



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes

April 6, 2022

Stratham Municipal Center

Time: 7:00 pm

Member Present: Tom House, Chair
David Canada, Vice Chair
Mike Houghton, Selectmen's Representative
Chris Zaremba, Member

Members Absent: Pamela Hollasch, Regular Member

Staff Present: Mark Connors, Town Planner

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Mr. House called the meeting to order and took roll call.

2. Approval of Minutes

a. March 16, 2022

Mr. House made a motion to approve the draft meeting minutes of March 16, 2022. Mr. Canada seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Motion passed.

3. Public Hearing:

a. Public hearing for consideration of adoption of a Special Event Permit Program into the Stratham Site Plan Regulations, codified as new section 3.6 'Special Events.'

Mr. House asked Mr. Connors to introduce this item. Mr. Connors said that the Planning Board had discussed this item at two previous meetings and set the public hearing for tonight. At the most recent meeting on March 16, 2022, the Board indicated it was comfortable with the proposed language so no new changes have been incorporated. The Town has not received any public comments related to the proposed Special Event Permit system.

Mr. House said nothing has changed since the Planning Board's last discussion, so all that is needed is a motion to approve, is that correct? Mr. Connors said yes.

40 **Mr. Houghton made a motion to approve the Special Event Permit program as**
41 **documented in the April 6, 2022 staff memo, codified as Section 3.6 “Special Events” in the**
42 **Stratham Site Plan Regulations. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor.**
43 **Motion passed.**
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45 **4. Public Meeting:**

46 **a. Housing and Economic Development Workshop**

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48
49 Mr. Connors said that he had put together some statistics to carry forward the discussion from the
50 last meeting related to housing and employment. These are informational. No action is needed by
51 the Board tonight. Mr. Connors made a presentation to the Board with pertinent statistics to the
52 Board. Rockingham County is the most expensive county for housing in New Hampshire, he
53 said. The housing vacancy rate is very low at less than one percent. The median rent for a
54 twobedroom apartment is \$1,672 based on statistics from last year. That’s an increase of 26
55 percent since 2016. The median sales price for a single-family home in Rockingham County in
56 February 2022 was \$550,000, which is the highest amount ever recorded.
57

58 Mr. Connors said that Rockingham County has one of the highest rates of employment growth
59 in New England. Among large counties it is second only to Suffolk County in Massachusetts,
60 which includes Boston and surrounding communities, for job growth over the last ten years.
61 Other counties with high employment growth include Middlesex County, Mass., which is a
62 large county stretching from Cambridge to the NH border, and York County, Maine, which
63 include most of Southern Maine south of Portland. Mr. Connors showed a graph indicating that
64 Rockingham County had added 10.3 percent new jobs over the last ten years but only 6.4
65 percent new people in population. It is certain that a significant share of people taking new jobs
66 here live in other counties, he said. Mr. Canada asked if these statistics incorporated COVID-19
67 related city-flight. Mr. Connors said somewhat. The population figures are from the Spring 2020
68 so they would only show the very early changes from the pandemic. The employment figures
69 are from the third quarter of 2021, so they incorporate more of that. Mr. House said that some of
70 the new residents are also working in other counties, for example in the Boston Area.
71

72 Mr. Connors said he also wanted to discuss the Housing Appeals Board. This is a new State
73 Board created back in 2019 by the Legislature and Governor Sununu to decide appeals of
74 “questions of housing and housing development.” Mr. Connors said it is likely that Stratham may
75 appear before this Board because many of our surrounding communities have already done so.
76 Mr. Canada noted that an appeal is currently pending where the Town is the defendant. Mr.
77 Connors said that is true but it is Superior Court. The Housing Appeals Board allows for a faster
78 and lower cost appeals process, but that the party appealing has the option to file in Superior
79 Court instead. Housing Appeals Board decisions can be appealed to the NH Supreme Court.
80 Mr. Canada asked if the Supreme Court was required to hear all appeals of the Housing Appeals
81 Board. Mr. Connors said his understanding is that the Court can technically decide not to hear an
82 appeal, but in actuality they accept almost all appeals. He will double-check on that however.
83

84 Mr. Connors noted that the most common outcome from Housing Appeals Board decisions is the
85 Board orders it back to the Town to reconsider part of its decision. Usually in the Board’s
86 perspective the Town made some error in how it reviewed an application. In four cases, the

87 Town's decisions were upheld. In three decisions, there was a split decision or a complete
88 reversal of the Town's decision. Mr. Houghton said it would be helpful to get the Cliff Notes
89 version of why decisions were returned to towns by the Appeals Board. Mr. Connors ran through
90 the facts and basic findings of a few cases he was familiar with. He said he would compile more
91 information for a future meeting.

92
93 Mr. Connors noted that many political office holders on the state level have focused on zoning
94 and land use requirements as the biggest barrier to new housing development in New
95 Hampshire. He said that probably wasn't completely fair, there are many factors that influence
96 housing supply and affordability but there is some validity to criticism of zoning and land use
97 requirements. He pointed to the example of Hanover, NH, which has a significant housing
98 shortage. The Official Zoning Map significantly limits new areas for housing development. At
99 least 95 percent of the town's land area prohibits new housing or limits it to very large lots.

100
101 Mr. Canada said that there is a lot more than just zoning that contributes to this, although zoning
102 is a big part of it. The cost of land is very high and the cost of materials for new homes has
103 skyrocketed recently. He noted the example of a manufactured home that had doubled in price
104 over just five years.

105
106 Mr. Zaremba asked Mr. Connors if the Community College would be returning to the Board.
107 Mr. Connors said yes, they are scheduled for the next meeting for a preliminary discussion. The
108 Board discussed the importance of the site for new more affordable housing. Mr. House asked if
109 Stratham should have a Housing Committee? Mr. Connors said the Town could certainly create
110 one - Exeter has one - but the Planning Board is very focused on housing issues so it might not
111 be necessary.

112 113 **b. Miscellaneous Planning Issues** 114

115 Mr. House noted that Denise Lemire, the Building/Code Enforcement Coordinator had submitted
116 her notice to resign her town employment effective at the end of next week. Mr. House noted
117 Denise is a valued town employee and familiar face to many in town. On behalf of the Planning
118 Board, I would like to thank her for her many years of service to the Planning Board and to the
119 community and to wish her well in her future endeavors.

120
121 Mr. Connors announced that a candidate had submitted an application to serve on the Planning
122 Board. As you know, there are currently two vacancies on the Board for alternate positions. He
123 briefly described the candidate. The Board asked Mr. Connors to ask the candidate to attend the
124 Board's next meeting, where there will be a full agenda, so he can get a better sense of the Board
125 and if the Planning Board is an appropriate fit for his interests.

126
127 As a last item, Mr. Connors reminded the Board that the Regional Planning Commission is
128 assisting the Town with an Age Friendly Survey which looks at making Town services more
129 accessible for an aging population. He asked the Board to help spread the word to encourage
130 residents to take the survey.

131 132 **5. Adjournment** 133

134 Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 7:40 pm. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. Motion
135 carried unanimously.

136 *Note(s):*

137 *1. Materials related to the above meeting are available for review at the Municipal Center during normal business hours.*
138 *For more information, contact the Stratham Planning Office at 603-772-7391 ext. 147.*

139 *2. The Planning Board reserves the right to take item, out of order and to discuss and/or vote on items that are not listed*
140 *on the agenda.*

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