



SOUTH BURLINGTON PLANNING COMMISSION

11 AUGUST 2026

The South Burlington Planning Commission held a regular meeting on Tuesday, 11 August 2026, at 7:00 p.m., in Room 301, City Hall, 180 Market Street, and via Zoom.

MEMBERS PRESENT: J. Louisos, Chair; M. Mittag, D. MacDonald, D. Leban, C. Lawrence, M. Emery

ALSO PRESENT: P. Conner, Director of Planning and Zoning; K. Peterson, City Planner, R. Doyle

1. Instructions on exiting the building in case of an emergency:

Ms. Louisos provided instructions on emergency exit from the building.

2. Agenda: Additions, deletions or changes in order of agenda items:

No changes were made to the agenda.

3. Open to the public for items not related to the Agenda:

No issues were raised.

4. Planning Commissioner announcements and staff report:

Ms. Louisos said she will be having surgery next month and should be back within a month.

Mr. Mittag said he may not be able to attend the 25 August meeting.

Mr. Conner announced that last Friday the City submitted the Act 250 Tier 1A application. The City is the second to apply (Rutland first). There will be a public

meeting regarding this which will involve a tour in the morning and meeting in the afternoon.

Mr. Laurence said he had a conversation with an engineer regarding sand and gravel. It has gotten to the point where it costs more to drive the same from the sand pit than to buy sand. The engineer blamed this on Act 250 which made it impossible to open more sand pits, and the existing ones are so far away. This is very significant when it comes to the cost of building things. Developers are now using more gravel than sand which is more expensive. Ms. Louisos noted that a number of sand pits have been reclaimed as neighborhoods.

5. Reorganization Meeting:

Mr. Conner presided over the election of a Commission Chair. He opened the floor for nominations.

Mr. Mittag nominated Ms. Louisos. Ms. Emery seconded. There were no further nominations and the vote to elect Ms. Louisos was 6-0.

Mr. Mittag and Ms. Emery noted they had attended the ceremony last week at which Ms. Louisos was awarded the Citizen Planner of the Year honor. A number of former Planning Commission members attended the ceremony. Ms. Louisos thanked Mr. Conner and Ms. Peterson for having nominated her.

Ms. Louisos presided over the remainder of the meeting. She opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chair.

Ms. Emery nominated Mr. MacDonald. Ms. Leban seconded the nomination. There were no further nominations, and Mr. MacDonald was elected by a vote of 6-0.

Mr. Mittag then nominated Ms. Leban for Clerk. Mr. MacDonald seconded. There were no further nominations, and Ms. Leban was elected by a vote of 6-0.

Ms. Emery then moved that the Planning Commission meet on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month with the exception of the fourth Tuesday in December at 7:00 p.m. with the exception of holidays when they will meet on the next non-holiday. Mr. MacDonald seconded. The motion passed 6-0.

6. Landscaping

Ms. Peterson drew attention to a list of questions she has posed, the first of which was: What is the purpose of the landscaping requirement?

Mr. Mittag enumerated the following purposes: aesthetic, health, contact with nature, climate change mitigation. He added that the rules should be the same in all sections of the LDRs.

Ms. Emery noted that some HOAs prohibit residents from having gardens. Common use law prevents the Legislature from allowing residents in these HOAs to grow their own food. Mr. Conner noted that private property owners can place limitations beyond what the community provides.

Ms. Leban noted that some surfaces and benches can count as landscaping. Mr. Conner said this is only as an exception. The regulations said "trees and shrubs."

Ms. Leban said other purposes of landscaping include: reducing air pollution, cooling the environment 2-4 degrees, reducing rates of cardiac disease and asthma, protecting biodiversity, stormwater management, "social cohesion" (people meeting) reducing stress, and increasing physical activity as people are more likely to walk where there is landscaping. Ms. Leban added her concern when people cut down perfectly good trees because they don't want to have to rake the leaves. She also cited the Austrian pine trees that the City cut down in Veterans Park. They were perfectly healthy and had been there for 30 years.

Mr. Laurence cited other values of landscaping, specifically to provide habitat and to slow down traffic when they are planted at the edge of a road.

Mr. MacDonald said they should be trying to promote local species to help the environment and should be incentivizing reducing lawns. He asked if there is a way to tie landscaping to different districts. Ms. Peterson said "the short answer is yes."

Ms. Peterson said the landscaping discussion here should focus on landscaping related to development.

Ms. Leban said there should be consideration for retaining mature trees on a site that is being developed. Mr. Conner noted a project in the city that was actually designed around the protection of a very large tree.

Mr. Mittag said credit should be given to retaining indigenous trees, and there should be a penalty for clear-cutting.

Ms. Louisos said there are habitat blocks which are protected separately, also wetlands, river corridors, etc. There is also landscaping that can happen in conjunction with stormwater management and in civic spaces such as pocket parks. Ms. Peterson said those things overlap, and maybe there could be credit for them.

Mr. Laurence said the City has very little ability to determine how landscaping gets maintained in the future. He suggested possibly steering toward lower maintenance landscaping.

Ms. Leban said the City could do itself a favor by not thinking of parking as just for cars. Some paving can allow for large trees in parking areas.

Ms. Louisos cited the secondary benefits of landscaping such as promoting habitat, pollination, and edible landscaping. Ms. Emery noted the raised beds in front of a Market Street building. She didn't know if residents can use them. Mr. Conner said those are part of the landscaping budget for the developer. There are areas out back that residents can use. Ms. Emery cited the need to have water available nearby. She also noted that in Paris there is parking between trees on streets.

Mr. Laurence said good landscaping should be multi-purpose. He felt the broader "landscaping" can be defined, the better.

The next question Ms. Peterson raised was: To what should landscaping be tied?

Ms. Louisos noted it is now tied to the cost of the project. This doesn't work well with renovation of an existing building as the site may already be fully landscaped.

Mr. Mittag said the larger the project, the more people will be present to use the landscaping. He suggested the possibility of a larger percentage for larger projects. Ms. Peterson noted that with a taller building on less land, there is less room for landscaping. She suggested possibly using the number of units as a guide. Mr. Conner added there are many ways to get amenities as in City Center.

Ms. Peterson said there are a lot of mechanics to be worked out. She noted projects where a developer has spent \$8,000 on a bench because they have to spend the money. There have also been some new art projects. She said the question is how to get landscaping that meets its purposes without spending money on things that don't .

Ms. Leban said you have to be more creative with larger buildings. You want to make places that are useful and usable such as shady spots. You don't want to just "put down some plants."

Mr. Laurence said part of him leans toward a percentage of the project even though it can be "crude"; otherwise, you would need more performance standards. He suggested possibly using the Grand List value of a property. He said that tall buildings on small lots shouldn't get absurd landscaping requirements.

Ms. Peterson suggested a point system with some trees worth more than others. You can have more flexibility with that kind of system. Ms. Emery suggested categories for a point system such as cooling, water filtration, and aesthetics. She also suggested possibly having a neighborhood vote on what kind of landscaping they would like to see.

Mr. Doyle suggested using "area disturbed" as a landscaping standard. Landscaping should also be non-invasive. He cited the absurd situation on Market Street with a dozen maple trees planted four feet from the building. Mr. Conner said that comes from having to spend a certain amount of money on landscaping. He stressed the need to have the money used for something useful, not something that won't survive.

Ms. Peterson noted that the Dept. of Public Works has regulations regarding species of trees, missing species, etc. She felt those specs should be connected to the LDRs. She also noted that larger trees are harder to transplant, but developers have been buying those because they are more expensive and count for more toward their landscaping requirement. Those trees are less likely to survive.

Mr. Laurence said that Mr. Doyle's suggestion regarding "disturbed area" could result in less disturbance of the earth. Mr. Leban agreed. She said it behooves us to maintain as many native species as possible. She also cited the need to incentivize looking at the whole property and putting back what was there before.

Mr. Mittag stressed working with the City Arborist regarding what is good for this area, particularly salt resistant species.

Ms. Louisos cautioned that a large building should not preclude children from playing catch on the lawn.

Ms. Leban cautioned that there shouldn't be a suburban neighborhood with only a few trees.

Mr. MacDonald said landscaping should be tied to a district. There could be areas which are appropriate for a rain garden.

Ms. Peterson said you can't have everything in every development. There should be flexibility for people to have what they want in their neighborhood. She suggested a list of 20 or so items from which a developer could choose. Ms. Emery said that data should also be considered such as which neighborhoods are the hottest or the most prone to flooding. She noted how hot it has been on Market Street this summer and questioned how to bring those temperatures down. She would support having gardens in front yards.

Ms. Leban said the parking spaces behind buildings on Market Street are empty in the daytime. They could be more useful, but people don't feel comfortable going out to a parking lot. She suggested giving points for more usable parking lots, possible with pavers that allow grass to grow between them that would soak up water.

Mr. Mittag said that shade trees should be added to the chart on Table 8.

Mr. Conner said the only place you can currently use something other than trees and shrubs for landscaping is City Center. The DRB has allowed some alternatives when the only other choice was one \$30,000 tree. This causes a lot of "churn" in a project and results in a lot of money spent when there could be better uses. Ms. Leban suggested plantings on patios and/or balconies. Mr. Conner said the process usually doesn't favor things residents control because they can go away.

Ms. Leban felt that a fountain should get landscaping credit.

Mr. Laurence felt the regulations should be understandable to the "average Joe" without having to hire a professional. Ms. Louisos disagreed and said the City wants a professional. Mr. Laurence cited an ADU as an example of his point. Mr.

Conner said landscaping requirements don't apply to single-family homes or duplexes. He noted the City has accepted something like Gardeners' Supply because over the years they have done well. Ms. Peterson noted that DPW's tree species list can be understood by just about anyone, and to tie that into the LDRs would provide more information than anything else.

Ms. Leban said pervious surfaces are much more expensive, but it could work if it were tied to a landscaping requirement.

Members next considered the retention of vegetation.

Mr. Mittag said shade trees in parking areas should apply in Sections 8 and 13, and the landscaping of civic spaces should follow the rules. DPW Section 6 should be included by reference.

Mr. Conner noted this is a hard subject for the DRB to wrestle with. Developers get credit for something that was never going to be a problem in the first place (e.g., "saving" trees that are a great distance from the developed area). He then asked how you reward something like creating butterfly habitat or letting an area grow into a meadow.

Ms. Leban noted that Maplewood, New Jersey has done a lot of tree preservation work so that roots aren't crushed and accidentally destroyed. She cited the excellent fencing put in at the top of Park Road during construction, but it was later knocked down by a bulldozer.

Mr. Mittag said a developer should get credit for retention of indigenous shade trees. Ms. Peterson said that should depend on how close they are to the building or how close they are to where people walk, bike, play, etc.

Mr. Laurence said developers should also get credit for putting a sidewalk where it does not destroy a tree/trees.

Ms. Leban suggested credit for not blasting ledge. She said it can be used as a feature.

Ms. Leban also noted that in Maplewood there is "hazard only" tree removal. She said a lot of people who have moved into her area are cutting down perfectly healthy trees. Ms. Peterson agreed these were considerations that warrant discussion but not part of this project.

Mr. Mittag said paying into a fund should be a last resort when there is no alternative.

Mr. Conner said the question is: what is a valid reason? He noted that residents at Quarry Hill got very close to that, and the Outpatient Center on Tilley Drive is a very large building with not much room for landscaping. He suggested a possible cap on landscaping or a 'release point.'

7. LDR Amendments: RTE Language Tweaks:

Ms. Peterson noted this draft was proposed to A&R. They were happy with it and said it was what they were looking for. They will add the amendments as written.

Mr. Conner said the Commission needs to warn a public hearing on the amendments for 8 September. Staff may wait to move them on to the City Council so the Council gets a full package and not dribs and drabs.

Ms. Peterson said the City should hear from the Board in late September/early October.

Mr. Laurence asked what "field verification" is. Ms. Peterson said it is a small version of a natural resources inventory done by the same people (whose license is on the line). Mr. Conner noted that the DRB has a few tools it can go to including hiring a technical review at the developer's expense.

Mr. Mittag moved to approve the RTE Language Tweaks to the LDR Amendments and to schedule a public hearing on 8 September 2026 at 7:00 p.m. The prior report stands as written. Ms. Emery seconded. Motion passed 6-0.

8. Step 3 Designation: Staff Update:

Members agreed to postpone this item to the next Commission meeting.

9. Meeting Minutes of 28 July 2026:

Mr. Mittag questioned whether he had said he did not say additional height did not appeal to him.

Mr. Mittag clarified what he had said with regard to TDRs and larger homes. What he meant was there was interest on the committee in requiring TDRs for larger homes.

Mr. Mittag then moved to approve the Minutes of 28 July 2026 with the above notations. Ms. Emery seconded. Motion passed 6-0.

10. Other Business:

A poll of members showed that there may not be a quorum for the 25 July meeting. Members agreed to skip that meeting. There is a quorum for the 8 September meeting.

As there was no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned by common consent at 9:20 p.m.

Clerk