

**Town of Amherst
Planning Commission Minutes
August 1, 2012**

A meeting of the Town of Amherst Planning Commission was called to order by Chairperson June Driskill in the Council Chambers of the Town Hall at 7:30 PM on August 1, 2012. It was noted that a quorum was present as indicated below:

P June Driskill	P William Jones
A Ted Finney	A Steve LaBar
A William Hathaway	P Richard Wydner
P Clifford Hart	

Town Manager Jack Hobbs was present in his capacity as Secretary to the Commission.

The minutes of the May 2, 2012 Commission meeting were approved on a motion by Mr. Wydner, seconded by Mr. Jones, and carried 4-0 according to the following:

June Driskill	Aye	William Jones	Aye
Ted Finney	Absent	Steve LaBar	Absent
William Hathaway	Absent	Richard Wydner	Aye
Clifford Hart	Aye		

Downtown Ordinances

The Town Manager reported that, during its meeting on July 11, 2012, the Town Council asked the Planning Commission to review Town ordinances that affect the downtown area. These ordinances put the Town in the situation of having rules that would not allow the downtown to develop as it has to date, yet the downtown area is recognized as a beloved feature of the community. In summary, the Town Council desires to promote and improve the downtown area but there is a concern that some Town regulations may be hampering efforts in that area. Although relief can be given in the form of variances and Planning Commission approval of alternate parking arrangements, having to apply and then having to wait for several weeks for a decision - which is not guaranteed - can discourage new businesses from pursuing a location in downtown Amherst.

Specific issues of concern appear to be:

- parking space requirements discourage changes in the use of older buildings, many of which were built before the proliferation of automobiles. For instance, restaurants (1 space/100 SF) require more on-site parking spaces than retail sales (1/200) and office uses (1/400). (Ref §18.1-602)

- many downtown lots have buildings that do not meet current front setback standards. In addition, as per the recent variance application, the required side yard is driven by whether there is a residence on the adjacent property. (Ref §18.1-804)
- the allowed size, quantity and placement of signage. (Ref §18.1-908)

The Commissioners discussed the matter and agreed that the signage regulations are adequate but that additional information and perhaps a more specific proposal would help them better understand the setback and parking regulation concerns.

Downtown Ideas Project

The list of downtown improvement ideas generated from a recent public involvement process was presented. The Town Manager was asked to investigate how the Town could encourage the installation of a sidewalk from the traffic circle to Mountain View Shopping Center.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:20 PM on a motion by Mr. Jones that was seconded by Mr. Hart and carried 4-0 according to the following:

June Driskill	Aye	William Jones	Aye
Ted Finney	Absent	Steve LaBar	Absent
William Hathaway	Absent	Richard Wydner	Aye
Clifford Hart	Aye		

June Driskill, Chairperson

Attest: _____