

Approved 2/26, 2015

**City of Rockland
Comprehensive Planning Commission
Minutes for February 12, 2015**

Board Present: Chair Valli Geiger, Thomas Keedy, Eileen Wilkinson, Adam Ackor, Ann Morris, Amy Files, Jesse Butler, Alt. Michelle Gifford

Guests: Charlie Jordan, Terry Pinto, Cabot Lyman, David Myslabodski's

Staff Present: Asst. Code Enforcement Officer David Kalloch, City Attorney Kevin Beal, Recording Secretary Kara Cushman

Meeting called to order at 7:06 p.m.

ACTION: Member Morris made a motion, seconded by Member Wilkinson to accept January 29, 2015 COMP Commission Minutes as written. VOTE: 7-0-0

Old Business:

Downtown Zone building height regulations-180-day moratorium

Chair Geiger presented a written outline with a brief overview of the article emailed to the COMPS Commission by Terry Pinto. The article is from Great Streets San Diego-“Changing the Conversation: from Building Heights to Place Making” by Walter Chambers.

Chair Geiger said that when the Downtown Rockland height moratorium ends, the height maximum will return to 65 feet. In the San Diego article, it discusses Height to Width Proportion (HWP). It is the ratio of the height of the street wall to the width of the street. A good proportion can make the street space feel right, like a comfortable room, and inviting to people. The space can feel lively, interesting and safe. 3:1 HWP ratio is good for larger urban core downtowns. 1:4 ratios are what are found at suburban strip malls with low building height and wide streets. 3:2 ratios offer a clear sense of enclosure and are good for mid-rise, medium sized downtowns. A 1:1 ratio may also have a strong place making potential with excellent spatial definition and is the encouraged minimum for all urban areas.

Member Morris said her concern was with preserving historic resources in the Downtown Historic District. She said that the maximum height should be 3-story which is the predominant downtown building height with a few higher buildings here. Member Files said it was important to get people downtown, but also respect residential space. Member Wilkinson asked if it was possible to have specific ratios to set height definitions for specific streets. She thought 1:1 ratio would only work in certain areas.

Other considerations include:

- 1) The base height or 'street wall' which in some cases could be the first "layer of wedding cake" with layers above stepped back.
- 2) The larger the lot, the higher the building.
- 3) The streetscape width (not including the automobile lane)
 - a. 13 feet is recommended (5 feet for the sidewalk, 8 feet for streetscape including trees, benches, street lights, CMP poles, and trash receptacles.)
- 4) Shading from taller buildings is a more important issue on North to South streets than on East to West streets.

Guest and former member Terry Pinto said we should look street by street and the amount of right-of-way dedicated to streetscape. Stay with the 5-foot sidewalk and share the canopy of trees with the street. Choose trees that are appropriate size. Create provisions based on the street itself. The streets are rather wide for an older city and could be narrower. Requiring no more than 3-stories does nothing in preserving the integrity of a historic building next to it. For example, many cities have old churches or libraries next to higher, newer buildings. Look at the economics because 3-story is very limiting.

Chair Geiger discussed the design ideas of Jan Gehl and Christopher Alexander. Gehl's is a 6-story height limit, with no limits on symbolically important buildings. (i.e. the Eiffel Tower) Alexander's is a 5-story limit which allows people to walk up to the upper floor level of the building. The building can also be of wood-framed construction. These buildings must have 2 stairwells and elevators that use a large amount of floor area.

Cabot Lyman discussed his future hotel that is now being built in downtown at the corner of Main and Pleasant Streets. He said he had looked at the City's Comprehensive Plan, zoning, and the site. People are interested in height. We can't duplicate historic buildings today. There has to be density to make building economical. In his hotel, 26 rooms are marginal. That's why they had to build up. After 4 stories, you may need non-combustible, steel construction for fire safety, with elevators and 2 stair cases. This eats up a lot of space. Investment dries up when buildings have fewer stories. Also tax values of multi-story buildings are much greater per square foot. Rockland parallels a lot of other towns with the fight against the sprawl of big box stores. Big box stores have a lower tax return with 1-story buildings and much of the land area devoted to parking areas.

City Attorney Beal says that in Chapter 13, Future Land Use, the Comprehensive Plan focuses on economics and redevelopment in the downtown zone. It encourages infill development and the efficient use of commercial land in the City's 'growth area.' The Comprehensive Plan doesn't specifically address height except with respect to residential zones (Pg. 13-12) where it speaks of ways to allow more infill development including, "increasing maximum height or floors..." This chapter discusses preventing sprawl with more compact and dense neighborhoods.

Member Morris changed her first statement, and said that we do need diversity in height and the skyline. This is valuable in areas where development is likely to happen.

Asst. CEO Kalloch said the number of stories is not as important as the design and the look of the building.

The COMPS Commission agreed to split into 4 groups to go out and observe the streets.

Members are to look at:

- 1) What ratio is appropriate for each street (i.e. 3:2, 1:1, or 1:2)
- 2) Maximum height
- 3) Street wall (vertical height)
- 4) Layer cake/step back
- 5) Roof treatment above wall

Next meeting is February 26, 2015.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kara Cushman
Recording Secretary