



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.

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

46
47 Neil Hanson, Tighe & Bond, spoke on behalf of the Applicant. Mr. Hanson stated that the only
48 changes on the application from the last meeting is the additional waiver request and they have no
49 issue revising the road detail to match town standards. Regarding the waiver request from the
50 stormwater regulations, the area of disturbance is just over 9,000 square feet and there is minimal
51 increase in the stormwater runoff, therefore they believe the project meets the spirit of the
52 regulations and are requesting a waiver. Mr. Hanson read aloud the waiver request that was
53 submitted as part of the application. The Board had no questions on the waiver request.
54

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

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

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

70
71 Mr. House asked if any members of the public wanted to speak. Nobody from the public came
72 forward.

73
74 **Mr. Kunowski made a motion to close the public hearing. Mr. Canada seconded the motion.**
75 **All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**

76
77 Ms. Price stated that there is a draft conditional approval for the Board's consideration that was
78 also sent to the Applicant.

79
80 **Mr. Houghton made a motion that the Planning Board conditionally approve, subject to the**
81 **conditions stated on pages one through five in a draft notice of decision for an amended site**
82 **plan, to extend the existing dead-end fire lane to the existing parking area to create a fire**
83 **access loop around the southeast side of the existing building #1 at One Fine Chocolate Place.**
84 **Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**

85
86 Mr. Allison returned to the board at 7:16 p.m.

87
88 B. Kelly and Michael Guarascio (Applicant and Owner) request for approval of a Conditional Use
89 Permit to construct a 17-foot by 32-foot swimming pool and fencing within the wetlands setback
90 at 4 Tuckers Trail (Tax Map 24, Lot 48) in the Residential/Agricultural Zoning District.

91
92 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.

126
127 Mr. House recommended that the Applicant discuss the project with the police and fire
128 departments.

129
130 Ms. Price noted that when a formal application is submitted, the project will go through a town
131 department working group.

132
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.

135
136 Ms. Price added that the fire department uses turning templates from Exeter and Portsmouth.

137
138 Mr. Kunowski asked what changes are proposed for signage.

139
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.

143 Mr. Kunowski advised that they make sure it complies with the sign ordinance.
144

145 Mr. Bisbano replied that the signage vendor will complete a separate study that will be submitted
146 with the final application for reference.
147

148 Mr. Kunowski asked if there would be a drive-up window. Mr. Bisbano replied no.
149

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.
158

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.
163

164 Mr. Bisbano agreed and added that the existing parking in the front is primarily in the setback as
165 well.
166

167 Mr. Allison asked if there is an attic in the existing building.
168

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.
176

177 Mr. Bisbano replied yes, it is a code requirement.
178

179 Mr. House asked how someone in a wheelchair would get downstairs to use the bathroom.
180

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.
183

184 Mr. House thanked Mr. Bisbano for his presentation.
185

186 5. Public Hearing

187 A. Proposed 2026 Zoning Amendments.
188

189 Ms. Price stated there are four proposed amendments for tonight, the first is a housekeeping clause
190 for technical corrections.
191

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

193
194 **Amendments, to add a new subsection 21.2 called Technical Corrections and move to the**
195 **town ballot. Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**

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

198
199 **Mr. Kunowski made a motion that the Planning Board approve to amend Section 4.2 Table**
200 **of Dimensional Requirements and 4.3(i) Explanatory notes to have the footnote be placed in**
201 **the upper left corner of the table and define 4.3 (i) for all lots, and move to the town ballot.**
202 **Mr. Allison seconded the motion. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**

203
204 Ms. Price presented the changes to the proposed amendment to the Route 33 Legacy Highway
205 Heritage District requirements since the last meeting. Changes include applying the density
206 requirements in full two-acre increments and limiting residential building footprints to 5,000
207 square feet.

208
209 The Board discussed building footprint limitations and how it would apply to single-family vs.
210 multi-family homes.

211
212 Mr. Kunowski commented that he is fine with tighter limits, but it seems odd to him that there is
213 no building footprint limitation in the residential/agricultural district, the manufactured housing
214 district, or the retirement planned community district. He stated that if he had a two-acre lot in the
215 residential/agricultural district, he could have a 10,000 square foot footprint.

216
217 Mr. Canada suggested it could be added to those districts as well.

218
219 Mr. Kunowski responded that it goes beyond where the Board started with this amendment.

220
221 Mr. Houghton explained that the evolution of the Route 33 Heritage District was to stimulate
222 adaptive reuse of the property so that owners didn't tear down what was there to create something
223 different and to retain existing structures, which is the Legacy Highway connotation. He believes
224 it creates a uniqueness in zoning.

225
226 Mr. Canada suggested again limiting the other districts as well.

227
228 Mr. House replied that this article is specific to the Route 33 District and that the suggestion would
229 have to be a separate article.

230
231 Mr. Canada suggested considering it for next year.

232
233 Ms. Price summarized that the Board changes are single-family building footprints not to exceed
234 3,000 square feet and duplexes and multi-family not to exceed 5,000 square feet.

235
236 Tim Lewis, a member of the public, commented that people should be able to do what they want
237 with the property they own; it's New Hampshire.

238
239 **Mr. Kunowski made a motion to move the proposed amendments to the Route 33 Legacy**
240 **Highway Heritage District to the December 17th meeting. Mr. Allison seconded the motion.**
241 **All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**

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

245
246 There were no comments from the public or the Board on the changes.
247

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

253
254 **6. Miscellaneous**

255 A. Proposed additional 2026 Zoning Amendments

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

261
262 B. Proposed 2026 Planning Board Meeting Schedule

263 Ms. Price presented a proposed meeting schedule for 2026 that is the first and third Wednesdays
264 of the month, except for July, which would be the second and fourth Wednesdays due to the July
265 4th holiday. The Board agreed with the proposed schedule, including the change in July 2026.

266
267 C. Impact Fees

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

274
275 Mr. House asked who pays the impact fees. Ms. Price replied that any new person who seeks a
276 permit for new development, for example, a permit for a new or modified water supply service
277 connection.

278
279 Mr. House asked if the impact fees go into a fund dedicated to capital improvements. Ms. Price
280 replied that in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan, it would identify a specific need in town
281 services, and the fees would be dedicated to a specific project.

282
283 Mr. House asked what kind of development.

284
285 Ms. Price replied to any new development, usually residential units, but could also be
286 commercial.

287
288 Mr. House asked if it applies to a vacant lot where someone wants to build a house.

289
290 Mr. Canada replied that it applies when someone applies for a building permit.
291 Ms. Price agreed and added that it depends on how it is established.

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

295
296 Ms. Price stated she thinks the current use goes to conservation.
297

298 Mr. Canada commented that it is difficult to construct affordable housing projects due to the cost,
299 and impact fees will make it even more difficult. He does not agree with charging someone for the
300 privilege of moving into town when they will be paying taxes.
301

302 Mr. Allison agrees with respect to residential properties, but thinks there is an opportunity with
303 commercial properties.
304

305 Mr. Canada agrees there could be an argument made for commercial properties and gave the
306 example that Stratham does not have a ladder truck, and if someone proposed a five-story structure,
307 then the town would need to look at that.
308

309 Mr. House asked if a project came in and the town collected an impact fee, and there was no
310 construction project, what happens with the money.
311

312 Mr. Houghton and Ms. Price replied that the town would not collect the fee in that situation. There
313 needs to be a specific project identified.
314

315 Ms. Price presented a case study from the Town of Salem that separates residential and non-
316 residential uses. She suggested, if the Board is interested, she can have the Rockingham Planning
317 Commission present to the Board.
318

319 Mr. House asked the public if they wanted to speak.
320

321 Tim Lewis, member of the public, stated that it is a little obscene to have it tied to specific projects;
322 that if there's no project going on, then nobody pays the fee. He stated that if he develops his
323 property, then he will have that burden where nobody else did. He suggested looking at tying it to
324 real estate sales. He said North Andover does something similar, and that money can be used to
325 buy Open Space like the Scamman Farm Agway building, instead of having that be another car
326 dealership on a beautiful property.
327

328 Mr. Kunowski commented that he thinks Stratham missed the opportunity to benefit from impact
329 fees. If this were 20 or 30 years ago, relative to the amount of development in those years, it would
330 have made a difference. He believes that looking forward, the volume of development seems fairly
331 finite and limited. He questions how much can be realized from impact fees in the next ten years.
332

333 Mr. Houghton is initially in favor of considering this for the commercial districts, but not for
334 residential properties. He mentioned that many plazas on Route 108 are aging and, at some point,
335 will be redeveloped.
336

337 Mr. Lewis commented that if there is nothing on the books, then the Town can't wait for a
338 commercial expansion and then scramble to find a project to fund. He said it doesn't sound like a
339 feasible way to create income for the town, and the town might lose some development because
340 there aren't any shovel-ready projects.
341

342 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.
344

345 **7. Adjournment**
346

347 **Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 8:34 pm. All voted in favor, and the motion passed.**
348

349 *Respectfully submitted by Susan Connors*