



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes
December 3, 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 7:01 pm and took the roll call.

Mr. House had Nate Allison as a full voting member.

2. Approval of Minutes

A. November 5, 2025, Planning Board meeting minutes

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

3. Public Hearing:

A. Lindt & Sprungli (USA) Inc. (Applicant and Owner) requests for a Site Plan Amendment to extend the existing dead-end fire lane to the existing parking area to create a fire access loop around the southeast side of the existing building #1. The property is located at One Fine Chocolate Place (Tax Map 3, Lot 1) in the Industrial District. Application submitted by Tighe & Bond, Inc., 177 Corporate Drive, Portsmouth, NH 03801.

Mr. Allison recused himself from the discussion on this project.

Ms. Price explained that CMA Engineers reviewed the plan set on behalf of the Town and provided comments. CMA identified two items that did not meet the regulations: 1) Site Plan Regulations Addendum C, Section B.ii. and 2) Subdivision Regulations Figure A, Road Cross Section for the proposed pavement section. The Applicant submitted a waiver request for Addendum C and replied that they will update the final plan set to comply with Figure A and requested it be added

as a condition of approval. CMA and Planning Staff do not see any issues with the Applicant's requests.

Neil Hanson, Tighe & Bond, spoke on behalf of the Applicant. Mr. Hanson stated that the only changes on the application from the last meeting is the additional waiver request and they have no issue revising the road detail to match town standards. Regarding the waiver request from the stormwater regulations, the area of disturbance is just over 9,000 square feet and there is minimal increase in the stormwater runoff, therefore they believe the project meets the spirit of the regulations and are requesting a waiver. Mr. Hanson read aloud the waiver request that was submitted as part of the application. The Board had no questions on the waiver request.

Mr. Houghton made a motion to grant the waiver from Section B.ii of Addendum C, as this allows the Town to consider a waiver for small projects that with limited impervious expansion by the following findings of fact:

- 1. The granting of the waiver will not be detrimental to the public safety, health, or welfare or injurious to other property and will promote the public interest;**
- 2. The waiver will not, in any manner, vary other provisions of the Stratham Zoning Ordinance;**
- 3. Such waiver will substantially secure the objectives, standards, and requirements of these regulations, as the limited area of added pavement and the presence of an existing storage feature (fire pond) between the work area and the wetland, this approach is reasonable and conservative.**
- 4. A specific circumstance warrants the granting of a waiver, as the limited area of added pavement and the presence of an existing storage feature (fire pond) between the work area and the wetland, this approach is reasonable and conservative.**

Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Mr. House asked if any members of the public wanted to speak. Nobody from the public came forward.

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

Ms. Price stated that there is a draft conditional approval for the Board's consideration that was also sent to the Applicant.

Mr. Houghton made a motion that the Planning Board conditionally approve, subject to the conditions stated on pages one through five in a draft notice of decision for an amended site plan, to extend the existing dead-end fire lane to the existing parking area to create a fire access loop around the southeast side of the existing building #1 at One Fine Chocolate Place. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Mr. Allison returned to the board at 7:16 p.m.

- B. 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.

Mr. House announced that the Applicant has withdrawn the application.

93 **4. Public Meeting:**

- 94
- 95 A. Bruce W Bisbano (Applicant) and 38 Portsmouth Ave LLC (owner) request a Preliminary
- 96 Consultation to amend an approved site plan to include a renovation and have a 578 SF addition
- 97 to their existing building at 36 Portsmouth Ave. (Tax map 9, Lot 117) in the Gateway Commercial
- 98 Business Zoning District.
- 99

100 Ms. Price announced that this preliminary consultation is an informal, non-binding discussion with

101 the Board, and the abutters were not notified. The project involves expanding the existing bank

102 building by closing in the drive-through. The addition is proposed to match the existing

103 architectural features, including the brick wall, traditional trim molding, and traditional windows.

104 The project includes additional lighting, updated landscaping, and the conversion of one of the

105 parking spaces into an EV parking space as required for redevelopment sites.

106

107 Bruce Bisbano, Bisbano & Associates, Inc., spoke on behalf of Citizens Bank, the tenant. He

108 explained that the project will retain one drive-up ATM, but change it from a remote location to a

109 through-the-wall location. The vehicle access around the building basically remains the same, with

110 the exception that the existing canopy will be converted to a building addition with one lane for a

111 drive-up ATM and a drive-up night deposit. He stated the reason for the additional square footage

112 is that Citizens Bank was looking to provide handicap accessibility on the interior during the

113 renovation. There are two workstations in the basement and restrooms in the basement and one on

114 the first floor. They can satisfy the building code for the restroom, but cannot for the workstations

115 in the basement. The number of tellers will remain at two. They plan to increase the number of

116 offices on the first floor from three to five and have a larger lobby. Currently, sometimes customers

117 coming into the bank are backed up in the vestibule because of a lack of space. The roof will be

118 slightly bigger, and the parking lot will stay the same. The exterior handicap accessibility has

119 already been done and will remain the way it is. Mr. Bisbano stated they will add the required EV

120 parking and charger. They are maintaining the existing building, repairing rotted trim, and

121 replacing the roof. They are working to match the brick. On the interior, they are removing the

122 ATM from the vestibule and converting the vault into one of the offices. He presented and

123 described exterior renderings of the proposed changes, including updating the landscaping and

124 lighting. Banking requirements for lighting require two foot-candles at ground level within a 50-

125 foot radius of entrances and any banking equipment. The project will be dark sky compliant.

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127 Mr. House recommended that the Applicant discuss the project with the police and fire

128 departments.

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130 Ms. Price noted that when a formal application is submitted, the project will go through a town

131 department working group.

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133 Mr. Bisbano stated that they will reach out to the fire department in advance of the application to

134 see if there are any issues with apparatus circulation.

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136 Ms. Price added that the fire department uses turning templates from Exeter and Portsmouth.

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138 Mr. Kunowski asked what changes are proposed for signage.

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140 Mr. Bisbano replied that he believes the exterior signage has been upgraded, but there are some

141 changes that Citizens would like to make, like adding the “daisy” logo.

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143 Mr. Kunowski advised that they make sure it complies with the sign ordinance.

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145 Mr. Bisbano replied that the signage vendor will complete a separate study that will be submitted
146 with the final application for reference.

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148 Mr. Kunowski asked if there would be a drive-up window. Mr. Bisbano replied no.

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150 Mr. House reiterated that this is a non-binding discussion. Mr. Bisbano replied, understood.

151
152 Mr. Bisbano showed the Board where they proposed the EV charger, but they have concerns with
153 the charging cables being on the sidewalk. He pointed to another location and asked for the Board's
154 opinion on that.

155
156 Ms. Price stated that she will seek an opinion from the fire department, as she is aware of concerns
157 the fire department has elsewhere with EV chargers.

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159 Mr. House added that he thinks the fire department will appreciate the charger being moved away
160 from the building.

161
162 Mr. Houghton commented that if it is moved to the last parking spot, it is in the zoning setback.

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164 Mr. Bisbano agreed and added that the existing parking in the front is primarily in the setback as
165 well.

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167 Mr. Allison asked if there is an attic in the existing building.

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169 Mr. Bisbano replied that there is a limited attic, ductwork, and equipment. Currently, access to the
170 existing attic is from the drive-up. When it is replaced, there will be an attic truss, because there
171 will be service equipment up there, and the rafters will be insulated.

172
173 Mr. House commented that the cupola looks out of scale with the addition.

174
175 Mr. House asked if the bank offers bathrooms for customers.

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177 Mr. Bisbano replied yes, it is a code requirement.

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179 Mr. House asked how someone in a wheelchair would get downstairs to use the bathroom.

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181 Mr. Bisbano replied that there is a restroom on the first floor now, and as part of the modification,
182 there will be a single-use ADA compatible restroom.

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184 Mr. House thanked Mr. Bisbano for his presentation.

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186 **5. Public Hearing**

187 **A. Proposed 2026 Zoning Amendments.**

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189 Ms. Price stated there are four proposed amendments for tonight, the first is a housekeeping clause
190 for technical corrections.

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192 **Mr. Kunowski made a motion that the Planning Board approve to amend Section XXI,**

Amendments, to add a new subsection 21.2 called Technical Corrections and move to the town ballot. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Ms. Price presented the amendment to the Table of Dimensional Requirements to clarify that the existing explanatory note 4.3(i) applies to all lots.

Mr. Kunowski made a motion that the Planning Board approve to amend Section 4.2 Table of Dimensional Requirements and 4.3(i) Explanatory notes to have the footnote be placed in the upper left corner of the table and define 4.3 (i) for all lots, and move to the town ballot. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Ms. Price presented the changes to the proposed amendment to the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage District requirements since the last meeting. Changes include applying the density requirements in full two-acre increments and limiting residential building footprints to 5,000 square feet.

The Board discussed building footprint limitations and how it would apply to single-family vs. multi-family homes.

Mr. Kunowski commented that he is fine with tighter limits, but it seems odd to him that there is no building footprint limitation in the residential/agricultural district, the manufactured housing district, or the retirement planned community district. He stated that if he had a two-acre lot in the residential/agricultural district, he could have a 10,000 square foot footprint.

Mr. Canada suggested it could be added to those districts as well.

Mr. Kunowski responded that it goes beyond where the Board started with this amendment.

Mr. Houghton explained that the evolution of the Route 33 Heritage District was to stimulate adaptive reuse of the property so that owners didn't tear down what was there to create something different and to retain existing structures, which is the Legacy Highway connotation. He believes it creates a uniqueness in zoning.

Mr. Canada suggested again limiting the other districts as well.

Mr. House replied that this article is specific to the Route 33 District and that the suggestion would have to be a separate article.

Mr. Canada suggested considering it for next year.

Ms. Price summarized that the Board changes are single-family building footprints not to exceed 3,000 square feet and duplexes and multi-family not to exceed 5,000 square feet.

Tim Lewis, a member of the public, commented that people should be able to do what they want with the property they own; it's New Hampshire.

Mr. Kunowski made a motion to move the proposed amendments to the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage District to the December 17th meeting. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

Ms. Price presented the changes to the proposed amendment to Residential Open Space Cluster Development that were largely to clarify the draft language.

There were no comments from the public or the Board on the changes.

Mr. Kunowski made a motion that the Planning Board approve to substantially amend Article 8 Residential Open Space Cluster Development to strengthen the design criteria and yield plans for residential open space cluster development, limit to four units per cluster, to amend lot sizes and setbacks, and to limit density and move to the town ballot. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.

6. Miscellaneous

A. Proposed additional 2026 Zoning Amendments

Ms. Price explained that the Heritage Commission wants to make some changes in the Route 33 Heritage District (e.g., requiring Preservation Easements) that she discussed with town counsel, who suggested the Town may need to create a Historic District to address those concerns. The Board agreed that town counsel should discuss this with the Heritage Commission to possibly address this in a future year's amendments.

B. Proposed 2026 Planning Board Meeting Schedule

Ms. Price presented a proposed meeting schedule for 2026 that is the first and third Wednesdays of the month, except for July, which would be the second and fourth Wednesdays due to the July 4th holiday. The Board agreed with the proposed schedule, including the change in July 2026.

C. Impact Fees

Ms. Price provided the Board with information on impact fees for consideration. The first step is to have an ordinance that allows an impact fee study to be commissioned. The Rockingham Planning Commission prepared a frequently asked questions document that addresses how impact fees would impact individual projects. It must be used exclusively for capital improvements. She presented information showing impact fees in Rockingham County and asked the Board if there is interest in pursuing this.

Mr. House asked who pays the impact fees. Ms. Price replied that any new person who seeks a permit for new development, for example, a permit for a new or modified water supply service connection.

Mr. House asked if the impact fees go into a fund dedicated to capital improvements. Ms. Price replied that in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan, it would identify a specific need in town services, and the fees would be dedicated to a specific project.

Mr. House asked what kind of development.

Ms. Price replied to any new development, usually residential units, but could also be commercial.

Mr. House asked if it applies to a vacant lot where someone wants to build a house.

Mr. Canada replied that it applies when someone applies for a building permit.

Ms. Price agreed and added that it depends on how it is established.

Mr. Allison commented that it increases taxes frequently, particularly when a property is going from current use to a building lot.

Ms. Price stated she thinks the current use goes to conservation.

Mr. Canada commented that it is difficult to construct affordable housing projects due to the cost, and impact fees will make it even more difficult. He does not agree with charging someone for the privilege of moving into town when they will be paying taxes.

Mr. Allison agrees with respect to residential properties, but thinks there is an opportunity with commercial properties.

Mr. Canada agrees there could be an argument made for commercial properties and gave the example that Stratham does not have a ladder truck, and if someone proposed a five-story structure, then the town would need to look at that.

Mr. House asked if a project came in and the town collected an impact fee, and there was no construction project, what happens with the money.

Mr. Houghton and Ms. Price replied that the town would not collect the fee in that situation. There needs to be a specific project identified.

Ms. Price presented a case study from the Town of Salem that separates residential and non-residential uses. She suggested, if the Board is interested, she can have the Rockingham Planning Commission present to the Board.

Mr. House asked the public if they wanted to speak.

Tim Lewis, member of the public, stated that it is a little obscene to have it tied to specific projects; that if there's no project going on, then nobody pays the fee. He stated that if he develops his property, then he will have that burden where nobody else did. He suggested looking at tying it to real estate sales. He said North Andover does something similar, and that money can be used to buy Open Space like the Scamman Farm Agway building, instead of having that be another car dealership on a beautiful property.

Mr. Kunowski commented that he thinks Stratham missed the opportunity to benefit from impact fees. If this were 20 or 30 years ago, relative to the amount of development in those years, it would have made a difference. He believes that looking forward, the volume of development seems fairly finite and limited. He questions how much can be realized from impact fees in the next ten years.

Mr. Houghton is initially in favor of considering this for the commercial districts, but not for residential properties. He mentioned that many plazas on Route 108 are aging and, at some point, will be redeveloped.

Mr. Lewis commented that if there is nothing on the books, then the Town can't wait for a commercial expansion and then scramble to find a project to fund. He said it doesn't sound like a feasible way to create income for the town, and the town might lose some development because there aren't any shovel-ready projects.

Mr. House, Mr. Houghton, Mr. Kunowski, and Mr. Allison are in favor of hearing more about the

343 topic from the Rockingham Planning Commission. Mr. Canada is not.

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345 **7. Adjournment**

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347 **Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 8:34 pm. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**

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349 *Respectfully submitted by Susan Connors*