



## Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes

April 6, 2022

Stratham Municipal Center

Time: 7:00 pm

**Member Present:** Tom House, Chair  
David Canada, Vice Chair  
Mike Houghton, Selectmen's Representative  
Chris Zarembo, Member

**Members Absent:** Pamela Hollasch, Regular Member

**Staff Present:** Mark Connors, Town Planner

### 1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Mr. House called the meeting to order and took roll call.

### 2. Approval of Minutes

#### a. March 16, 2022

Mr. House made a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of March 16, 2022. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Motion passed.

### 3. Public Hearing:

#### a. Public hearing for consideration of adoption of a Special Event Permit Program into the Stratham Site Plan Regulations, codified as new section 3.6 'Special Events.'

Mr. House asked Mr. Connors to introduce this item. Mr. Connors said that the Planning Board had discussed this item at two previous meetings and set the public hearing for tonight. At the most recent meeting on March 16, 2022, the Board indicated it was comfortable with the proposed language so no new changes have been incorporated. The Town has not received any public comments related to the proposed Special Event Permit system.

Mr. House said nothing has changed since the Planning Board's last discussion, so all that is needed is a motion to approve, is that correct? Mr. Connors said yes.

Mr. Houghton made a motion to approve the Special Event Permit program as documented in the April 6, 2022 staff memo, codified as Section 3.6 “Special Events” in the Stratham Site Plan Regulations. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Motion passed.

#### 4. Public Meeting:

##### a. Housing and Economic Development Workshop

Mr. Connors said that he had put together some statistics to carry forward the discussion from the last meeting related to housing and employment. These are informational. No action is needed by the Board tonight. Mr. Connors made a presentation to the Board with pertinent statistics to the Board. Rockingham County is the most expensive county for housing in New Hampshire, he said. The housing vacancy rate is very low at less than one percent. The median rent for a twobedroom apartment is \$1,672 based on statistics from last year. That’s an increase of 26 percent since 2016. The median sales price for a single-family home in Rockingham County in February 2022 was \$550,000, which is the highest amount ever recorded.

Mr. Connors said that Rockingham County has one of the highest rates of employment growth in New England. Among large counties it is second only to Suffolk County in Massachusetts, which includes Boston and surrounding communities, for job growth over the last ten years. Other counties with high employment growth include Middlesex County, Mass., which is a large county stretching from Cambridge to the NH border, and York County, Maine, which include most of Southern Maine south of Portland. Mr. Connors showed a graph indicating that Rockingham County had added 10.3 percent new jobs over the last ten years but only 6.4 percent new people in population. It is certain that a significant share of people taking new jobs here live in other counties, he said. Mr. Canada asked if these statistics incorporated COVID-19 related city-flight. Mr. Connors said somewhat. The population figures are from the Spring 2020 so they would only show the very early changes from the pandemic. The employment figures are from the third quarter of 2021, so they incorporate more of that. Mr. House said that some of the new residents are also working in other counties, for example in the Boston Area.

Mr. Connors said he also wanted to discuss the Housing Appeals Board. This is a new State Board created back in 2019 by the Legislature and Governor Sununu to decide appeals of “questions of housing and housing development.” Mr. Connors said it is likely that Stratham may appear before this Board because many of our surrounding communities have already done so. Mr. Canada noted that an appeal is currently pending where the Town is the defendant. Mr. Connors said that is true but it is Superior Court. The Housing Appeals Board allows for a faster and lower cost appeals process, but that the party appealing has the option to file in Superior Court instead. Housing Appeals Board decisions can be appealed to the NH Supreme Court. Mr. Canada asked if the Supreme Court was required to hear all appeals of the Housing Appeals Board. Mr. Connors said his understanding is that the Court can technically decide not to hear an appeal, but in actuality they accept almost all appeals. He will double-check on that however.

Mr. Connors noted that the most common outcome from Housing Appeals Board decisions is the Board orders it back to the Town to reconsider part of its decision. Usually in the Board’s perspective the Town made some error in how it reviewed an application. In four cases, the

Town's decisions were upheld. In three decisions, there was a split decision or a complete reversal of the Town's decision. Mr. Houghton said it would be helpful to get the Cliff Notes version of why decisions were returned to towns by the Appeals Board. Mr. Connors ran through the facts and basic findings of a few cases he was familiar with. He said he would compile more information for a future meeting.

Mr. Connors noted that many political office holders on the state level have focused on zoning and land use requirements as the biggest barrier to new housing development in New Hampshire. He said that probably wasn't completely fair, there are many factors that influence housing supply and affordability but there is some validity to criticism of zoning and land use requirements. He pointed to the example of Hanover, NH, which has a significant housing shortage. The Official Zoning Map significantly limits new areas for housing development. At least 95 percent of the town's land area prohibits new housing or limits it to very large lots.

Mr. Canada said that there is a lot more than just zoning that contributes to this, although zoning is a big part of it. The cost of land is very high and the cost of materials for new homes has skyrocketed recently. He noted the example of a manufactured home that had doubled in price over just five years.

Mr. Zaremba asked Mr. Connors if the Community College would be returning to the Board. Mr. Connors said yes, they are scheduled for the next meeting for a preliminary discussion. The Board discussed the importance of the site for new more affordable housing. Mr. House asked if Stratham should have a Housing Committee? Mr. Connors said the Town could certainly create one - Exeter has one - but the Planning Board is very focused on housing issues so it might not be necessary.

#### **b. Miscellaneous Planning Issues**

Mr. House noted that Denise Lemire, the Building/Code Enforcement Coordinator had submitted her notice to resign her town employment effective at the end of next week. Mr. House noted Denise is a valued town employee and familiar face to many in town. On behalf of the Planning Board, I would like to thank her for her many years of service to the Planning Board and to the community and to wish her well in her future endeavors.

Mr. Connors announced that a candidate had submitted an application to serve on the Planning Board. As you know, there are currently two vacancies on the Board for alternate positions. He briefly described the candidate. The Board asked Mr. Connors to ask the candidate to attend the Board's next meeting, where there will be a full agenda, so he can get a better sense of the Board and if the Planning Board is an appropriate fit for his interests.

As a last item, Mr. Connors reminded the Board that the Regional Planning Commission is assisting the Town with an Age Friendly Survey which looks at making Town services more accessible for an aging population. He asked the Board to help spread the word to encourage residents to take the survey.

### **5. Adjournment**

134 Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 7:40 pm. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. Motion  
135 carried unanimously.

136 *Note(s):*

- 137 1. *Materials related to the above meeting are available for review at the Municipal Center during normal business hours.*  
138 *For more information, contact the Stratham Planning Office at 603-772-7391 ext. 147.*  
139 2. *The Planning Board reserves the right to take item, out of order and to discuss and/or vote on items that are not listed*  
140 *on the agenda.*  
141