homeless person, and derelict.

Consensus among members to recommend the words "boutique" and "transient" be removed from the verbiage in lodging sections of the Town code.

Mr. Gibson provided a verbal example of lodging types from the Town of Blacksburg. Open discussion ensued with members and Mr. Gibson about finding a balance in the code, for the town and for future opportunities. Recommendations were made to keep our code simple, not restrictive.

Mr. Gibson advised the commission that the Community Development and Planning staff will continue to research lodging types. Mr. Gibson asked members to send an email with suggestions, questions, opinions, or concerns to help with the development of a final recommendation to the Planning Commission.

Old Business Item No. 2: Comprehensive Plan Update

Staff Remarks:

Josh Gibson, Town Planner, came before the Planning Commission to advise members that our Comprehensive Plan is still under development with Evie Sloane at Hill Studios.

Discussion by Planning Commission:

Open discussion ensued with Commission Members and Mr. Gibson on a projected date for the final version of the Comprehensive Plan. It has almost been a year, June 2014, when Evie started work on the plan. Discussion continued on completion expectation in May 2015, with the first draft anticipated in April 2015.

NEW BUSINESS

New Business Item No. 1: Way Finding Signage Design

Staff Remarks:

Josh Gibson, Town Planner, came before the Planning Commission to present the staff report memorandum on the new wayfinding signage design update.

MEMORADUM To: Janet Stockton, Chair, and Planning Commissioners From: Matthew C. Hankins, Assistant Town Manager and Zoning Administrator Josh Gibson, Town Planner Date: February 26, 2014 Re: New signage and wayfinding design update. Planning Commissioners: Thanks to the Harvester, new businesses and other popular events in and around Town, Rocky Mount has experienced a new influx of out-of-town visitors during the past year. It is imperative we facilitate a pleasant experience for these visitors, and one way to accomplish that is through effective signage and wayfinding. The update which follows summarizes ongoing staff efforts to improve wayfinding and signage within the town.

SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDE SIGNS ON US 220

According to Virginia Logos, which administers the state's Integrated Directional Signing Program (IDSP) for the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the Harvester qualifies for the Supplemental Guide Sign program as a venue and destination owned by a local governmental organization. Though we initially investigated adding The Harvester to the blue "Logo Signs" along access-restricted highways like US 220, the large brown signs like the one depicted in Figure 1 offer enhanced visibility without additional surrounding clutter. Our application for approval is nearly complete, but we cannot submit a completed application until additional steps are taken (discussed below).



TOWN WAYFINDING UPDATE

The account representatives from Virginia Logos indicated that applicants would be facing a waiting period of several months after approval due to statewide construction delays. In the meantime, they suggested we begin work on a pre-installation requirement which they call a "trailblazer plan". The trailblazer plan is required to demonstrate that the applicant has installed sufficient signage to direct motorists from the brown Supplemental Guide signs along major thoroughfares (in this case U.S. 220) to the destination (in this case The Harvester).

For over six years, several staff members, groups and committees have worked intermittently on signage planning and installation around town. Some have come to fruition (Welcome Signs, Mary Elizabeth Park, parking signage), but the planned overall comprehensive wayfinding system has been delayed. The requirement for wayfinding as a part of the Supplemental Guide sign installations is a good opportunity to begin to finalize all of the effort expended over the years in planning for a consistent wayfinding system in town.

Though at the time of this Staff Report several items are still being finalized, we are nearing a point when we can begin putting out requests for bids on fabrication and installation of wayfinding signs. Based on the information from our past work on wayfinding, including public meetings and commentary, staff worked to develop a consistent theme for sign design as a basis for the system prior to assigning content to each sign.

WAYFINDING SIGN DESIGN

The design theme for the wayfinding system was based on several key factors, which aimed to:

- Enhance and compliment current and historic town features and design characteristics
- Maximize visibility and contrast
- Present the information in an attractive manner
- Present the information succinctly
- Minimize colors and thus costs
- Minimize expensive enhancements
- Allow flexibility of the system now and moving forward
- Allow for consistent branding across several locations and signage types



Discussion by Planning Commission:

Open discussion ensued with Commission Members and Mr. Gibson regarding design, colors, and locations within the Town. Discussion continued with the individual size of the signs and the size of the lettering. Commission members are happy with colors, usage of the Town seal, and the consistency of design.

Chair Stockton asked about adding Ben Franklin Middle School. Mr. Gibson advised the signs have limited space available. Some items will not be listed on the signs.

Mr. Gibson advised the members that the brown venue signage (IDSP) from VDOT will take approximately six to eight months for approval and delivery.

Chair Stockton asked for any other comments.

COMMISSIONER CONCERNS AND STAFF UPDATES

Member Hall: Questions about waste water and fees to County.

John Boitnott, Town Attorney, asked Mr. Hall to discuss directly with him.

Member Clements: No Comments

Vice Chairman Speidel: No Comments

Chair Stockton: No Comments

Member Tiggle: No Comments

Chair Stockton advised the board members of the Virginia Municipal League regional supper at the Harvester Performance Center on Thursday, April 16, 2015. Please RSVP to Town Clerk, Stacey Sink by Wednesday, March 25, 2015.

Chair Stockton thanked Mr. Gibson for his professionalism in his staff reports to the Planning Commission.

Chair Stockton hearing no further comments entertained a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to Adjourn By: Commission Member Clements

Second: Vice Chairman Speidel

Action: Approved by a unanimous vote of members present

Time of Adjournment: 6:44 p.m.

Janet Stockton, Chairman

ATTEST:

Deanna F. Alexander, Clerk/Secretary

DFA/