



## Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes

May 21, 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:** Vanessa Price, Director of Planning and Building

### 1. Call to Order and Roll Call

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

### 2. Approval of Minutes

#### a. May 7, 2025

**Mr. House commented that the date of the minutes should be corrected to May 7, 2025. Mr. Kunowski made a motion to approve the May 7, 2025 meeting minutes as amended. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

### 3. Ongoing Business:

- a. Copley Properties LLC (Applicant) and Helen E. Gallant Revocable Trust of 1995 (Owner), request for approval of a Subdivision application and Conditional Use Permit for a proposed subdivision of 80 and 80R Winnicutt Road, Tax Map 14, Lots 56 and 57, Zoned Residential/Agricultural, into a Residential Open Space Cluster Development with 28 single-family residential lots, and five (5) joined-array lots each with four (4) separate single-family units, for a total of 48 units.

Bruce Scamman of Emanuel Engineering requested a continuance to the June 4, 2025, meeting. Ms. Price explained that CMA Engineers is in the process of completing their second review and the fire protection review is continuing as well.

**Mr. Houghton made a motion to continue the application to June 4, 2025. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

- b. 41 Portsmouth Avenue LLC (Applicant) and 41 Portsmouth Avenue Realty LLC (Owner) request for a Site Plan Review for a new 30,000 square foot auto dealership at 41 Portsmouth Avenue, Tax Map 9, Lot 4 in the Gateway Commercial Business and Residential/Agricultural Districts.

Ms. Price stated that the fire inspector and town consulting engineer are still reviewing the April 23<sup>rd</sup> plan set and application documents. She anticipates receiving comments by the end of this week and will forward them to the applicant. The staff memo notes changes needed to the plan set including a tractor trailer turning template, flat roofs are not supported in the District, sign details are needed for all the signs, drinking water supply, sidewalks and streetlights, and there may be additional items from the staff memo dated April 9 that may not have been addressed. Ms. Price recommended continuing the application to July 2<sup>nd</sup> due to the outstanding ZBA variance request. She stated that the applicant is here to present the landscape plan to the Board.

Bruce Scamman with Emanuel Engineering and James Verra & Associates introduced the project team which includes Chris Lane, the owner; John Arnold from Orr & Reno; and Vicky Martel from Woodburn and Company. Mr. Scamman stated that if there is anything new on the vesting, Mr. Arnold could talk about that, but Mr. Arnold is still in discussions with the town council.

Ms. Martel presented the landscape plan. There are shade trees along the frontage with Portsmouth Avenue; those are elms with a higher canopy so the front of the building will be visible, but the trees will help to soften the building. There are two stormwater structures along with a sign in the middle, and those detention basins will be filled with perennials and low shrubs that will tolerate the inundation. There is a gas line easement along the southern property line so there is a lack of trees in that area. To buffer the building in that area, there is a mix of shrubs: spireas and forsythias. Closer to the residential use, there is a robust evergreen screening at the bottom of a retaining wall. Around the back, there will be more shade trees in the islands. The center island is used for stormwater retention. On the northern side of the building there is a small planter with some ornamental trees and a line of arborvitaes along the solid wall of the building and other areas of solid walls.

Ms. Price noted that the plans submitted to the Board in their packet are the original plans and are significantly different than the plan Ms. Martel presented. Mr. Scamman apologized for the confusion.

Ms. Martel continued that from the north, the overhead service bay doors would be screened by shade trees and three ornamental trees. Mr. Scamman stated that a waiver was submitted for the project 10 years ago for the garage doors facing Portsmouth Avenue and that's an important part of the landscaping – the amount of trees along the road and the secondary trees down at the garage elevation. The doors are glass roll-up, so they don't look like garage doors.

Mr. Kunowski asked if the catch basin in the back moved because of the extension of the proposed building. Mr. Scamman replied that one pond is relocated, and he doesn't have his design drawings to answer if the catch basin moved.

Mr. Kunowski stated that he does not see the proposed parking in the rear of the building that was on the original plan and asked what landscaping will be there. Mr. Scamman replied that is to be determined. They wanted to show the Board tonight the main frontage. There was a large pond in the original development with some retaining walls, and the ponds have been expanded in the back and one pond was eliminated. He believes that allows for more vegetation along one side. He described the location of the gas pipeline that precludes some landscaping.

Mr. House asked Mr. Scamman to elaborate on the description of the pond. Mr. Scamman replied he is referring to bioretention ponds that will have water flow into them and will be grassed. They will typically be dry year-round except during rain events where they back up. There will be a sand

filter in them, so the water gets treated as it percolates down to storage in the stone layer. He stated that originally a traditional pond in one corner was proposed that would hold water that wasn't a biopond and didn't have treatment. Mr. Scamman added that one area of the parking lot will have a pond underneath it as well that is new in this go-round as part of the drainage design that will be reviewed by the CMA Engineers. Mr. House asked if there is pervious pavement. Mr. Scamman replied that he believes there is pervious pavement, but they may have designed it so that water flows to the swale, is stored, and then would slowly flow out. He would have to check the design plans on that.

Mr. Kunowski asked if the addition of the pond with permeable pavement was added because some of the original stormwater system had to change in this new scheme. Mr. Scamman replied there was a bioretention swale in one area and some of the new regulations didn't quite meet current NHDES requirements, so they redesigned that area of the site to ensure better quality.

Mr. Allison asked if this is a different building than was originally submitted. Mr. Scamman replied correct.

Mr. Kunowski asked if the project has abandoned the notion of a sidewalk on Portsmouth Avenue. Mr. Scamman replied the plan submitted is what they are proposing and no sidewalk is proposed. They believe they are vested and that is being worked out with the Town.

Mr. Canada asked how sustainable elm trees are. Ms. Martel replied they are disease resistant elms that are not susceptible to Dutch elm disease and they seem to do really well in commercial settings. They are in the Target parking lot in Greenland and are doing really well there. They establish quickly and then grow fast. Mr. Canada asked when was the variety was developed. Ms. Martel replied over 10 years ago. Mr. Canada replied that is not much of a track record for trees. He recognizes that the owner has to maintain them but wanted to point that out. Ms. Martel replied 10 years is how long she has been using them regularly, but not the point that they were developed; she doesn't have a year for that. She added that Dutch elm disease would usually effect trees very early in the lifespan and she believes she would have seen it by now in plantings. Mr. House asked what is the height of the trees. Mr. Martel replied at maturity they can get 30 to 40 feet tall, but in this setting that is not likely, so easily over 20 feet tall. Mr. House asked if under the canopy will be clear. Ms. Martel replied yes, they have a vase shaped canopy, so the lower limbs grow up and out.

Mr. House asked if there are any comments from the public. Nobody from the public asked to speak.

Ms. Price recommended continuing the application and the applicant requested returning for the June 4<sup>th</sup> meeting to discuss the architecture plans.

**Mr. House made a motion to continue the application to June 4, 2025. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

- c. 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.

Ms. Price explained that CMA Engineers is in the process of completing their second review. The Applicant requested a conditional approval and that is not recommend by staff since the engineering review is not complete. Some outstanding items include typical road section, driveway details, and a number of waivers were submitted today. She discussed with Mr. Scamman comments from the fire chief that they will address. Ms. Price stated that because the entrance is under the jurisdiction of NHDOT certain items were not provided like traffic studies and site distance. She did not ask the Applicant to provide waivers but would like direction from the Board on that. Mr. House agreed that waivers are not needed in that case. Ms. Price noted there are revised architectural plans that were submitted. The 65-day timeline for action on the application is June 6, 2025.

Tim Phoenix of Hoefle, Phoenix, Gormley & Roberts is the attorney for the Applicant. Mr. Phoenix stated he is confused as to the difference between a street and a driveway in Stratham and he'll turn the discussion over to Mr. Scamman to discuss that. Mr. House replied that it looks like a street and off that street, there are driveways going to the houses, so the project has both.

Mr. Scamman described that he has been working with town staff on the project. They submitted ten waivers after meeting with town staff today. Mr. Scamman described each of the waivers.

Mr. House asked Mr. Phoenix to explain his concern with driveways and streets. Mr. Phoenix explained that the Town's requirement for a 60-foot right-of-way is excessive for this project and if the Board grants the waiver, then there will be no concern from the applicant. Mr. House replied that his understanding is that whether it is private or public, it is a street that will need to have emergency response access. Ms. Price added that CMA Engineers is under the impression that it is a private road that would follow the design standards in the regulations. Additionally, for three or more units, 911 requires naming whether it is a road, driveway, private or whatever, it needs to be named. Mr. House stated that private or public road names require approval from the Select Board.

Mr. Allison asked for clarification on the septic system with regard to its setback to wetlands and if grading can occur within 75 feet. Mr. Scamman replied that only 25 feet is a non-disturbance area, and the next 50 feet is a structure setback.

Mr. House asked if anyone from the public wanted to speak. Nobody from the public asked to speak.

Mr. Scamman stated that he is finalizing discussions with the fire chief on how much paving is needed around the cistern and finalizing changes to landscaping near the cistern.

Mr. Zaremba noted for the record that he was not at the previous meeting, but he fully reviewed the meeting minutes and is comfortable participating in the discussion.

Tim Mason, member of the public, spoke and stated that he does not have a stake in the project, but this looks like a perfect subdivision to require sprinklers because of the cistern and the length of the road. There would be immediate protection with sprinklers, and it would address trying to get a tanker truck navigating around that tiny little road. Mr. House thanked him for his comment.

Ms. Price stated that with regards to the septic system and wetlands setback, she doesn't believe grading is considered part of the septic system where the ordinance states that no subsurface

wastewater disposal system shall be constructed within the 75-foot setback; and septic is exempt from the definition of structure.

Mr. Scamman stated that he was asked to provide turning templates for both the Exeter and Portsmouth ladder trucks and to include the entire truck over pavement. The Portsmouth ladder truck is 109 feet and Exeter ladder truck is 100 feet. He provided templates for both that show the entire truck over pavement.

Mr. House called for a motion to continue. **Mr. Houghton made a motion to continue the application to June 4, 2025. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

#### 4. New Business

- A. 219 Portsmouth Avenue. Ficara Family Revocable Trust (Owner), request for review of proposed siding materials for a detached accessory dwelling unit at 219 Portsmouth Avenue, Tax Map 21, Lot 89, Zoned Route 33 Heritage District.

Ms. Price described that the contractor dropped off two samples of siding materials for the Board's review for which they are requesting approval in lieu of the required materials. She also provided the Board with a comment letter from the chair of the Heritage Commission that opposes the use of vinyl siding.

Tim Mason spoke on behalf of the owner. He described a composite siding (Celect) that shiplaps in the back so that it the locks together as one option. The required siding itself is \$14,000 for this building, that's only 1,000 square feet, plus painting is another \$6,000 so it's a \$20,000 siding option. The second option is LP siding. He compared it to Hardie Plank siding and described that if Hardie Plank is dropped in a bucket of water, it swells up on all the butt joints which causes problems if it isn't painted very well. The LP siding has a warranty on the color; it's pretty close to cedar siding, and it is technically wood siding, so he believes it meets the intent of the ordinance. Mr. Houghton asked how long has the compressed wood siding been out. Mr. Mason replied there was an earlier version of it from another company that was substandard. This version is sealed on the back. He stated the joints need to be painted if cut, but that is a minimal task. The LP siding is the owner's first choice, but he brought the other composite example as he believes the Board should look forward beyond cedar or Hardie Plank. Mr. House replied the Board's concern is with standard vinyl siding.

Mr. Canada asked what is the surface of the LP siding. Mr. Mason replied it is painted and comes with a fade warranty. It is applied in a controlled environment. Cedar siding even if it is purchased primed, two coats of paint might only last six or seven years.

Mr. Zaremba asked if traditional clapboard is proposed. Mr. Mason replied yes, 4 inches and they will use Azek trim.

Mr. Allison commented that the LP siding is similar to pressed board, and asked if it would delaminate if water got inside. Mr. Mason replied it would need to be painted on the ends if it was cut, but the same is required of cement board. He noted that the back of cement board is not sealed and if moisture gets behind it, it can pucker.

Mr. Allison asked Mr. Mason to describe the Celect composite siding product. Mr. Mason replied it is a composite that is thicker and heavier than standard, but they are proposing the LP siding.

Mr. House called for a motion on the LP siding. **Mr. Zaremba made a motion to allow LP siding as presented at the meeting for the Accessory Dwelling Unit being constructed at 219 Portsmouth Avenue. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

Mr. Mason asked if a full basement can be constructed to house the mechanics for the ADU with a deed restriction that the basement can never be finished. They are limited to pouring a 5-foot 5-inch basement and six-foot one is needed for an electrical panel in the basement. He doesn't understand the rationalization and said that if the certificate of occupancy includes the condition that it can't be finished, then that can be on the tax card and deed as well. He stated that it will be very difficult for mechanical contractors to work on it, and it can't have electricity if it was 5 feet five because six feet one is required for a panel. Mr. Mason added that the purpose of the ADUs is to keep families together.

The Board was in agreement that a full basement is prohibited in the current ordinance.

#### B. Review of Site Plan & Subdivision Regulations

Ms. Price described updates to the regulations with regards to preliminary consultations, design reviews, and minor site plan reviews. The Board will review the edits and discuss them at the next meeting.

### 5. Adjournment

**Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 9:08 pm. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**