

City of Newport
Planning Commission
Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Members Present: John Monette, Chair
Denis Chenette, Vice Chair
Carole O'Connell
Kevin Mead

Others present: Mayor Beth Barnes
Jay Walsh
Gina Cirelli
Ryan Pronto
Zoning Administrator Frank Cheney
City Manager Laura Dolgin

Call to Order: Chair Monette called the March 21, 2023 Planning Commission Meeting to order at 6:44 pm.

Approval of Minutes of March 7, 2023: Denis Chenette moved to approve the March 7 2023 minutes as presented, with Carole O'Connell seconding. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Public Comment: Mayor Beth Barnes, Newport resident Jay Walsh, and Newport resident Gina Cirelli came to hear Ryan's Pronto's presentation, and are interested in Historic Preservation and city planning.

Presentation from Real Estate Agent Ryan Pronto about the status of the Newport housing and real estate market from his vantage point as an agent with Jim Campbell Real Estate.

What is the real estate year going to be? The rest of the inventory is sold off that carried the winter. This is the low of the low for the inventory that is out there. Everyone is waiting for the snow to melt before they list their homes. April 1 is a big date. Last 3 years have been a real estate roller coaster. There were 110 listings in the city 3 years ago, and right now there are only 26 listings. Used to be 20 closings a month; now it is 3 or 4. All of Orleans county is this same picture. 550 listing 3 years ago; 5 years ago 1200. Now at 150 listings in the entire county. Ryan distributed a handout showing inventory and sales over the past three years, attached.

Pre pandemic the first question when buying a home was about the tax rate in the City. Now, no one cares about the taxes but they do care about high speed internet. High speed is a driving factor of the market which makes Newport attractive. The hard wire is critical for remote work.

There is not much available for land for sales though the average sales prices are still up on land. Multi family is the only section that is up across the board but so few sales the #'s get skewed a little bit. That being said there are not a lot of options for sale for multi family homes, although 3 family homes sold for a lot of money. There are 26 active listings in Newport right now but in the next couple months the numbers will see quite a bit of change.

Discussion ensued about the challenges of employee recruitment with a competitive or non-existent rental market, although Ryan doesn't specialize in rentals but does get a lot of inquiries. The rental market is harder than the

purchase market due in part to the requirement of first, last and security deposit. Big disparity between what a property sells for and what it costs to replace it is out of whack.

What impediments exist in the current bylaw that don't contribute anything to the betterment of the city to enhance the ability to develop more housing. City water and sewer is highly valued in the buyers market. A wastewater permit costs money at the state level that is significantly more expensive than the local level. The Planning Commission is interested in lot size, accessory dwelling units, and infill opportunities. Newport has the most favorable costs of water and sewer by a long shot. Tax exempt properties do not pay property taxes, but everyone has to pay water and sewer bills.

Ryan observes that buyers want walkability and aren't so concerned with density. Ryan indicated that based on his observation, that there is a lack of ways to expand that density won't matter. He pointed out the eastside of Newport is walkable but not necessarily close to downtown which will make these smaller lots marketable.

Newport Health Facility has lots of square footage on one floor and will require a large investment to refurbish. Buyers that have a decent job and can afford a little more have few options because the real estate market is slim. Older people who are living in single family homes lack affordable options. These are the types of houses that will sell quickly as the first house for a middle income. Doug Spates built the 9 unit place on West Main that has been very desirable and Rural Edge has a 5 year waiting list.

A number of buyers have had to look elsewhere. Most of the pressure comes from outside buyers, pushing out the local young people who want to remain here. Freeing up housing for the younger generation requires finding housing for seniors. Buyers might be receptive to condos up here depending upon price, density, and no maintenance. Expensive condos might not be appealing but Lakeview Estates were historically \$130-\$180K. You would have a line out the door, even if at \$250 below.

Ryan noted that the form based code caused problems for Main St. commercial on the first day of its release. Amending the form based code will be a huge help so Newport can get some activity downtown. There are only certain businesses that want to be downtown. Parking and loading docks are very important. If a retail inquiry is a small startup for 200-300 sq ft, a second floor is affordable. One Man St. space has rented for between \$1000 and \$1200 a month for several years and is still vacant. The St. J Mall is store fronts and the whole back is warehouse distribution.

The interim bylaw amendment will allow services professional office space. The yoga studio health care, law, real estate, will be aligned with what is already there. John noted there were services available 15 years ago on Main St., a real mix of services including the dept stores on Main St. The amended bylaw will allow the kind of flexibility that used to take place assuming the council approves it.

Employers need housing for recruitment purposes. Newport might have to be reassessed, but a new bill would bring the rate to 20% which would allow a reprieve. The common level of appraisal has dropped for a lot of municipalities which means it could be several years before the reassessment takes place. Not a lot of firms do this and they are booked years out. Land surveyors are hard to find these days too. Lots of trades that feed into housing are struggling due to a lack of interest in these trades.

With little availability in Newport, warehousing, light industrial and distribution is going to St. J and Lyndonville, which are now completely full. One advantage to consider might be to modify zoning commercial B because warehouses are not allowed. A new owner has purchased the available lots in the industrial park. Canadian businesses are interestec.

in coming here. Industrial development on Lakemont is now public health. Right Aid on the Derby road is now a warehouse. Its' common to use this kind of space in a nondescript way. Not a lot of options in Newport due to being land poor and no buildings are readily available.

Ryan says commercial amending zone B will free up options, and be directly related to what people can put into their properties, and bringing unoccupied space into compliance will open up some stuff.

Another advantage Newport has is a reliable zoning administrator that responds. Frank gets a lot of calls and is knowledgeable. John Harlamert is doing a full review of the addresses in Newport to verify they match all the data.

ARBNB's takes away from the housing stock and is a hot topic that has not been tackled yet for the bylaw modernization. The Arbnb registry restricts to owners occupied in Newport. It is a double edge sword because what used to be a \$100K house transforms into a \$500K Airbnb that could destroy the community.

Ryan departed at 8:03pm and is willing to review the bylaws as they get drafted.

Rules of Procedure: John asked for a motion to readopt the Rules of Procedure as presented. Carole O'Connell moved to adopt the Rules as presented, with Kevin Mead seconding. All voted in favor and the motion carried. Kevin Mead, being remote, authorized John Monette to sign his name with John Monette's initials.

Bylaw Modernization: Moved by Carole O'Connell moved to table this item to the next meeting, seconded by Denis Chenette, and the motion carried.

Old Business: n/a

New Business: Laura Dolgin invited the Planning Commission to present at the annual Community Update being planned for June 14, 2023.

Frank will work with the commission members to produce a report pertaining to the Interim Bylaw Amendment.

Elections of Officers: Denis made a motion to appoint John Monette as Planning Commission Chair, with Kevin Mead enthusiastically seconding. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

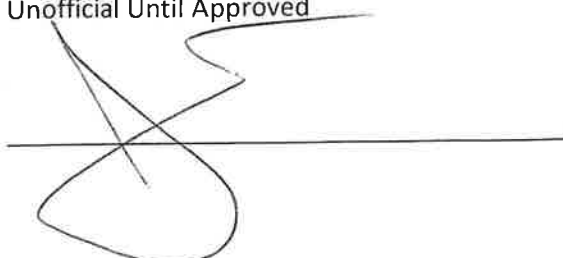
Carol O'Connell moved to appoint Denis Chenette to continue in his current position as vice chair, with Kevin enthusiastically seconding. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

Next meeting: The next Planning Commission Meeting is scheduled April 4, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. with a Special Meeting planned for on April 11. April 4 is Flood regulations with Alison Low and an ANR Representative.

Adjourn: Denis Chenette moved to adjourn, with Carole O'Connell seconding at 8:30pm. All voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Laura Dolgin

Unofficial Until Approved

 _____, Planning Commission Chair