

Richmond Planning Board Meeting
Town Hall
Minutes
January 13, 2020

Members present: Richard Bell, Douglas Bruce, John Hanson (Chairman), Katherine Keenum, Peter Lopez

Mr. Hanson opened the meeting at 6:30 P.M.

1. Mr. Bruce moved to approve the minutes of November 12, 2019, as is. Mr. Bell seconded. The motion was approved unanimously by a vote of 5-0.
2. Mr. Hanson reported that the Planning Board's new website materials had been posted substantially as submitted. Mr. Bell suggested a few changes. Mr. Hanson asked for them to be sent in an e-mail, which he would forward to the Town Administrator.
3. Mr. Hanson said that he was having trouble writing a "white paper" for updating Richmond's Master Plan because such an unsolicited proposal would require a new justification beyond what he had already discussed with members of the Board of Selectmen. For the meantime, he suggested that the Planning Board take up the issue of housing in Richmond, which could eventually be part of a Master Plan and was, in any case, pertinent to the town's future.
4. Mr. Hanson distributed a chart he had compiled of "Richmond Housing Starts History" between 2005 and 2019 (see Exhibit 1). It demonstrated that a decline in starts had begun at the time of the economic downturn of 2008, with no more than two new starts in any year since 2009. Such new housing starts as there were, he said, fell mainly into two categories: (a) houses built by people with high incomes at unique locations (e.g., on Richmond Pond or mountain tops) or (b) houses built on property subdivided by family members (which helped offset the high real estate costs associated with building in Richmond). Existing housing stock was gradually being turned over to new owners. These buyers were putting money into maintaining the properties, which was a good thing; but it made Richmond primarily a preservationist town. If the town wanted to encourage new housing starts for workforce families as well, then the Board should look at whether there were policies that would do so. Zoning was the primary tool of planning boards; but, he warned, zoning is a better brake than accelerator. He also noted that the Planning Board had influence only over new construction.

Mr. Bruce said that he disagreed with the idea that the town needed new starts because there were already a lot of vacant houses. He also noted that, to be meaningful, discussions of demographics and house sales cannot be limited to Richmond alone but must encompass the surrounding towns.

Mr. Hanson suggested that the Board undertake an inventory of existing housing and building lots. Mr. Bell objected on the grounds that the Planning Board was not charged to do so. Other members showed more interest.

As the end of more discussion of housing and the town's future, Mr. Lopez said that it would be worthwhile to read the existing Master Plan and to look at what success there had been in being aligned with town priorities. Before the meeting, Mr. Bell had e-mailed Board members a link to the minutes of May 8, 2017 (which are posted on line at the town website). He urged members to look at the five steps pertaining to the Master Plan that he had recommended then. Mr. Hanson undertook as an action item to distribute an electronic version of the Master Plan to members.

The meeting adjourned at 7:46 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,
Katherine Keenum, Clerk

Exhibit 1

Richmond Housing Starts History				
No.	Year	Number/ Year	Cum Total	Avg
1	2005	4	4	4
2	2006	5	9	4.5
3	2007	3	12	4
4	2008	4	16	4
5	2009	2	18	3.6
6	2010	0	18	3
7	2011	0	18	2.6
8	2012	0	18	2.3
9	2013	2	20	2.2
10	2014	2	22	2.2
11	2015	2	24	2.2
12	2016	0	24	2.0
13	2017	2	26	2.0
14	2018	2	28	2.0
15	2019	2	30	2.0