

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm by Chair Frechter.

ROLL CALL

Mike Giller Mark Leas Allen Frechter Susan Propper **remote**
Ethan Guerra **absent** Steve Gerard Elaine Gort

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

With no changes, the June 6, 2023, Planning Commission Minutes were approved.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

With no changes, the June 20, 2023, Planning Commission Agenda was approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION ISSUES:

- None

WORK SESSIONS:

1. Policy 48A: Voluntary Defensible Space

Mr. Cross presented a work session to review Policy 48A Voluntary Defensible Space. The following questions were asked of the Commission:

1. Does the Commission agree with Staff's identification of the challenges faced when trying to implement the full guidance of Fire Wise Standards within the Downtown Core and certain properties outside of the core (e.g. Tyra example)?
2. Are there additional concerns that the Planning Commission would like to note for consideration?

Commissioner Questions / Comments:

Ms. Gort: We are not adopting any of the Firewise standards? (Mr. Cross: At this time, Staff would recommend keeping our own defensible space code and implementing Firewise when possible but leaving staff the flexibility.)

Mr. Gerard: Is there any benefit to the Town to being able to say "we have implemented Firewise standards" such as insurance requiring that certification? (Mr. Cross: In speaking with RWB, some properties do have issues obtaining insurance without a defensible space plan.)

Mr. Frechter: To follow-on, the Town could say "the Town has this policy, it doesn't exactly follow Firewise, but as a property owner they may have to follow the more strict Firewise standards to get insurance?" (Mr. Cross: The insurance issue is mostly with larger properties valued above \$10 million. Mr. Benedict, Wildland Fire Captain has been working with these properties to create plans for defensible space.) Would the Town Code trump any Firewise standards?

Mr. Gerard: I believe the Town Code would trump the Firewise standards.

Mr. Giller: Does the Town consider any fire resiliency codes such as measures for construction with fire resistant materials and regulations for clearing debris and storage of combustible materials? (Ms. Puester: Staff is bringing forward an ordinance to Town Council to ban the use of cedar shake shingles. There have been discussions with Red, White, and Blue on fire resistant siding and other materials. The cleaning and debris removal information is done through messaging, primarily through RWB.) (Mr. Cross: Both Firewise and the Town's Code say the same things regarding clearing up fuels, with the exception that the Town's Code does not prohibit mulch and other landscaping materials near structures.)

- Ms. Puester: The Firewise zone 1 within 5 feet of the structure doesn't always work with many of the small lots and historic homes we have in the core of Town as shown in the photos presented tonight.
- Mr. Leas: Most new homes to meet the code are required to have a gravel barrier around the base.
- Mr. Giller: Are you considering adopting more items from other fire resiliency codes? (Ms. Puester: We did recently make some additional code changes regarding allowing more fire resilient materials such as Hardie plank siding outside the Historic District.) Regarding the cedar shingles, are we saying that no historic buildings can have the cedar shake shingles going forward? (Ms. Puester: Yes, the cedar shingles would be prohibited anywhere in Town.) (Mr. Kulick: There have not been any applications that I can recall having cedar shake shingles in the past several years.)
- Ms. Gort: What are other mountain towns doing? (Mr. Cross: Aspen and Vail, I don't believe they are following exactly Firewise, but they are following similar codes where the vegetation allowed is broken into zones like Firewise.) (Mr. Kulick: Other towns like Aspen, with a more mature tree canopy than ours, have taken the position that maintaining the tree canopy is more important in the core of Town rather than implementing all components of Firewise.)
- Ms. Propper: Having owned properties at Wellington and Longbranch, I support having visual buffers in the core of Town. Having a required 5ft buffer of no vegetation would change the character of the core of town considerably. I agree with Staff's conclusions here. I also agree with eliminating cedar shake roofs if the Town Council approves that measure.
- Ms. Gort: I agree that there is a challenge with the 5ft zone. It would create a poor-looking area without trees. Moving closer to the Firewise standards outside the 5ft zone is important, considering the fires we have had in our own community.
- Mr. Gerard: I would not want to go to the strict interpretation of Firewise in the core of town. Staff has accurately considered the implications of doing so. I think Firewise should apply to all new construction. As a former member of the Highlands Park review board, we saw the unintended consequences of adopting Firewise after construction when many owners eliminated all trees close to their homes within their view corridors. It was hard to argue against this because of Firewise but they were using it as an opportunity for clear cutting and removed the buffering that contributed to the neighborhood character for better views.
- Mr. Leas: I strongly agree that Staff should have the flexibility to determine what is best for the Town. You need to make tradeoffs between good and bad, aesthetics in this Town which includes trees, are equally as important as fire protection. We need the flexibility to make decisions regarding landscaping that are best for Breckenridge.
- Mr. Giller: I agree on number one. This really should be implemented with fire resiliency codes as well. Embers can travel miles; these are good measures, but we should also look at other resiliency tools to implement to prevent fire from spreading when embers land in and are trapped in architectural features such as roof eaves.
- Mr. Frechter: On question one I agree and support. I think for Zone 2 and 3, I don't know if it would hurt our visual buffering if we were to align our outer zones more exact with Firewise. More language regarding spacing of trees could be important. (Mr. Kulick: We also recognize that having single trees can be susceptible to blow-down in this area from heavy wind gusts. That is why we generally encourage multiple trees to be grouped together.)

OTHER MATTERS:

1. Handbook of Design Standards Update

Ms. Crump gave an overview of the recently updated 2019 edition Handbook of Design Standards for the Historic and Conservation Districts.

2. Town Council Summary

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting was adjourned at 6:40 pm.

Allen Frechter, Chair