



**Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes**  
**March 3, 2021**  
**Municipal Center, Meeting Room A**  
**Time: 7:00 pm**

Member Present: Tom House, Chair  
David Canada, Vice Chair  
Pamela Hollasch, Member  
Robert Roseen, Member (call in)  
Joe Anderson, Alternate Member  
Mike Houghton, Selectmen's Representative

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Mark Connors, Town Planner

**1. Call to Order/Roll Call**

Mr. House called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm and called roll call. Mr. Roseen, participating by phone, indicated that he was by himself.

**2. Review/Approval of Meeting Minutes**

February 3, 2021

Mr. House asked to correct Line 165 to correct a reference to Mr. Canada's name. Mr. Canada made a motion to approve the minutes of February 3, 2021 subject to Mr. House's correction. Pamela Hollasch seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

**3. Public Meeting:**

- a. Applications of Regional Impact -- Mr. Connors noted that state law requires land use boards to determine if an application represents a project of regional impact. He described the criteria, under state law, to determine if a project is of regional impact. He said in the past, if a land use board had not made any determination, it was assumed the project was not of regional impact. However, a recent case from Antrim sent the issue back to a land use board for not making a determination. For future cases, to reduce the risk of litigation, he would recommend that the Board make a determination regarding regional impact when the Board accepts applications as complete. Mr. Canada noted that the Antrim case was a ZBA decision, would it be different for the Planning Board? Mr. Connors said it would apply to all land use boards. Mr. Canada said it would be easy enough to do. Mr. Houghton discussed past projects in Stratham that met the regional impact criteria.

Mr. Roseen noted that he had concerns with the evaluation criteria described by the NH Office of Strategic Initiatives. Mr. Houghton noted that the Town did not have control over the criteria and he did not see it as a lengthy deliberation. It could simply be part of the motion when the Board votes to find an application to be complete.

- b. Legacy Highway Route 33 Re-Zoning -- Mr. Connors noted that at its last meeting, the Planning Board emphasized that advancing the Legacy Highway Route 33 Re-Zoning effort should be one of the Board's main priorities for 2021 with the intent to present a zoning amendment in 2022. Mr. Connors noted that he had reviewed the draft zoning language and provided some comments to the Board. Regarding the size of the proposed district, he said he understood there are no historic properties in the northeast side near the Greenland town line, but he would not want to remove the opportunities afforded by the re-zoning to those properties. Mr. Roseen said his understanding was that the re-zoning language applied to historic properties. Mr. Canada said the new zoning language would cover the entire district, but the incentives are targeted toward historic properties. Mr. Roseen said he loved the photos that we included of the historic renovations. This kind of imagery will be critical for getting support behind the Route 33 initiative.

Mr. Houghton said that before the Board explores these issues too deeply, it may be helpful to hold a workshop with members of the Heritage Commission and the Route 33 Ad-Hoc Committee. Those members bring a unique perspective and visions for the corridor. Ms. Hollasch brought up the Draft Schedule for the re-zoning effort. The members agreed that it was beneficial to start the process early and incorporate the Heritage Commission and Ad-Hoc Committee input up front. Ms. Hollasch said the schedule would allow for a workshop. Mr. Anderson inquired about the public input sessions. Mr. Connors said the early ones would likely be Zoom electronic meetings, but that in the fall when the draft language was in place, he hoped to host an in-person event. Mr. House said that we would table this for now and schedule a workshop with the Heritage Commission and the Route 33 Ad-Hoc Committee.

- c. Current Housing Conditions Mr. Connors said also at its February 3, 2020 meeting that the Board had emphasized that it would like to focus on housing and workforce housing in 2021. He prepared some slides to describe existing housing conditions in Stratham and the region. Median rent by county - Rockingham County is the highest in NH at \$1,601 for a two-bedroom apartment and has increased at the fastest pace over the past five years. Ms. Hollasch said it would be interesting to see how Northern Massachusetts compared. Current real estate market - Mr. Connors said this slide is just a snapshot of current real estate listings. The median asking price for a single-family home is \$883,000 and \$432,000 for a condo. The median price for a single-family home in Rockingham County was approximately \$435,000, increasing 63 percent since 2010. Building permits - There have been 211 building permits issued for residential dwelling units in Stratham between 2010 to 2019 and 33 issued last year. Mr. Anderson asked if this referred to individual buildings or developments. It was clarified that each permit was for one unit. Ms. Hollasch said this shows that most of the available land is already developed. Mr. Canada said do we want to dis-incentivize age-restricted housing and provide incentives for working families. Mr. Anderson said maybe we keep incentives for age-restricted housing, because of the aging population, and add incentives for workforce housing. Mr. Canada said that

the problem is there is very little buildable land left. Ms. Hollasch asked if the demand for senior housing is because such housing is limited to seniors or the features of the housing and neighborhood itself. This was followed by some discussion of general housing issues by the Board.

School enrollment - School enrollment in Stratham and the Exeter Co-op District has declined over the last 10 years. There is no immediate concerns related to school over-crowding. Ms. Hollasch noted some of the recent drops in enrollment may be related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr. Canada noted the trend line is definitely down.

Mr. House noted that it is a misconception that workforce housing is 'low-rent' - it is middle class housing.

Workforce housing definitions -- Mr. Connors described the income limits for workforce housing. Stratham follows the definitions in the NH RSA for workforce housing. Currently, workforce rental housing can charge a maximum of \$1,390. Workforce housing for purchase must not exceed \$364,000.

Population -- Stratham continues to grow in population, but at a much slower rate than in decades past. Population growth in our region is driven by in-migration, or people moving here from other regions or states. Since, deaths in New Hampshire are currently exceeding births, so migration is important to help balance the population.

Housing Regulations -- The Board discussed how housing is regulated in Stratham, including where single-family housing, multi-family housing, senior housing, and workforce housing are permitted and at what densities. Mr. Connors said one of the recommendations from the Master Plan was to look at a cottage-style housing ordinance, where the sizes of homes are limited in exchange for smaller lots. Ms. Hollasch said she was surprised that multi-family housing was not permitted in the Residential & Agricultural District, which is the vast majority of our town - that would be an opportunity. Mr. Canada said it relates to residents' concerns regarding density -- that is why we have two-acre zoning. Mr. Houghton agreed, but said there are parcels in town where multi-family housing would be appropriate, including the former technical college site. You would be hard pressed to get multi-family housing in the residential and agricultural districts, he said, but he is not opposed to considering it. Ms. Hollasch said the Town should not be scared off by NIMBYism if tasteful, appropriately scaled development is pursued. Mr. Houghton said that we can maintain the base zoning requirements while providing incentives for workforce housing that would be attractive to developers.

Mr. Connors said he would look at what other communities have done to incentivize more diverse forms of housing and take some potential options to the Planning Board for consideration.

- d. Stratham Drinking Water Source Protection Plan -- Mr. Connors said that the Rockingham Regional Planning Commission would be coming to the Board's next meeting to present their work so far on the Drinking Water Source Protection Plan. A Steering Committee from the Town has been helping the RPC develop the plan. Mr. House said this would be a great meeting for Mr. Roseen to attend in person.
- e. Deadlines for Preliminary Consultation Applications -- Mr. Connors said the Town currently allows for preliminary consultation applications to be submitted seven days in advance of

134 Planning Board meetings. It does not allow much time for staff to research the issue, provide  
135 input to the applicant, and consult with other Town departments. He is suggesting the Board  
136 consider amending the Subdivision and Site Plan Requirements to extend the deadline from  
137 seven to fourteen days. Mr. Roseen said from the applicant's perspective that adding a week  
138 could be burdensome. Maybe we increase it to ten days or have a sliding scale based on the  
139 complexity of the project. Mr. Connors said preliminary consultation is not required for small  
140 subdivisions or site plan amendments. Mr. Houghton said that additional review time may end up  
141 benefitting the applicant. Mr. Anderson asked if ten days would be a good compromise. Mr.  
142 Roseen said that would be agreeable to him. Ten days would be better than seven days.

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144 Ms. Hollasch made a motion to schedule a public hearing for April 7, 2021 to amend Section 2.2  
145 of the Subdivision Regulations and Section 4.11 of the Site Plan Regulations to extend the  
146 minimum deadline for Preliminary Consultation applications from seven days to ten days. Mr.  
147 Roseen seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

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149 g. Deadlines for Preliminary Consultation Applications -- Mr. Connors said the Planning Board has  
150 approved several site plans and subdivisions in recent years encumbered by vegetated non-  
151 disturbance areas, often for the purposes of providing screening from abutting properties.  
152 Although the Town is tasked with enforcing these restrictions, there are no policies in place  
153 dictating how requests related to removing or maintaining landscaping in these areas is handled.  
154 The Town's attorney suggested a policy be incorporated into the Site Plan and Subdivision  
155 Regulations. Staff has drafted a draft policy that would allow the Town Planner and Code  
156 Enforcement Officer to approve written requests administratively. The draft language has been  
157 provided for the Board's review. If the Board is agreeable, a draft motion has been provided to  
158 set a public hearing to adopt the language.

159  
160 Mr. Roseen asked if a non-disturbance buffer area is the same thing is as a screen. Mr. Connors  
161 said he believed that was typically the intent of the buffer areas, but not necessarily. Mr. Roseen  
162 said he has a problem with how screening requirements are applied by some Planning Boards; it  
163 is a bit of an overreach. It can be a significant burden for a property owner. Mr. Connors said the  
164 non-disturbance zones are already in place; the intent of this change would be to make it more  
165 flexible to the property owners encumbered by them. He said he did not envision supplemental  
166 landscaping being required unless the tree removal would have significant aesthetic impacts. Mr.  
167 Canada said the language would only require replacement of vegetation, not unlimited new  
168 landscaping to create a complete buffer. Mr. Roseen said he was concerned we would be brought  
169 in to settle disputes between property owners.

170  
171 Mr. Canada made a motion to schedule a public hearing for April 7, 2021 to consider  
172 amendments to the Stratham Site Plan and Subdivision Regulations to consider amendments  
173 relating to Vegetated Non-Disturbance Buffer Areas. Ms. Hollasch seconded the motion. Mr.  
174 House asked for discussion. Mr. Roseen said he would suggest that the language allowing  
175 replacement landscaping could be required be stricken. Mr. Canada said he would leave the  
176 motion in place without the suggested amendment. Ms. Hollasch said she trusted the staff to  
177 have discretion and make common sense determinations. She would maintain her second on the

original motion. Mr. House took a vote. All Board members voted in favor, except for Mr. Roseen who voted nay.

#### **4. Adjournment**

Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 9:08 pm. Ms. Hollasch seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

#### *Note(s):*

- 1. Materials related to the above meeting are available for review at the Municipal Center during normal business hours. For more information, contact the Stratham Planning Office at 603-772-7391 ext. 147.*
- 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 on the agenda.*