



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes
November 19, 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. November 5, 2025, Planning Board meeting minutes

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from November 5, 2025. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

3. Public Hearing:

A. Kelly and Michael Guarascio (Applicant and Owner) request for approval of a Conditional Use Permit to construct a 17-foot by 32-foot swimming pool and fencing within the wetlands setback at 4 Tuckers Trail (Tax Map 24, Lot 48) in the Residential/Agricultural Zoning District.

Ms. Price introduced the application. The Applicant went before the Planning Board recently for a preliminary consultation, and they also presented the project to the Conservation Commission. The proposed improvements are located in the 50-foot wetlands setback, with the exception of the fence that is proposed in the 25-foot wetlands no-disturbance buffer. She spoke with the owners and requested that the fence be relocated outside of the buffer, and they said it would not be an issue. There were no concerns from Department heads. Meeting minutes from the Conservation Commission are included in the Planning Board's packet along with some written comments from an abutter. The Conservation Commission does not support the project as they have concerns about a negative impact from the pool on the wetland.

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

Mr. House invited the Applicant to speak. Michael Guarascio introduced himself and his wife Kelly. He stated that his lot is uniquely constrained as it is surrounded on three sides of the property

45 by wetlands. There is a limited upland area available for any improvement. The location they are
46 proposing is the only feasible area outside the wetlands where a pool could reasonably be placed,
47 given where the house, the patio, and the leach field are located. They discussed the location with
48 a wetland scientist. They wish to make reasonable use of the land and build a pool with the required
49 fence. They acknowledge the Conservation Commission's concerns and appreciate their feedback.
50 The existing home is within the 75-foot setback from the wetlands, and the opinion of their wetland
51 scientist is that the impact is there now, and this project would not create any additional impact.

52
53 Mr. House asked if it is an above-ground or in-ground pool. Mr. Guarascio replied in-ground. Mr.
54 House asked what construction material is proposed. Mr. Guarascio replied Gunite. Mr. House
55 asked if the Board had any questions.

56
57 Mr. Canada asked if the water table is generally lower than the bottom of the pool. Mr. Guarascio
58 replied that they spoke with Northern Pool, and they said that 95% of the time they do hit water
59 and they have mitigation in place for that; they run a dewatering pump during construction to keep
60 it dry, along with a hydrostat valve that goes into the pool floor, so water pressure outside the pool
61 remains. If the water pressure outside the pool is greater than inside the pool, that valve releases,
62 and the pool doesn't rise or float, which would be the concern.

63
64 Mr. Zaremba asked if there would be a patio around the pool. Ms. Guarascio replied that there is
65 a patio that was built in 2022 that was approved by the town, which is within the 50-foot setback.
66 The patio for this project would extend beyond that to surround the pool in addition to the fencing.
67 She stated they are willing to do whatever is needed to make sure that it is not in the buffer [sic]
68 area. Mr. Zaremba asked how wide the patio surrounding the pool would be. Mr. Guarascio
69 described it in relation to the plans. Mr. Zaremba asked Ms. Price if the setback is measured to the
70 patio or the pool. Ms. Price replied that the pool decking needs to be outside of the 25-foot no-
71 disturbance buffer, but can be allowed in the 50-foot setback through the Conditional Use Permit.

72
73 Mr. Zaremba asked if the property line setback is 20 feet. Mr. House replied that the wetlands
74 setback is the issue. Mr. Canada added that it is way back from the property line.

75
76 Mr. House asked if the patio around the pool is only about 5 to 6 feet so they can walk around it.
77 Mr. Guarascio agreed that it is a walking space. Mr. House asked if they would consider having
78 grass to the edge of the pool. Ms. Guarascio replied that she prefers hardscaping, but if it matters
79 for approval, she would consider it. She asked if hardscaping with drainage would be okay. Mr.
80 Guarascio added that when they met with Northern Pool, they said that because of the slope from
81 the leach field, they would have to consider how the water is flowing in the yard, and typically,
82 they would add drainage in the hardscaping.

83
84 Mr. Allison stated that there appears to be a fairly steep slope behind the pool, and the Board
85 doesn't have an idea of how the land will be graded if the patio is installed. He believes that the
86 construction grading might interfere with the no-disturbance buffer. Ms. Guarascio replied that
87 they dealt with that when the patio was constructed. She explained that there is upland, and then
88 the land drops drastically down to where the wetland is, and there's a tree line. Mr. Allison
89 explained why a grading plan would be helpful.

90
91 Mr. House commented that it looks like some trees will be removed as well. Mr. Guarascio agreed
92 that some trees on the right side will be removed. Ms. Guarascio added that they will not remove
93 any trees on the north side.

95 Regarding grading, Ms. Guarascio explained that the pool company said they would flatten that
96 area with the hardscaping and would need to almost level it down. The existing patio was already
97 leveled down, and we have sub grading on the sides of the patio with landscaping to build it up, to
98 keep it flat. She said they would probably need to do the same thing as they level this all out; it
99 would almost be a step down to keep it flat. Mr. House agrees with Mr. Allison that a proposed
100 grading plan would be helpful.

101
102 Mr. Canada asked if they are just using the pool company as a designer. Ms. Guarascio replied
103 they hired a professional surveyor and a wetland scientist per the Board's comments during the
104 Preliminary Consultation. She was not aware of the grading concerns and will have to take that
105 back to their consultants.

106
107 Ms. Price asked if the Board is requesting more information including a grading plan before
108 making a final decision. Mr. House replied yes. Mr. Allison suggested that the contractor outline
109 where exactly where they will construct walls and everything else, then it will become very
110 apparent on the grading plan.

111
112 Ms. Guarascio stated that she wished she knew this grading plan request after the Preliminary
113 Consultation as they spent a lot of money already on the site survey. She doesn't want to continue
114 to spend money if at the end of this process, the Board will not approve the project. Mr. Zaremba
115 and Mr. Canada agree that her request for Board input on whether or not this is approvable is
116 reasonable. Mr. Canada believes the project is a reasonable use of the property. Mr. Allison agreed,
117 he just wants to make sure that the construction takes place within that fence.

118
119 Mr. Houghton asked if there is a report from the wetland scientist that can be submitted as part of
120 the package. Ms. Guarascio replied no, they have his responses to the CUP criteria and he
121 performed a delineation with flagging. That information was given to a site surveyor to prepare
122 the survey.

123
124 Mr. Houghton asked if there is any flexibility to the size of the pool. Mr. Canada commented that
125 is a fairly modest size. Mr. Houghton explained that would give them more flexibility around the
126 perimeter.

127
128 Mr. Zaremba commented that he is most concerned with not disturbing the 25-foot no disturbance
129 area at all. Mr. Houghton and Mr. House agreed.

130
131 Mr. Canada asked the Board if any members consider this a non-starter. Mr. Houghton stated that
132 if they can work within the feedback given tonight, he does not think it is a non-starter, but
133 encroachment into the 25-foot no-disturbance buffer would be a non-starter for him. Mr. House
134 agreed.

135
136 **Mr. Canada made a motion to open the hearing to the public. Mr. Zaremba seconded the**
137 **motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**

138
139 Eric Nash of 7 Morningstar Drive spoke. He expressed concerns with the project. He stated that
140 the property borders the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve which is one of 30
141 national wildlife reserves in the United States. He was part of the group that worked very hard to
142 have it become a National Estuarine Research Reserve. He is a chemistry and physics teacher and
143 believes a pool is one of the worst things to have near these wetlands. He is concerned with impact
144 from chlorine and cyanic acids along with tree removal and erosion. He stated there is very little

145 area for drainage to be dealing with the water now and then also runoff from the pool. He thinks
146 the Board should look at a wetlands analysis of this and he can't believe it passed as there are strict
147 laws about discharge of chlorinated water back to a national reserve. He thinks a pool is wonderful
148 and he has no objection to it, but he has worked very hard for 40 years to maintain it.

149
150 Mr. Canada asked where does the property border the reserve. Mr. Nash pointed on a map.

151
152 Mr. House asked if it would be a chlorine or saltwater pool. Mr. Guarascio replied Saltwater, but
153 there is still chlorine in saltwater. He stated that he loves the Great Bay, the trails, and the
154 Discovery Center and their intent is to manage the pool responsibly.

155
156 Mr. Zaremba asked what kind of filter they would use. Mr. Guarascio replied that they haven't
157 gotten that far yet.

158
159 Mr. House commented that during winterization, some water needs to be removed and is usually
160 discharged to the ground along with during backwashing.

161
162 Mr. Nash commented that draining the pool below the skimmers will be a part of routine
163 maintenance, and they will need to somehow spread the discharge out onto the lawn and every five
164 years, the entire pool should be dumped in order to remove the cyanic acid buildup. He doesn't see
165 how they can manage that.

166
167 Ms. Guarascio asked Mr. Nash where the line for the estuary is. Mr. Nash described the location
168 and further described how the group for the Great Bay worked with landowners such as Pease and
169 Fish & Game to protect land around Great Bay.

170
171 Mr. Canada asked Mr. Nash if he was appointed to speak for the Great Bay National Reserve. Mr.
172 Nash replied no. Mr. Canada noted that if it is as great a concern as he says, someone from the
173 organization should speak. Mr. Nash replied he doesn't know how they would know about it. Mr.
174 Canada asked if the Great Bay Reserve is an abutter. Ms. Price replied no, the Town is the abutter.
175 Mr. Canada questioned how the land can be part of the reserve if it is owned by the Town. Mr.
176 Nash replied he could be wrong, but he was told that when he bought his house, that the abutting
177 land was undeveloped land. Ms. Guarascio replied she was told it was conservation land, so she is
178 trying to understand the difference between conservation land and estuary. Mr. Nash corrected
179 himself that the Town's land is not part of the estuary, but the water on the land may be considered
180 estuary water and he does not know where the estuary begins and ends. He described the location
181 of a stream behind his property and the subject property that flows into the estuary. Ms. Guarascio
182 believes that stream behind her house is storm drainage that wraps around her house to the house
183 next to her on Tucker's Trail and stops, she does not believe it flows to Great Bay or the estuary.
184 Mr. Nash replied on his side it does, but not behind her side.

185
186 Mr. House asked if the Board would like to schedule a site visit. No board members thought a site
187 visit was needed. Mr. House commented that he is curious if the water between the two properties
188 flows to the estuary or not.

189
190 Ms. Guarascio stated that she thinks the estuary starts on the other side of the conservation land
191 that she abuts. They very much want to protect the environment and if it is true, then they would
192 reconsider their plans. She added that being said, chemicals flowing from other homes down the
193 hill from Tucker's Trail and Morningstar is already happening from fertilizer, etc. She believes the
194 addition of a pool to her property is a minimal additional impact.

195 Mr. Canada recommended that when the pool needs to be drawn down, they could pump the water
196 to use as irrigation on the lawn. Mr. Zaremba stated he has read that people do that. Mr. Canada
197 added that he used to do it for his lawn and he checked with Scotts fertilizer who said the chlorine
198 is so minimal, it is not harmful to grass.
199

200 Ms. Price stated there were written comments submitted by another abutter, Kathleen Durkin of 2
201 Tucker's Trail. Ms. Price read aloud the email from Ms. Durkin dated November 18, 2025 that
202 cautioned there might be buried stumps on the subject property that are decomposing. Ms. Durkin
203 also has concerns with the wetland delineation performed during a dry year and with potential foot
204 traffic and property line encroachment between her property and the Guarascio's property with the
205 installation of the pool and requested a fence along the property line between the homes.
206

207 Mr. Zaremba asked if dry weather affects a wetland delineation. Ms. Price replied that wetlands
208 scientists review maps and onsite soil conditions. Mr. Allison added that a soil profile will not
209 change whether or not the soils are saturated. Mr. Houghton commented that is why he asked if a
210 soil report was prepared. Mr. Allison stated a report would be handy. Mr. House asked if a report
211 was prepared. Ms. Guarascio replied that the wetlands scientist helped with the criteria responses
212 and worked with the site surveyor and signed the site survey with regards to the wetland
213 boundaries.
214

215 Mr. Houghton commented that the land looks like it drops off about five feet back to the stream.
216 Mr. Allison stated a grading plan would resolve those questions.
217

218 Mr. House suggested a continuation of the application for the Applicant to provide more
219 information. Mr. Zaremba agreed and Mr. Canada stated he is satisfied with the existing submittal.
220

221 Mr. Kunowski stated he is incredibly sympathetic to the property owners and their project; and
222 obviously, if the pool was built at the same time as the home was built, we wouldn't be having this
223 conversation. The setback rules have changed over time, but he would want to see absolutely no
224 encroachment within the 25-foot setback, including with the fence. He is predisposed to approve
225 the application.
226

227 Mr. Allison stated he would like to see the grading plan to prove there will be no encroachment
228 into the 25-foot no-disturbance buffer. Mr. House and Mr. Houghton agreed.
229

230 Mr. House asked how deep the pool will be. Ms. Guarascio replied six feet at the deepest end.
231

232 Mr. Kunowski suggested they ask their pool contractor for their experience when excavating a site
233 like this and how they mitigate encroaching into the wetland.
234

235 **Mr. Zaremba made a motion to continue the application to December 3, 2025. Mr. Canada**
236 **seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**
237

238 B. Proposed 2026 Zoning Amendments.

239

240 Ms. Price presented the changes since the last meeting to the amendments for the Technical Review
241 Committee.
242

243 Mr. Canada commented that he mentioned this committee to the Heritage Commission, where
244 some members suggested that the TRC should consider adding a citizen seat. Mr. Canada

recognizes that the Conservation Commission, Heritage Commission, and Planning Board members are all citizens rather than staff and suggested that might be sufficient. The Board agreed that ad-hoc members may be added at the TRC Chair's discretion for specific projects.

Mr. Kunowski questioned a contractor's seat on the TRC who might need to be paid to attend. Ms. Price explained that there may be projects that need an engineering review and there is a budget line in Planning for special projects that could possibly be used. Mr. Houghton does not support that and believes the Applicant should pay for that kind of review. Mr. House added that he has presented to TRCs, and they don't have citizens or engineers. Ms. Price suggested an edit that removes contractors and adds members of the community.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to open the meeting to the public. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Susan Connors, Stratham Planning Project Assistant and resident at 100 Bunker Hill Avenue spoke. She provided minor grammatical suggestions, including clarifying that the TRC applies to major subdivisions and not minor, and asked why the TRC would review state and federal regulations. Mr. Zaremba suggested changing 'local, state, and federal regulations' to 'applicable regulations'. Ms. Connors asked that the Board clarify if the member of the public participant must be a resident or it can be a business owner or property owner that does not live in town. The Board decided that "member of the community" applies to residents, property owners, business owners, etc.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to close the meeting to the public. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

The Board agreed that the proposed changes to the TRC were not substantial and could move to a vote.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion that the Planning Board approve the creation of a Technical Review Committee for major site plan and subdivision Planning Board applications moves to the Town ballot. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Ms. Price stepped through the changes to the Residential Open Space Cluster Subdivision, including removing cottage developments and increasing to 40% the total land of the parcel that must be included as Open Space.

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

Susan Connors of 100 Bunker Hill Avenue spoke. She provided some grammatical edits and questioned language regarding "accessory uses". She asked if the accessory use paragraph is associated with the common land and not the individual lots. The Board agreed to strike the paragraph as accessory uses are described elsewhere in the section.

Ms. Connors asked for clarification on the Design Review process as it relates to approving the yield plan and submittal of a residential open space cluster design. The Board agreed it is a multi-step process where once the Board approves the yield plan, the Applicant will then need to prepare a design plan to be reviewed by the Board, potentially at a later meeting, before the Design Review

application can be closed.

Mr. Zaremba asked if the term yield plan should be defined throughout the section or capitalized, as the term seems to be used for potentially different meanings. He asked for that to be considered.

Ms. Connors continued with comments and suggested that it be clarified that the cost of completing a financial and technical feasibility study be borne by the Applicant.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to close the meeting to the public. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to continue the amendments to Section XIII, Residential Open Space Cluster Development, to December 3, 2025. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Ms. Price introduced a potential new amendment to add a housekeeping clause that will allow the Planning Board to make technical corrections to the Zoning Ordinance, provided no substantive changes to the Ordinance would result because of the changes. The Board agreed.

Ms. Price introduced a potential new amendment that clarifies that Table 4.3(i) applies to the entire table. The Board agreed.

Ms. Price introduced changes to the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage District since the last meeting. The Board agreed to strike the language about comparing new construction to the size of existing structures.

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

Susan Connors of 100 Bunker Hill Avenue commented that the proposed footprint of 2,500 square feet in this District is extremely small when compared to the other Districts, where the maximum footprint is either not applicable or 80,000 square feet. Mr. Kunowski stated that in a previous meeting, the Board discussed that the dimensional requirements in the Route 33 District would mimic the Residential/Agricultural District if the Route 33 District did not exist. The Board agreed to strike the paragraph describing the footprint size.

Ms. Connors commented that the multifamily limitation of 3 units per 2 acres is difficult to understand or calculate. Mr. Kunowski calculated that a 3-acre lot would allow one and a half units. Ms. Connors suggested adding language about rounding. The Board requested language that would round down.

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to close the meeting to the public. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Mr. Houghton made a motion to continue this zoning amendment to December 3, 2025. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

5. Public Meeting (Miscellaneous)

A. New discussion of road design and cul-de-sac with the board.

Ms. Price stated that Mr. Allison is working with her on road design requirements and asked Mr. Allison to introduce his thoughts. Mr. Allison stated that he has reviewed several of the cul-de-sac details in the subdivision regulations. He provided suggested changes to the previous Planning Director, and since that time, the Board has heard from the fire department what they need. Mr. Allison does not believe the current standard road detail is sufficient for the fire department's needs. Also, he noticed that the Town recently painted lines and installed signage on Rollins Farm Road, which informed him of DPW's needs as well. He will continue to work on this and present it to the Board at a later date.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 9:57 pm. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Respectfully submitted by Susan Connors