



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.

45 Bruce Scamman presented the project on behalf of Shamus Quirk, the Applicant and Dorothy
46 Thompson, the property owner.
47

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

50 Mr. Canada asked if the commercial building is considered a seventh unit (with respect to the 2
51 units per acre limitation). Mr. Scamman explained that building will be owned by whoever owns
52 the original home. There was a lengthy discussion between the Board and the project team on the
53 maximum density allowed and the proposed mixed-use of the property. A mixed-use development
54 in this district limits the residential density to 2 units per acre but allows additional buildings for
55 commercial use. Mr. Quirk stated that he thought the commercial aspect of a mixed-use
56 development was favored by the Planning Board but he hears mixed reviews on it and is agreeable
57 to removing it from this application. The Board and the Applicant agreed to remove it from this
58 application as the type of use is currently unknown and the future owner of that condo can return
59 to the Planning Board for site plan approval if a commercial use is proposed.
60

61 Mr. Kunowski commented that if this were a conventional subdivision, then 12 acres would be
62 needed and this proposal is for six very large houses on 3 acres. He also does not see the
63 preservation of agriculture which is preferred in this district and he does not believe the proposal
64 creates a quintessential New England style pocket neighborhood which would be smaller homes
65 built around a courtyard or green space.
66

67 Mr. Zaremba asked for a description of the common area lines. Mr. Scamman explained that each
68 home will have its own exclusive use area as depicted on the plans in addition to common areas
69 for all the homes. Mr. Zaremba agrees with Mr. Kunowski's comment that this proposal is a
70 backdoor way to get around 2 acre zoning. Mr. Scamman replied this is similar to Sewall Farms
71 that has single-family homes and duplexes.
72

73 Mr. Allison stated that the fire truck turning templates are confusing due to the graphics and
74 suggested ways to make them more readable. Mr. Allison commented on the sanitary line and
75 elevations at one of the units and suggested some alternative solutions for wastewater disposal.
76

77 Mr. Houghton asked what kind of maintenance is required for the bioswales. Mr. Scamman replied
78 regular mowing. If silt or sand washed into it from somewhere else, that should be removed as
79 well. Mr. Houghton asked if the drip edges would be required to be maintained in the HOA
80 documents. Mr. Scamman replied yes along with the driveway, the cistern, the well house, pumps,
81 etc. He added that there will be a stormwater maintenance plan.
82

83 Mr. Houghton agrees with Mr. Kunowski that this proposal does not meet the spirit and intent of
84 the Route 33 Heritage District. Mr. Quirk replied that he believes the purpose related to varying
85 ages and income levels is ambiguous and not feasible in new construction these days. Mr.
86 Houghton clarified that he is not speaking to income levels, but structurally, characteristically it
87 does not align with the spirit and intent of this district. Mr. Quirk compared this proposal to
88 Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth and stated there is room for a community garden or chicken coop
89 on the common land to support agricultural use. He stated that a landscape plan is in development.
90

91 Mr. House asked the status of approvals from NHDOT and NHDES. Mr. Scamman replied they
92 have not submitted septic system applications yet and they have started a conversation with
93 NHDOT who indicated that two driveways might be allowed.
94

95 Mr. House asked about screening from the road. Mr. Quirk replied there is concern with the health
96 of the existing screening and is considering a stacked stone rock wall. Mr. Scamman added that
97 Portsmouth Avenue is several feet above the development.
98

99 Mr. House asked where snow would be piled from plowing. Mr. Scamman replied along the sides
100 of the roads. Mr. Allison commented that it should not be piled on the septic systems and one
101 system might be too close to the road.
102

103 Mr. Canada asked if the project will be served by municipal garbage pickup. Mr. Scamman replied
104 yes.
105

106 Mr. Allison asked if soil tests were completed in additional areas other than the septic areas. Mr.
107 Scamman replied that a series of test pits were completed and explained the locations.
108

109 Mr. Zaremba asked when you measure front setbacks for structures, when it's a private road, do
110 you go off Route 33. Mr. Scamman replied correct. Mr. Zaremba asked it's not off the private
111 road? Mr. Scamman replied correct because it is really a shared driveway.
112

113 Mr. House reminded the project team of the 35-foot height limitations. Mr. Scamman is aware and
114 presented the elevations.
115

116 Mr. Canada asked if the applicant would be willing to put a preservation easement on the existing
117 house. Mr. Quirk replied absolutely.
118

119 Ms. Connors presented a brief overview of comments from town staff and the Route 33 Heritage
120 District Advisory Committee. She noted that the Conditional Use Permit is needed only if a mixed-
121 use project is pursued.
122

123 Mr. House invited members of the public to speak.
124

125 Edie Barker of 218 Portsmouth Avenue commented that regarding moving the driveway, it will be
126 closer to her driveway across the street and she is concerned with traffic impact to this area. She
127 would like to see a turning lane on that section of the road. Mr. House replied that is the purview
128 of NHDOT and not the Town. He added that in his opinion, there will be less traffic than what is
129 seen currently with the farm and business operating there. Mr. Houghton requested that planning
130 staff reach out to the police chief for comment.
131

132 The Board and the project team discussed plans for the proposed commercial space and came to
133 the conclusion that it will be removed from this proposal and if a future owner wants to pursue a
134 business, they can do so separate from this process.
135

136 Debbie Ficara of 219 Portsmouth Avenue asked if a buffer could be installed between her property
137 and this project. Mr. Quirk replied there is existing vegetation and he will preserve it. Ms. Ficara
138 asked if the project could affect her water supply well. Mr. Scamman replied that in his experience,
139 a project this small should not affect her well.
140

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

145 Ms. Connors asked if the project should be sent for engineering review for the stormwater
146 calculations and fire truck turning templates. The Board agreed to require a third-party review.
147

148 Mr. Zaremba stated that there are a lot of architectural standards in the zoning ordinance and he
149 asked that the project team review that.
150

151 Mr. Scamman requested to return for the April 16th meeting to review the architecture. Mr. House
152 agreed to put them last on the agenda but stated that the discussion must start before 9:45 pm. The
153 project team agreed to meet with the Heritage Commission as well.
154

155 **Mr. Canada made a motion to continue the application to April 16, 2025. Mr. Zaremba**
156 **seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**
157

158 4. Public Meeting:

159 a. Election of chair and vice-chair Planning Board positions
160

162 **Mr. Zaremba made a motion to nominate Mr. House as chair. Mr. Kunowski seconded the**
163 **motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**
164

165 **Mr. Zaremba made a motion to nominate Mr. Canada as vice-chair. Mr. House seconded**
166 **the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**
167

168 b. Site Plan and Subdivision Regulation amendments for Preliminary Reviews
169

170 Ms. Connors presented proposed amendments to the site plan regulations which include a complete
171 re-write of Section 4 for the purpose of clarifying preliminary consultations and design reviews
172 and chronological organization of the Section. The Board provided minor comments that staff will
173 incorporate and return a final draft to the Board at a later meeting when there is time on the agenda.
174

175 5. Adjournment

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