

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS
Council Community Affairs Committee Meeting
February 4, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM on Wednesday, February 4, 2026, by the Chair Mr. Ernie Havens.

ROLL CALL

PRESENT

Mr. Greenwood

Mr. Havens

Ms. Wright

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

There were no prior minutes to approve. The previous minutes stood as the agenda and the meeting proceeded directly into executive session for interviews.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Havens:

- Stated that although there is no old business, there is new business regarding the scope, purpose, and composition of non-chartered boards and commissions.
- Lists boards under review: Old Village Review Board (OVRB), BZA, PRC, Planning Board, Historical Board.
- Notes ongoing concern: finding enough members for all boards and difficulty getting quorums.
- Suggests exploring whether OVRB responsibilities could be incorporated into another board so important elements are not lost.
- Asks Mr. Schommer if the recap is accurate.

Mr. Schommer:

- Confirms Mr. Haven's summary aligns with previous Council discussion.
- Provides initial guidance: some boards are charter-created (Planning Board, BZA) and cannot be structurally changed easily; others are council-created (VRB, PRC, Historical Board).
- Explains VRB is codified in Article 14, its role is advisory, and it is not a historical review board.
- Notes VRB's limited caseload.

Mr. Havens:

- Highlights that the VRB historically allowed participation by non-resident business owners and asks if that is allowed in charter boards.

Mr. Schommer:

- States charter boards must be resident electors; non-residents cannot serve.

Mr. Greenwood:

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- Gives VRB historical background, beginning in 1974.
- Notes the zoning language is suggestive rather than mandatory.
- Praises VRB for providing community insight.

Mr. Havens:

- Asks where the purpose of VRB is documented.

Mr. Schommer:

- States it is documented in Article 14.

Mr. Havens:

- Asks whether a combined Planning–OVRB could exist.

Mr. Schommer:

- Believes it is unlikely due to legal and structural limitations.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Agrees combining boards would not work.

Mr. Schommer:

- Further details limitations posed by Charter requirements.

Mr. Havens:

- Raises concern about delays when VRB cannot achieve quorum.

Mr. Schommer:

- Clarifies that BZA retains final decision authority and special meetings can be called.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Suggests giving VRB more work to increase engagement.

Mr. Schommer:

- Suggests civic-oriented additions to VRB but notes little redevelopment occurs downtown.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Emphasizes value of community involvement.

Mr. Schommer:

- Notes redevelopment scenarios where VRB would be involved.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Highlights intent of VRB to help rather than financially burden residents.

Mr. Havens:

- Shares problematic community stories involving a screen door and paint color.

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Mr. Schommer:

- Clarifies VRB does not regulate such matters.

Mr. Havens:

- Raises signage delay concerns.

Mr. Schommer:

- Explains current sign process: code-compliant signs bypass VRB; only variances go VRB → BZA.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Adds note about Article 14's precedence.

Mr. Havens:

- Asks about VRB membership count.

Mr. Schommer:

- VRB should have five members; current count unclear.

Mr. Havens:

- Again raises idea of streamlining.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Suggests recruiting volunteers more aggressively.

Mr. Havens:

- Asks whether consolidation is feasible.

Mr. Greenwood:

- States he had considered it but is unsure how it would work.

Mr. Havens:

- Asks Mr. Schommer to evaluate feasibility.

Mr. Schommer:

- Explains combining VRB with BZA/Planning is constrained.
- Suggests possible civic advisory enhancements.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Reiterates value of having a board that captures diverse input.

Mr. Schommer:

- Points out Bellbrook lacks true historic standards; establishing them would require new regulation.

Mr. Havens:

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- Requests hypothetical example involving a drive-through addition to an old downtown building.

Mr. Schommer:

- Walks through the process: VRB recommendation → BZA for variance; or VRB recommendation → Planning Board → Council for rezoning.

Mr. Havens:

- Notes this could take two months or more depending on quorum.

Mr. Schommer:

- Confirms delays are possible but special meetings can mitigate.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Confirms special meetings have occurred previously.

Mr. Schommer:

- Shares example of a business intimidated by multi-board process.

Mr. Havens:

- Notes a business walked away from the Frosty Eagle site due to incorrect information from prior VRB members.

Mr. Schommer:

- States such an outcome is impossible today because VRB cannot issue binding denials.
- Notes staff now properly routes applicants and Council retains final authority.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Adds an example involving a tear-down and VRB advisory input.

Mr. Schommer:

- Clarifies demolition approvals and appeals.

Mr. Greenwood:

- Mentions the 10% demolition profitability rule.

Mr. Schommer:

- Concludes by asking what Council wants VRB recommendations to represent.

OPEN DISCUSSION

General comments were made about community engagement, public input, and the long-term strategic direction for boards and commissions.

Jen LeClaire spoke about the VRB not having a real say in what they decide.

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Mr. Schommer said if combining Planning and VRB it would change the scope of the Planning Board. Mr. Havens asked if it's possible to remove the quorum requirement from VRB. Mr. Schommer said a quorum is required for their actions to be official. A quorum would be simple majority; 1 more than half.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at a time not specified.

Ernie Havens, Chair

Rob Schommer, Clerk of Council