



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes

April 2, 2025

Stratham Municipal Center

Time: 7:00 pm

Members Present: Thomas House, Chair
David Canada, Vice Chair
Mike Houghton, Select Board's Representative
Chris Zaremba, Regular Member
John Kunowski, Regular Member
Nate Allison, Alternate Member

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Susan Connors, Planning Project Assistant

1. Call to Order

Mr. House called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and took roll call.

2. Approval of Minutes

a. March 19, 2025

Mr. Kunowski made a motion to approve the March 19, 2025 meeting minutes as drafted.

Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

3. Public Hearing (New Business):

- a. Land Bank Properties, LLC (Applicant) and Dorothy P. Thompson (Owner) request for approval of a Condominium Subdivision, Conditional Use Permit, and Route 33 Heritage District Application at 217 Portsmouth Avenue, Tax Map 21, Lot 88 in the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage District. The project includes the construction of five 4-bedroom homes while retaining the existing 3-bedroom home, retail store, and garage.

Ms. Connors explained that the Planning Board packet includes two memos – one from Carol Ogilvie, the Interim Town Planner, which includes staff comments from the DPW, the Stratham Fire Chief, and the Chair of the Heritage Commission. The second memo is from the Route 33 Heritage District Advisory Committee who reviewed the project last week. The Rt 33 HDAC has a number of comments on the architecture and the site and they asked that the proponent present the project to the Heritage Commission to address the comments instead of returning to the Rt 33 HDAC.

Mr. Kunowski made a motion to accept the application as complete. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

Bruce Scamman presented the project on behalf of Shamus Quirk, the Applicant and Dorothy Thompson, the property owner.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to open the hearing to the public. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

Mr. Canada asked if the commercial building is considered a seventh unit (with respect to the 2 units per acre limitation). Mr. Scamman explained that building will be owned by whoever owns the original home. There was a lengthy discussion between the Board and the project team on the maximum density allowed and the proposed mixed-use of the property. A mixed-use development in this district limits the residential density to 2 units per acre but allows additional buildings for commercial use. Mr. Quirk stated that he thought the commercial aspect of a mixed-use development was favored by the Planning Board but he hears mixed reviews on it and is agreeable to removing it from this application. The Board and the Applicant agreed to remove it from this application as the type of use is currently unknown and the future owner of that condo can return to the Planning Board for site plan approval if a commercial use is proposed.

Mr. Kunowski commented that if this were a conventional subdivision, then 12 acres would be needed and this proposal is for six very large houses on 3 acres. He also does not see the preservation of agriculture which is preferred in this district and he does not believe the proposal creates a quintessential New England style pocket neighborhood which would be smaller homes built around a courtyard or green space.

Mr. Zaremba asked for a description of the common area lines. Mr. Scamman explained that each home will have its own exclusive use area as depicted on the plans in addition to common areas for all the homes. Mr. Zaremba agrees with Mr. Kunowski's comment that this proposal is a backdoor way to get around 2 acre zoning. Mr. Scamman replied this is similar to Sewall Farms that has single-family homes and duplexes.

Mr. Allison stated that the fire truck turning templates are confusing due to the graphics and suggested ways to make them more readable. Mr. Allison commented on the sanitary line and elevations at one of the units and suggested some alternative solutions for wastewater disposal.

Mr. Houghton asked what kind of maintenance is required for the bioswales. Mr. Scamman replied regular mowing. If silt or sand washed into it from somewhere else, that should be removed as well. Mr. Houghton asked if the drip edges would be required to be maintained in the HOA documents. Mr. Scamman replied yes along with the driveway, the cistern, the well house, pumps, etc. He added that there will be a stormwater maintenance plan.

Mr. Houghton agrees with Mr. Kunowski that this proposal does not meet the spirit and intent of the Route 33 Heritage District. Mr. Quirk replied that he believes the purpose related to varying ages and income levels is ambiguous and not feasible in new construction these days. Mr. Houghton clarified that he is not speaking to income levels, but structurally, characteristically it does not align with the spirit and intent of this district. Mr. Quirk compared this proposal to Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth and stated there is room for a community garden or chicken coop on the common land to support agricultural use. He stated that a landscape plan is in development.

Mr. House asked the status of approvals from NHDOT and NHDES. Mr. Scamman replied they have not submitted septic system applications yet and they have started a conversation with NHDOT who indicated that two driveways might be allowed.

Mr. House asked about screening from the road. Mr. Quirk replied there is concern with the health of the existing screening and is considering a stacked stone rock wall. Mr. Scamman added that Portsmouth Avenue is several feet above the development.

Mr. House asked where snow would be piled from plowing. Mr. Scamman replied along the sides of the roads. Mr. Allison commented that it should not be piled on the septic systems and one system might be too close to the road.

Mr. Canada asked if the project will be served by municipal garbage pickup. Mr. Scamman replied yes.

Mr. Allison asked if soil tests were completed in additional areas other than the septic areas. Mr. Scamman replied that a series of test pits were completed and explained the locations.

Mr. Zaremba asked when you measure front setbacks for structures, when it's a private road, do you go off Route 33. Mr. Scamman replied correct. Mr. Zaremba asked it's not off the private road? Mr. Scamman replied correct because it is really a shared driveway.

Mr. House reminded the project team of the 35-foot height limitations. Mr. Scamman is aware and presented the elevations.

Mr. Canada asked if the applicant would be willing to put a preservation easement on the existing house. Mr. Quirk replied absolutely.

Ms. Connors presented a brief overview of comments from town staff and the Route 33 Heritage District Advisory Committee. She noted that the Conditional Use Permit is needed only if a mixed-use project is pursued.

Mr. House invited members of the public to speak.

Edie Barker of 218 Portsmouth Avenue commented that regarding moving the driveway, it will be closer to her driveway across the street and she is concerned with traffic impact to this area. She would like to see a turning lane on that section of the road. Mr. House replied that is the purview of NHDOT and not the Town. He added that in his opinion, there will be less traffic than what is seen currently with the farm and business operating there. Mr. Houghton requested that planning staff reach out to the police chief for comment.

The Board and the project team discussed plans for the proposed commercial space and came to the conclusion that it will be removed from this proposal and if a future owner wants to pursue a business, they can do so separate from this process.

Debbie Ficara of 219 Portsmouth Avenue asked if a buffer could be installed between her property and this project. Mr. Quirk replied there is existing vegetation and he will preserve it. Ms. Ficara asked if the project could affect her water supply well. Mr. Scamman replied that in his experience, a project this small should not affect her well.

Ms. Barker asked if there will be any impact to wetlands. Mr. Scamman replied a wetlands delineation was completed and there is no proposed development in the wetlands setback. Mr. Allison commented that signage should be installed identifying the wetlands no-disturbance buffer. Mr. Houghton suggested it be added to the condo documents as well.

Ms. Connors asked if the project should be sent for engineering review for the stormwater calculations and fire truck turning templates. The Board agreed to require a third-party review.

Mr. Zaremba stated that there are a lot of architectural standards in the zoning ordinance and he asked that the project team review that.

Mr. Scamman requested to return for the April 16th meeting to review the architecture. Mr. House agreed to put them last on the agenda but stated that the discussion must start before 9:45 pm. The project team agreed to meet with the Heritage Commission as well.

Mr. Canada made a motion to continue the application to April 16, 2025. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

4. Public Meeting:

a. Election of chair and vice-chair Planning Board positions

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to nominate Mr. House as chair. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to nominate Mr. Canada as vice-chair. Mr. House seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.

b. Site Plan and Subdivision Regulation amendments for Preliminary Reviews

Ms. Connors presented proposed amendments to the site plan regulations which include a complete re-write of Section 4 for the purpose of clarifying preliminary consultations and design reviews and chronological organization of the Section. The Board provided minor comments that staff will incorporate and return a final draft to the Board at a later meeting when there is time on the agenda.

5. Adjournment

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to adjourn at 9:56 pm. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.