



## Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes

June 4, 2025

Stratham Municipal Center

Time: 7:00 pm

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

**Members Absent:** Chris Zaremba, Regular Member

**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. Mr. House appointed Mr. Allison as a voting member for the meeting.

### 2. Approval of Minutes

#### a. May 21, 2025

**Mr. Canada corrected the word 'must' to 'much' on line 120. Mr. Kunowski made a motion to approve the May 21, 2025 Planning Board meeting minutes as amended. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

### 3. Ongoing Business:

#### a. Land Bank Properties, LLC (Applicant and 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.

Tim Phoenix of Hoefle, Phoenix, Gormley & Roberts, spoke on behalf of the Applicant. He stated that on May 30, 2025 the comments from town staff and CMA Engineers were submitted to the Emanuel Engineering. He requested a continuance to the June 18<sup>th</sup> meeting to for Emanuel Engineering to have time to review the comments. There were no comments from the Board.

**Mr. Canada made a motion to continue the Land Bank Properties application to June 18<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

Ms. Price noted that the 65-day application timeframe needs to be extended as well. Mr. House asked if it can be part of the original motion. Mr. Phoenix stated that they do not need a separate motion.

#### b. 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.

Tim Phoenix of Hoefle, Phoenix, Gormley & Roberts, spoke on behalf of the Applicant. He requested a continuance to July 2<sup>nd</sup>. The project team is waiting to receive outstanding engineering comments and they need time to review and address the comments when received. He requested that the continuance include an extension to the 65-day application timeframe.

**Mr. Canada made a motion to continue the Copley Properties/Helen Gallant proposal to July 2<sup>nd</sup>. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

#### **4. CMA Engineers, Inc.**

Ms. Price introduced Ben Clark of CMA Engineers, the Town's consulting engineering firm. He is here to answer questions from the Board on certain engineering practices such as single-pitch roads, retention systems and grading.

Ben Clark, senior project manager at CMA Engineers, stated that he was asked to present his opinions on superelevated roads and bioswales that have been proposed on projects in town that require waivers. He described that superelevated roads have one consistent slope across the road which differs from the Town's requirement of a center crowned road. He stated they are designed to increase driver comfort at high speeds like highways, off and on ramps, race tracks, and on curves. They are generally not used on smaller subdivisions unless there are site constraints that necessitate the use, such as ledge or other existing features that affect grade. On smaller roads like cul-de-sacs and roads that are not collector streets, he does not see a safety issue for constructing a superelevated road. However, in his opinion, to grant a waiver for that type of construction, there should be some site constraints that require the road to be built like that. There are issues with tie-ins where two roads that are superelevated intersect. The tie-in can be awkward and can create a low point with drainage issues. Another issue is in the winter when there is snow on the high side of the road and as the snow melts, it will cross the road as designed. There will be melting and freezing cycles that could result in ice across the road. Additionally superelevated roads are generally not used for two-way traffic, they are used for one-way unless it is a high-speed curve. He stated that on a cul-de-sac or a dead end it is not a safety issue. Mr. House asked what is the normal percentage for something like that. Mr. Clark replied that a crowned road typically has a cross slope of 2% on either side. Mr. House asked if there could be a concern with two way traffic and ice freezing on a superelevated road. Mr. Clark replied that his opinion is that it is not a safety issue at slower speeds but it is an annoyance. Mr. Allison commented that with a crowned road when driver's hand is off the steering wheel, the vehicle will drift towards the side of the road, but without a crowned road, the car might drift into the other lane. Mr. Allison defines a high-speed road as 15-20 mph or more. Mr. Clark agreed with Mr. Allison's safety concern example and stated that in his opinion, center-crowned roads are better for drainage and are an expected condition for any vehicles on the road and should be the standard unless there is a site-specific constraint. Mr. Kunowki asked if there is a trend towards one type of road design in New Hampshire and are municipalities looking to adopt superelevated roads. Mr. Clark replied that crowned roads are preferred almost everywhere. Ms. Price added that crowned roads are easier to maintain. Mr. House commented that a private road could be constructed whichever way, but a road proposed to be maintained by the Town should be designed to town standards. Ms. Price replied that the Town's regulations state that private roads must be built to town standards. Mr. Allison added that in a state where he lived previously, the state made a determination that municipalities should be

responsible for private roads. Mr. Canada stated that he does not want to inhibit new and improved designs and questioned if this is a new and improved design since the bioswale treatment is part of the design. Mr. Clark replied that with superelevated roads he does not believe the town is thwarting innovation because they are well established for safety on highways. Mr. House asked why would someone propose a superelevated road and what are the pros and cons. Mr. Clark replied to control the drainage to one side. Mr. House stated there could be more cost to have bioswales on both sides of the road.

Regarding bioswales, Mr. Clark stated that he believes bioswales are a good idea when constructed properly. In general, if the drainage calculations show a project is meeting the town standards, then he does not think there is an issue. He stated that any project proposing bioswales is likely going to need an AOT permit and NHDES has a rigorous review process above and beyond the town regulations and there may be some requirements in AOT regulations that need to be met that could potentially change how a bioswale is constructed. He thinks bioswales are a good idea in general but one thing to consider is maintenance. Bioswales, rain gardens, and gravel wetlands all have thorough operation and maintenance requirements, for example, clean out after certain rain events and ongoing inspections either once or twice per year. The more complex a system is, the more likely there is an issue to arise. For example, if a driveway interrupts a bioswale, the underdrains under the driveway may need to be replaced at some point. Mr. Clark stated that if the bioswales are maintained properly, then they are a good idea. Mr. Canada stated that the Board usually asks for the HOA to be responsible and requires an O&M manual. Mr. Clark added NHDES has AOT requirements that may be difficult to meet without outlet control structures or other systems. Mr. Allison stated a concern with frost depths being as deep as five feet and the possibility of stormwater than cannot infiltrate because of that and flooding that occurs. He stated that happened in his development in Stratham. He stated that the Board does not review the HISS maps and wonders if all parts of a site are not suitable for bioswales. Mr. Clark agreed. Mr. Allison stated that he believes there should be a secondary mechanism for release when there is a back up of water. Mr. Clark replied that is why he suggested an outlet control structure and believes that the AOT process will review that. It could be as simple as a catch basin where the underdrain is connected with an outlet from the catch basin and directed somewhere and the grate on the catch basin is the failsafe if the ground is frozen. Regarding HISS, Mr. Clark said that NHDES will require that an applicant prove that the soils will infiltrate if infiltration is proposed. Additionally, there is a separation required from the seasonal high-water table.

There were no further questions from the Board.

## **5. Ongoing Business**

- a. 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 explained that the applicant would like to present the proposed architectural details at tonight's meeting. She updated the Board that there is a pending application for this project before the Zoning Board of Adjustment to allow vehicle storage on the part of the parcel that is zoned Residential/Agricultural. The Applicant will also submit a Conditional Use Permit application to waive the requirement for the buffer between the R/A and Gateway districts. Town Council is still working through the vesting question with the applicant/owner. Ms. Price noted that a continuance will be needed to extend the application beyond the 65-day RSA provision.

Mr. House asked if the Applicant has seen the public comments that were submitted on the application that are in the Board's packet this evening. Ms. Price replied that she forwarded the comments to the applicant who confirmed receipt.

Chris Lane of 41 Portsmouth Ave LLC and McFarland Ford Stores is the applicant and introduced JJ MacBride of Emanuel Engineering and Dunja Suljicic, architect with PRAXIS3 and Brian Tanner of PRAXIS3. He stated that tonight they will present the proposed architecture. Ms. Suljicic presented the building design. It is a two-story building. She stated that they tried to accommodate the requirements of the Gateway Commercial Business District, some of them being gabled roofs and symmetry with the central mass of the building and the entrance. There are smaller volumes to the left and right of the entrance and high-speed service doors on the north side. The rest of the overhead doors are not facing the front. The amount of glass is within the standards, not more than 70% of the façade. She stated they tried to meet window trim requirements with a different color EIFS that surrounds the glazings, and the signage will not be lit per the design requirements and is below the lower roof line of the center mass of the building.

Mr. Kunowski asked what is the material of the garage doors and is it solid, transparent, or opaque. Ms. Suljicic replied they plan on it to be transparent. They are high speed doors which sense the cars coming in. She stated they can be solid if that is desirable, but they usually plan on them being transparent so daylight can come in.

Ms. Suljicic described the elevations. The showroom or retail front area wraps around both sides of the building. There are a few overhead doors on the side facing River Road. The side facing the existing Nissan dealership is pretty plain. Regarding materials, it is mostly EIFS and fiber cement panels up below the roof line with some roofing shingles visible from the front. The curtain wall system is not reflective glass and is a fairly standard and transparent glass that allows about 60% of the visible light to come into the building. Ms. Suljicic stated that Kia asked for a variance from the fiber cement panel to instead use an aluminum composite material that is not reflective, but would allow for durability. Mr. Kunowski asked for clarification on where that material would be. Ms. Suljicic replied it is the dark material that you see below the roof line. Mr. Kunowski asked if it is the aluminum product. Ms. Suljicic replied yes, they are asking to use an aluminum composite material that is not reflective. She added that with fiber cement, the edges can erode over time and aluminum holds up much better. Mr. Kunowski asked where the aluminum is proposed. Ms. Suljicic replied they originally had the dark material under the roof line as a fiber cement panel but would prefer to use aluminum panels instead which would also be dark and non-reflective.

Ms. Suljicic continued that the other request is to have an angled edge of the storefront instead of straight because that aligns better with Kia's prototypical image. She presented renderings showing their requests. She stated the total amount of material on the front façade is just below 20%.

Mr. House asked how tall is the building from the ridge to the grade. Ms. Suljicic replied 45 feet at the ridge. Mr. Kunowski replied 39' 6", Ms. Suljicic agreed.

Mr. House asked if Ms. Suljicic has reviewed the regulations for the Gateway Business District. Ms. Suljicic replied yes. Mr. House replied that the goal for the Gateway District is to make buildings more traditional looking and there is quite a lot of glass on the front that he thinks is too much. In his opinion three panels high would be enough and requested the rest of the board to weigh in. Mr. Lane replied that they could bring everything down a little bit. Mr. House commented that EIFS materials are not allowed anywhere in town. Mr. House asked how the Board feels about the flat roof in the back. Mr. Houghton said he would like to see the parapet extended

194 back; looking at the south elevation, he would like to see it at least as far as the four doors or  
195 further. Mr. House asked Mr. Houghton what about the north elevation. Mr. Houghton replied he  
196 would like it on both sides. Mr. Canada asked Mr. Houghton what is the theory behind stopping at  
197 the four doors. Mr. Houghton replied he would be equally happy to see it go the length of the  
198 building especially if there will be mechanical equipment on the roof. Ms. Suljicic stated the  
199 parapet extends about four feet above the roof at the back of the service shop, so any equipment  
200 should not be visible. And for the main part of the roof, it's not covering the entire front of the  
201 building; it would have been much taller if it did. There is a place for the flat roof, for the  
202 mechanical equipment beyond the shingled portion of the roof that you see. Mr. Kunowski asked  
203 if there are any mechanicals on the roof for the service area. Ms. Suljicic replied there will probably  
204 be some rooftop equipment for the HVAC but it will not be visible from the street. Mr. Kunowski  
205 stated that adding some type of angled roof element would potentially shield any equipment even  
206 more. Mr. Houghton agreed that it depends on which way one is traveling along Route 108, for  
207 example coming from the town center, the elevation is higher. Mr. Canada commented that with  
208 regards to enlarging the parapet, it is kind of industrial without something changing the roof line a  
209 bit, it's just a straight box. Mr. Kunowski agreed and likened it to an Amazon warehouse with a  
210 big, solid façade. He asked if the Kia design standards could be altered so it is not so rigid and  
211 regular. Ms. Suljicic replied they can improve on it, but it is not that visible because there is a  
212 Nissan building right next to it. Mr. House replied that it will be visible and originally when the  
213 building was shorter, it wasn't as bad, but now with the elongated back end, it's become really  
214 obvious. Mr. Kunowski added that they hear from residents all the time about protecting the  
215 agricultural aspect of town and someone driving south on Route 101 is going to pass the Scamman  
216 Farm and then see what he calls the Amazon warehouse. He knows it is not easy to camouflage a  
217 volume like that and he understands the space is necessary for the functioning of the business, but  
218 it creates a very visible wall. Ms. Suljicic replied she understands. Mr. Kunowski said he's not  
219 sure that is seen in other dealerships along that stretch of road. He added that maybe some of it  
220 will be shielded by landscaping. Mr. House said that he doesn't think the landscaping will be any  
221 taller than the garage doors. Mr. Allison stated he assumes it is a flat roof with inlets and an  
222 alligator back that collects run off and runs it to the interior and out into the stormwater system.  
223 Mr. House replied they will probably have roof drains. Mr. Allison asked if there will be a crown  
224 to the center and then out, because they might want a parapet in there anyway. Ms. Suljicic replied  
225 the initial plan is to have the roof drain at the internal roof drains on either the north or south side  
226 that would be collected and directed away from the building. Mr. Allison asked if they run down  
227 the columns and under the floor and out. Mr. House replied yes, interior, they show down spouts  
228 in the front, not the back.

229  
230 Mr. House requested that the building be redesigned a bit to make it look more traditional like the  
231 rest of town. Because it is such a long building, parapets out back might be needed. The biggest  
232 concern is to hide mechanical units and make it look more traditional. That big, long garage in the  
233 back is too much. Mr. Canada added that the Subaru dealer and McFarland have facades that are  
234 broken up very nicely with, he presumes, false gables.

235  
236 Mr. House asked for the Board's opinion on the north and south elevations with the diagonal wall  
237 detail that interrupts the storefront. The board had mixed reviews on it. Mr. House noted that the  
238 EIFS material needs to go. Ms. Suljicic asked for clarification on the Board's thoughts on the  
239 diagonal walls. Mr. House summarized that two members think it is too contemporary and the  
240 others are not concerned or undecided at this time. Mr. Houghton stated it requires a waiver. Mr.  
241 House replied correct and that it doesn't meet the design standards and if that is something the  
242 applicant really needs to have, it can't be EIFS, which might take away the angle. Ms. Suljicic

asked if the aluminum composite panels require a waiver. Ms. Price looked at the site plan regulations and stated that prefabricated metal is not allowed.

Mr. House asked Ms. Suljicic to go over the elevation sheets. Ms. Suljicic explained that they received comments late from the brand (Kia), so that's why two drawings were submitted. She described some of Kia's comments. Mr. House asked what the black banding is on the south elevation, and Ms. Suljicic described that. He stated it cannot be EIFS. Regarding the diagonal, the Board is undecided on that, and for some members it is too contemporary. For the north elevation, he asked Ms. Suljicic to describe the storefront. Ms. Suljicic replied that Kia wants to add a storefront on that elevation as well because they thought a little more daylight into that space would be good. Mr. Kunowski asked if storefront means glass. Ms. Suljicic replied yes, similar to what's happening at the front of the building, just not as tall. Mr. House moved to the west elevation. He suggested that if they add a few lines in the background to pick up the gables on the east elevation, then that might make it clear that mechanicals won't be visible from the road. Mr. House asked for an explanation on the note regarding adding storefront or relocating overhead doors. Ms. Suljicic explained that the doors are the ones that a customer will leave from when they purchase a new vehicle. Her understanding is that the Town does not want overhead doors on the front side, so additional glass is proposed if that is acceptable. Mr. Kunowski confirmed that doors should not be on the front side. Regarding additional glass, Mr. House replied that he doesn't mind some glass, but it looks like a lot of glass for a traditional look and requested that the applicant review that.

Mr. House asked about the comment on the plans, "ACM required request variance". Ms. Suljicic replied that is the aluminum composite material suggested on the plans. Mr. House replied that metal is not allowed. Ms. Price confirmed that metal is not allowed in the District.

Mr. House asked about the comment on dropping signage. Ms. Suljicic stated that she believes the Town requires that signage needs to be the lowest roof line which is where they placed it. There is another requirement for the top of the signage, like the maximum height of the signage. In this case, it would be on the glass and they think it would look much better if it was above the glass. Mr. House agreed. She stated that based on comments heard tonight, they will need to lower the glass line anyway. The comment on the plans is that they believe the signage will be better off the glass, but that it could be lowered onto the glass if required.

Mr. Allison asked if the Kia and McFarland signs are lit. Ms. Suljicic replied no.

Mr. Canada commented that there is way too much glass and when compared to Nissan and Subaru on the opposite sides of the parcel, it will stick out like a sore thumb. He continues to hear negative comments about another building in the District and he would like to see a much more traditional New England look similar to Subaru or Nissan.

Mr. Kunowski commented that some of the other dealerships have a lot of glass. Mr. House replied that the glass on most of the designs was reduced from the original ask and that the Porsche building pre-dates the Gateway District. He noted when compared to Audi, the difference is noticeable.

Mr. Canada asked how the size of this building compares to the Nissan building. Mr. Lane replied it is about 7,000 or 5,000 square feet larger because of the service department. He noted that Nissan only has about eight bays which is not enough and this design has 18 bays. Mr. Lane stated that

any dealerships that have remodeled recently would put new bays in because people are keeping their cards longer and they are doing a lot more repair work than in the past.

Mr. House invited the public to speak.

Kyle Hollasch of 15 Greta's Way spoke in favor of sidewalks. He wanted to reiterate how important it is that when these parcels are developed, even if they're noncontiguous, that sidewalks are prioritized. He stated there is about 1,000 residents on Rt 108 and to the west and from a pedestrian perspective, we're trapped. It is unsafe to try to cross Rt 108, and it's not much safer to travel up and down. He knows that it looks a little odd to have a beautiful sidewalk in one space and then nothing, and then beautiful sidewalk and nothing, but he sees the vision slowly coming together. He believes a crosswalk at a light at Bunker Hill would be the perfect location to provide a safe crossing for those of us on that side. He reiterated that he thinks it's extremely important, even though it's piecemeal, even though it's going to take another decade or two to connect them all, that the Town holds developers both at 41 Portsmouth and at 57 Portsmouth as well to put in those sidewalks. Mr. Hollasch continued that the Town is going to resurrect the Open Space and Connectivity Plan, which kind of stalled for a year or two, and this was all addressed in the draft of that. Route 108 is a major North South corridor, and we really need to be pedestrian friendly. The time to do it is obviously now as it is much harder to ask an existing business to rip up their property. He is aware that the Rockingham Planning Commission has it on their long-term radar to do some funding up and down, but the more we have in place with new businesses, the more likely that that's going to happen going forward.

Ms. Price noted for the record that three public comment emails were submitted from people to support sidewalks along 41 Portsmouth Avenue and 57 Portsmouth Avenue in the future. These comments will be in the record for the 41 Portsmouth Avenue record.

Mr. House asked if there were any additional comments or questions from the applicant's architect. Ms. Suljicic replied no.

Mr. House began a discussion on a continuance. Ms. Price stated that the town is continuing to discuss the vesting issue with the applicant's attorney and a variance application has been submitted for this project that will be heard by the ZBA on July 1. Because of the need for a variance, the application is not considered ready for approval. She recommended that the applicant return on July 2 but is welcome to return on June 18. Mr. House stated that they can discuss revisions to the architecture on June 18. Ms. Price noted there are comments from the fire protection engineer and CMA Engineers as well. Mr. MacBride replied that he believes he can address CMA's comments by Friday, 10 days before the meeting, but he hasn't reviewed the fire protection comments yet. Ms. Price noted that she discussed the comments from the fire protection engineer with the fire chief and the chief said that he concurred with all of the comments and where the engineer questioned if something is needed, his answer is yes.

Mr. Lane requested a continuance on the decision to July 2, 2025. **Mr. Houghton made a motion to continue the application to July 2, 2025. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**

## 6. Miscellaneous

### a. Review of Site Plan Regulations

This topic was postponed to the next meeting.

- 342 **7. Approval of Minutes**  
343 **a. May 7, 2025 Non-Public Session**  
344 **Mr. Houghton made a motion to approve the non-public meeting minutes from May 7, 2025.**  
345 **Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion passed.**  
346  
347 **8. Adjournment**  
348  
349 **Mr. Kunowski made a motion to adjourn at 8:43 pm. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted**  
350 **in favor and the motion passed.**