



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes
April 7, 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
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. All members were present.

2. Review/Approval of Meeting Minutes

March 17, 2021

Ms. Hollasch asked if it was necessary to note when a member left the meeting. Mr. House said in this case, he believed it was not necessary. Ms. Hollasch noted that the sentence ending on Line 151 was incomplete. Mr. Connors said he would refer to the recording and correct that. She also noted that the minutes were very comprehensive. Mr. House said the Board would defer action on the March 17, 2021 Minutes until the change was incorporated.

3. Public Meeting:

- a. Stratham Route 33 Legacy Highway Workshop -- Mr. House noted that the Board would take up the Route 33 Legacy Highway Workshop first. Mr. House asked Mr. Connors to provide an overview of the materials prepared for the meeting. Mr. Connors noted that we were glad to have Nathan Merrill and Rebecca Mitchell, from the Heritage Commission, and David Ryng, from the Route 33 Legacy Highway Ad-Hoc Committee participating in the workshop tonight. He said that Alex Dardinski, also from the Ad-Hoc Committee, could not be present tonight but sent in his comments that I've distributed to everyone.

Mr. Connors briefly introduced all of the materials that he had prepared for the meeting tonight. He noted that the images showing the vision for the corridor had already been shared with the

Heritage Commission, but not yet with the Planning Board. He had added some additional imagery and believes it could be a helpful tool to help residents visualize what the community's vision for the corridor is and how it might be accomplished through a re-zoning initiative. He also noted that there was a draft letter included in the materials that we would like to send out to all property owners in the district. The purpose of the letter is to notify property owners of the initiative and to get their preliminary input before re-zoning language is prepared. He said that would be a good place to start the discussion.

Ms. Hollasch noted that a sentence relating to buildings falling into disrepair may make those property owners feel singled out. Mr. Merrill noted that members of the Ad-Hoc Committee really struggled with this issue. It is one of the primary drivers of the Route 33 discussion. Mr. Houghton said that the sentence could be re-worded to sound more positive. Ms. Hollasch agreed. Mr. Roseen said it is important to convey, in a sensitive way, the sense of urgency surrounding these issues. Disrepair may be an understatement for some properties.

Ms. Mitchell noted that she would suggest adding headings and/or making the letter more topical so it would be easier for readers to find their way through the letter instead of being confronted by a large block of text. She said she felt it was a little too long. Ms. Hollasch said the first paragraph could potentially be nixed or shortened. You need to grab people's attention. She said the latter part of the letter contained the most important information. Mr. Houghton suggested the "We want to hear from you" text be moved to the beginning of the letter. Mr. Roseen said if the text was reduced some of the great imagery we have compiled could be incorporated. The images are really what we're trying to convey in words.

Mr. House asked what materials the links would send readers to. Mr. Connors noted it would be the Ad-Hoc Committee Report, the Portsmouth Avenue historic inventory, and the other Route 33 materials. Members discussed how to best showcase these materials. Mr. Merrill said overall he liked the letter but agreed the suggested edits would improve it. Ms. Hollasch suggested a letter format. Mr. Canada noted up to five sheets could be included in one letter for the regular postage rate.

Mr. Houghton said he would lean toward eliminating the "properties in disrepair" text. This is not about embarrassing anyone, but promoting the vision. Mr. Canada said the Old Town Hall, which was a great project, should be included in the imagery. Ms. Hollasch also mentioned the historic house at the corner of Bunker Hill Avenue and Route 108. Ms. Mitchell mentioned the house and barn at the corner of Depot Road should be included. Ms. Mitchell noted that the Heritage Commission tries to be proactive in reaching out to property owners of historic properties that may be falling into disrepair, but they don't always get responses. Mr. Ryng said some property owners don't realize how historically significant they're homes are. There was a brief discussion about a potential Heritage revolving fund.

Mr. Merrill noted that the Route 33 Ad-Hoc Committee Report should be limited to the report itself and not the previously considered re-zoning language. Mr. Connors agreed. Mr. Connors

87 thanked everyone for their input and noted that he would revise the materials based on the
88 comments discussed.
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90 Mr. Connors noted that the next consideration for the workshop is a potential Neighborhood
91 Heritage District designation for properties along the corridor. He explained how a Heritage
92 District would work, including that an advisory committee would advise the Planning Board on
93 applications, but the regulatory power would stay with the Board. The requirements would apply
94 to single-family properties, although small projects could be exempted. Mr. House asked who
95 would make up the advisory committee? Mr. Connors said, well we would have to set one up, or
96 we could expand the scope of an existing committee like the Heritage Commission or the
97 Demolition Review Committee. Ms. Mitchell said her understanding was the advisory committee
98 should include at least two property owners from the district. Mr. Connors said that would be
99 ideal but is not necessarily required.
100

101 Mr. Roseen asked what would be the downside to a Heritage District designation? Mr. Connors
102 said it would apply to single-family property owners. There would be an extra level of review
103 that we don't currently require. Now those property owners can tear down their house and the
104 Town cannot stop them. Mr. Merrill said the Ad-Hoc Committee worked hard to provide carrot
105 and not just sticks. He said, yes this would involve another layer of regulation and review, but in
106 return we would be allowing much more flexible uses of properties. Ms. Mitchell also noted that
107 a Heritage District designation would also help provide a guarantee that nothing out of character
108 is going to happen right next door to you. That would help protect property values. Mr. House
109 noted that it could be a collaborative process and not just regulatory.
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111 Mr. Roseen asked again if there was a downside. Mr. Houghton said some people don't want that
112 extra layer of review. Mr. Roseen agreed, but said it's less than a Historic District for sure.
113 Maybe we do everything that a Heritage District does but don't call it that. Mr. Canada said
114 under the statutes it would have to be a designated Heritage District. Mr. Connors agreed. Ms.
115 Hollasch said she liked the flexibility of a Heritage District. Mr. Houghton said it removes some
116 of the freedom to do what you want with your property, but I like it because it feels more
117 collaborative and less restrictive than a Historic District.
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119 Mr. Canada said he can't speak for the Heritage Commission, but concern has really focused on
120 demolitions. I think we can be really flexible as long we can control demolitions. Mr. Merrill
121 said he believed that the politics of the Town had changed and that residents might be receptive
122 to this model. There was agreement that a Heritage District would be much preferable than a
123 Historic District.
124

125 Mr. Roseen said David as a property owner, would this be a burden or a benefit? Mr. Ryng said
126 that overall he thought it would be beneficial. He said the application should be straight-forward
127 and not too costly for residents. Mr. Connors said a Heritage District designation might help
128 alleviate some concerns of new uses being introduced to the district, since those would all
129 require an extra level of review.
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Mr. Canada said he thinks Nate is right, the Town has changed a lot in the last few years and I could see support for this. Mr. Canada said the biggest hump for voters might be adding new uses. As we've seen from the Gateway District, there is reluctance for more commercial. Mr. Merrill noted that many commercial uses were already being approved via the variance process at the Zoning Board of Appeals. This would be a better model in that it would involve more review of design.

Mr. Canada said is the consensus then that we would like to move forward with the Neighborhood Heritage District? All participants agreed that they were comfortable with that path forward.

Mr. Canada made a motion to request the Planning Department move forward with a Neighborhood Heritage District proposal. Second by Pamela Hollasch. All voted in favor.

Mr. Connors said the final items related to the land uses that we would allow within the district and if we would want to include a cap on the square footage of commercial uses.

Mr. House noted that Mr. Dardinski's comments largely focused on uses and asked Mr. Connors to read his letter into the record. The e-mail reads:

Hi Mark,

Thank you for reaching out and congrats on your new role, happy to have you here in town. The updates to the Route 33 materials are fantastic. I am very appreciative of the example photos added and I am really happy that we have community outreach planned as part of the process.

Looks like I am double booked tonight unfortunately so I wanted to send some comments..

There is one use type that I have repeatedly been trying to get into the plan. There has been lots of agreement on it in the meeting formats but I have yet to see it integrated into the documents. And that is an arts and craft type studio and retail store. Pottery, furniture, blacksmith shop, painting, leatherworking etc. We live right off Route 33 and bought here last year. Our house has a large barn. My wife and I are both designer / makers and our goal would be to renovate our barn for workshop space. We would love to one day have a small retail component to the property where customers could visit and make a purchase. I think of David Ryng's large barn and that too would make an excellent cabinetmaking or furniture studio and small showroom space. These live / work / sell combinations were very common historically and I would like to see that be mentioned in the table of uses somehow.

Some examples:

Blacksmith Shop

<http://elementsofsteel.com>

*32 North Main Street
Newmarket, NH 03857*

Furniture maker

*<http://www.afbroshwoodworking.com>
143 Main St.*

180 Essex, MA 01929

181
182 *Thanks for reaching out, I'd love to stay connected on this.*

183
184 Alex

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186 Participants agreed that the types of uses described by Mr. Dardinski are the kind we want to
187 encourage in the district. There was a discussion about how this could best be captured within
188 the zoning ordinance.

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190 Mr. Connors went through all of the uses that the previous re-zoning effort included as permitted
191 by right or by Conditional Use Permit. He said some of the more intensive uses may be
192 controversial and it may be helpful to get your input on any changes you would like
193 incorporated.

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195 Mr. Merrill said that the Ad-Hoc Committee felt that day-camps should be permitted, but overall
196 he was in agreement with some of the suggestions by staff. Ms. Mitchell said so many of the
197 issues depend on the size of the parcel. On larger parcels some of these uses might be acceptable,
198 but not on the majority of them. Parking can also be a significant eyesore.

199
200 Mr. Roseen said this (the uses discussion) and parking would likely be the most difficult part of
201 this re-zoning effort. Many of these uses require significant parking. Mr. Canada said the parking
202 should be out of view or to the rear of the buildings. Ms. Mitchell described different techniques
203 to camouflage parking. Mr. Houghton said these concerns could be captured as design
204 requirements within the zoning. Ms. Mitchell there could be a special permit process for parking
205 for larger events.

206 Mr. Connors described other uses that might present concerns including hospitals/clinics, nursing
207 homes, and funeral homes that require significant parking. Mr. Roseen said that he believed a
208 small nursing home might be appropriate. Ms. Hollasch said the broader issue is not the uses so
209 much but the size of the uses. There was general agreement from participants on this point.

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211 Mr. House referred to the map showing the potential zoning district. He said does it include the
212 Tech School property. Mr. Connors said it appeared as though included the front portion of that
213 site, but that he felt that particular site should be carved out of the district. Mr. Roseen said there
214 had been some discussion about reducing the size of the district not past the most northerly
215 historic property. Ms. Mitchell said she would argue in favor of keeping the district borders that
216 we have to maintain a consistent character to the corridor. Participants discussed whether
217 Stratham Hill Park should be included in the district. Mr. Connors noted that the Town was
218 exempt from its own zoning, but could be required to participate in non-binding review with the
219 Planning Board. Ms. Mitchell said she felt it was an integral part of the district. There was a
220 consensus that the park should be included in the district with the recognition that it would apply
221 only an advisory level.

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223 Mr. Connors said the last item related to placing potential limits on the size of commercial uses
224 in the district. There was a brief discussion regarding this issue. There was a general agreement

that it would be helpful but that limits should vary by use and that non-intensive commercial uses may not need to be limited. There was agreement that as the re-zoning language was further refined this would be a good issue to revisit as a future meeting.

Mr. Connors briefly described the draft public outreach schedule for this initiative. Mr. Roseen questioned if we should develop the zoning language first before the public outreach. Mr. House said he felt it was important to get public input first before we drafted the zoning language. Mr. Merrill said that he felt there was a lot for residents to chew on with the Neighborhood Heritage District proposal without having the language yet developed. There was agreement that the schedule was a useful framework for advancing the effort. Mr. House thanked Mr. Merrill, Mr. Ryng, and Ms. Mitchell for their participation. At 8:45 pm Ms. Hollasch announced that she needed to leave the meeting.

4. Public Hearing:

b. Deadline for Preliminary Consultations

Mr. Connors noted that the Board discussed this at their March 17 meeting and scheduled the public hearing for tonight. At that time, the Board settled on a 10 day deadline in advance of meetings, however since that would fall on a Sunday, he recommended the Board consider an alternative deadline.

Mr. Houghton made a motion to amend the Site Plan and Subdivision Regulations to extend the minimum deadline for Preliminary Consultation application applications to 14 days. Second by Mr. Anderson. All voted in favor.

c. Vegetated Non-Disturbance Buffer Zones

Mr. Connors noted that the Board discussed this at their March 17 meeting and scheduled the public hearing for tonight. At that time, the Board provided a few comments but advanced the language as written. He said a few small changes had been incorporated into the text to reflect the discussion at the last meeting. The changes are highlighted in bold.

Mr. Roseen noted he still had some reservations, but did not feel the need to detail them. Mr. Roseen asked for some clarification how this would be different than current practice. He said he was concerned about the requirement for adding replacement landscaping. He did not want the Town involved in disputes between neighbors. Mr. Anderson said they can always appeal to the Planning Board. There was some discussion of potential changes to the language, though it was ultimately decided to maintain the draft language.

Mr. Houghton made a motion to adopt the language relating to vegetated buffer areas into the Site Plan and Subdivision Regulations. Second by Mr. Anderson. Vote of 4-1 with House, Hollasch, Houghton and Canada voting yay and Roseen voting nay.

Mr. Connors said the final items related to some minor improvements proposed at the Memorial School. He did not feel the Board would be concerned but included the plans in the packets. Board members indicated they had no concerns. He also included a communication from CMA Engineers noting NHDOT plans to replace two culverts on Squamscott Road. Mr. Roseen said large open box culverts would likely be required and allow water to flow less restricted. Mr.

270 Connors said we do not yet have engineering plans from NHDOT but he would share them when
271 we receive them.

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273 **5. Adjournment**
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275 Mr. Anderson made a motion to adjourn at 9:06 pm. Mr. Canada seconded the motion.
276 Motion carried unanimously.
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287 *Note(s):*

- 288 1. *Materials related to the above meeting are available for review at the Municipal Center during normal business hours. For more*
289 *information, contact the Stratham Planning Office at 603-772-7391 ext. 147.*
290 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*
291 *agenda.*