



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes
July 13, 2022
Stratham Municipal Center
Time: 7:00 pm

Member Present: Thomas House, Chair
David Canada, Vice Chair
Mike Houghton, Select Board's Representative
Chris Zaremba, Regular Member
John Kunowski, Alternate 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. Mr. House appointed Mr. Kunowski as a voting member for the meeting.

2. Approval of Minutes

a. June 22, 2022

The approval of minutes from June 22, 2022. Edits were discussed. Line 29, Mr. Kunowski meant to say April 20th. Lines 64 and 65 regarding Mr. Houghton's question was clarified. Additional questions on who was speaking throughout the minutes were addressed. Mr. Zaremba made a motion to approve the draft minutes as amended. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

b. April 20, 2022

Mr. Canada made a motion to approve the draft minutes. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

3. Public Hearing:

- a. Tulip Tree, LLC (Owner), Kyle & Sophie Saltonstall (Applicants) - Request for approval of a site plan amendment to allow for modifications to the landscape plan associated with an event venue, non-profit lodge, and private school use at 61 Stratham Heights Road (Tax Map 5, Lot 81) approved by the Planning Board on March 6, 2019, Zoned Residential Agricultural.**

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Mr. House explained that the Applicant has requested this hearing be postponed until August 17, 2022. Mr. House asked for a discussion. There was no discussion.

Mr. Canada made a motion to postpone the public hearing to August 17, 2022. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. Mr. Kunowski recused himself from the motion. The motion was approved with one recusal.

- b. To amend Section 4.2.7 of the Site Plan Regulations for the purposes of adding application fees for applications submitted under the Route 33 Neighborhood Heritage District.

Mr. House requested that Mr. Connors explain the topic. Since the last meeting, Mr. Connors researched what other towns charge for application fees and provided the planning board with a summary chart. There was discussion at the last meeting if Stratham should increase the fees. Stratham’s model is the first type in the state so there is no exact corollary to what we are doing. The closest in New Hampshire is the Historic District Commission which about 50 towns have some sort of Historic District Commission and most of them collect a fee as part of their application structure. Fees for some towns are listed in the chart. Most have a flat fee for minor or major projects. Two towns have a sliding structure. Kingston starts at \$25 and if you are constructing a new commercial building the fee is \$500 as the base fee. Portsmouth has the highest fee that starts at \$100 and is capped at \$5,000. Mr. House asked if there is a descriptive criteria for each monetary value. Mr. Canada responded that the higher end is generally commercial. Mr. House asked how, for example, it is determined if a project fee is \$3,000 vs. \$4,000 vs. \$5,000. Mr. Connors responded that it is based on the square footage of the development.

Mr. Houghton stated that Stratham wouldn’t need to be concerned with the density of applications as he doesn’t believe we will get besieged with these and have to hire staff to manage it. Mr. Houghton doesn’t have a sense of the administrative burden but Stratham should be setting the fee to reasonably manage the administrative burden associated with the applications and include the other fees related to sending notices to abutters. It is appropriate to have a fee associated with abutter notification and an appropriate fee to process the application. Mr. House believes the fee should be “per abutter”. Mr. Canada agrees that the fee should be “per abutter”. Mr. House and Mr. Houghton do not like the sliding fee. Mr. Houghton reiterates that there are two administrative areas to address with the fee: the staff time accepting and processing the application and the cost of mailing the abutter notification. The “per abutter” fee would address the notification piece and the staff time processing the application would also need to be covered.

Mr. Connors believes the staff time depends on the complexity of the project. A residential addition requires minimal staff time, but a new development would require more staff time. Mr. Connors likes the idea of some sort of sliding scale and notes that if, for example, if the project is five new housing units, the fees won’t impact the development. But for a homeowner completing a minor project, Mr. Connors would advocate keeping the fees as low as possible. Discussion continued that Stratham should cover our costs and not more than that. Mr. Connors stated that the building permit fees are based on the cost of the development and the planning

87 board fees are based on the size of the development: \$150 flat fee and \$100 per 1,000 square feet.
88 Mr. House noted that's not really a sliding scale and without a cap, the fee could be high. Mr.
89 Connors presented the existing building permit and Planning Board fees as a comparison. Mr.
90 House asked if the fees cover third party engineering fees hired by the Town. No. Mr. Connors
91 replied that engineering would not be part of the Heritage phase, but instead part of the Planning
92 Board phase. Mr. Zaremba asked if an application can expire, for example, if the applicant
93 doesn't perform on other requirements. Mr. Connors replied yes, an applicant has 120 days to
94 satisfy conditions of a Planning Board approval. Then the applicant has 18 months to apply for a
95 building permit.

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97 Mr. Canada indicated he had a problem with major commercial being charged on a per square
98 foot basis as he does not see the administrative burden being larger. It's not like a building
99 permit that needs continual follow-up. He believes that \$150 plus a \$100 per 1,000 square foot
100 sounds steep. Mr. Houghton suggested making the fee \$300 per project, but again asked about
101 the value of the staff time. Mr. Connors suggested having a cap on the fee with the cost per
102 square foot. Mr. Canada noted that Portsmouth wants to be a partner with their development.
103 Mr. Canada noted that Portsmouth has a lower tax rate than Stratham and their administrative
104 layers are incredible. Portsmouth's larger commercial base contributes to the lower tax rate, but
105 also by charging high fees, so he does not think it is a good example for Stratham.

106
107 Mr. Canada would like to see a reasonable cap or a flat fee, but did not have a suggestion on a
108 reasonable cap and noted that a couple hundred dollars should not make or break a project. Mr.
109 House asked Mr. Connors' opinion. Mr. Connors suggested a cap of \$400 and a minimum fee of
110 \$150 or \$200. Discussion ensued and Mr. House asked the board if they would like to set the
111 base fee at \$50 and new residential application fee at \$150 plus \$100 per new housing unit. Mr.
112 House mentioned the work of meeting with the HAC group, reviewing the application, preparing
113 comments and asked Mr. Connors to estimate staff time for a small residential project. Mr.
114 Connors would advocate for a lower fee of \$100 and \$75. Mr. Houghton reiterates the fee should
115 cover the time value associated with the work and the applicant should cover that cost. If the fees
116 are set too low, then the taxpayers of Stratham are paying for the applicant's project. Mr.
117 Houghton compared the staff time to review a small residential lot project vs. the tech college at
118 90 acres. It is not unreasonable to charge for the work performed or undercharge for the work
119 and have the taxpayers subsidize the project. Mr. Houghton suggested that Mr. Connors take
120 some time to consider the administrative costs and suggested that some categories may not have
121 wide variability but other categories where there may be wide variabilities in complexity. Mr.
122 Canada recommends adopting interim fees tonight in case an application is submitted.
123 Discussion continued and Mr. Connors noted that the quality of the application can affect the
124 amount of time spent. Mr. House suggested considering the worst case scenario. Mr. House
125 suggested tabling the discussion and the public meeting, have Mr. Connors come back with some
126 more details on staff time review of applications, open the hearing up to the public if anyone
127 attends, and then close the hearing, and then vote. Mr. Canada noted that carrying the public
128 hearing over might eliminate the need to re-advertise. Mr. Connors responded exactly. Mr.
129 Canada asked if they could still establish interim fees and Mr. Connors responded yes.

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131 **Mr. Canada made a motion to open the public hearing. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion.**
132 **All voted in favor. Mr. Canada made a motion to close the public hearing. Mr. Zaremba**
133 **seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion was approved.**
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135 **Mr. Canada made a motion to adopt the following interim fee schedule for Route 33**
136 **Heritage District application fees: base fee/existing residential/agricultural applications is**
137 **\$50; the new residential application fee is \$150 plus \$100 per new housing unit; minor**
138 **commercial/mixed use applications is \$150 where no more than 1,500 square feet of**
139 **additional interior space is proposed; and major commercial/mixed use applications is \$150**
140 **plus \$100 per 1,000 square feet where more than 1,500 square feet of additional interior**
141 **space is proposed and to be capped at \$450. The fees will remain in place until revised at**
142 **the continued public hearing on September 7, 2022. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion.**
143 **All voted in favor and the motion was approved.**
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145 **4. Public Meeting:**

146 **a. Potential land donation of 18 Jana Lane to Town of Stratham**

147 Mr. Connors presented the topic. The property is 0.84 acres on Jana Lane in Stratham. Mr. and
148 Mrs. Young, the owners, previously lived adjacent to this property that abuts the Salt River
149 Association Conservation Land which is open to the public for passive recreation uses like
150 hiking, cross country skiing, picnicking, and even for boating access to Squamscott River. The
151 land abuts other land owned by the State of New Hampshire and the Town of Stratham which are
152 also open for public access. There is an opportunity for Stratham to build a trailhead on the
153 property to access the adjacent conservation land potentially with a small parking area. Mr.
154 Canada asked for confirmation that it is not a buildable lot. Mr. Connors believes that it is not
155 buildable based on some information that the Youngs presented to Stratham, but buildable for a
156 trailhead and limited parking is very different than buildable for a single-family structure. Mr.
157 Connors referred to the letter and maps submitted to the Select Board from the Youngs.
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161 Mr. Canada asked if there is any liability to Stratham and suggested the tax value must be low if
162 it is not buildable. The Youngs had the land for sale for \$125,000 and the tax assessor increased
163 the assessed value, but they could not find a buyer and submitted to the assessor an opinion from
164 a wetlands scientist who believes the lot is quite wet and would be very difficult to build a home
165 on. Based on the information submitted, the tax assessor reduced the assessed value to
166 approximately \$20,000. Mr. Houghton asked if we have access to New Hampshire Fish and
167 Game's parcels for trails and walking. Mr. Connors replied yes. Mr. Houghton stated it would be
168 nice to get this parcel to connect to Salt River, come down Linda Lane to New Hampshire Fish
169 and Game's parcel to Turnberry. Mr. Connors stated that unfortunately Turnberry does not allow
170 public access.
171

172 Mr. Kunowski asked if Stratham were to acquire this, would there be a problem with abutters
173 with regards to the public access? Would the abutters have a say if Stratham could make it a
174 trailhead? Mr. Connors does not believe it would be problematic; this would be a Town project
175 and we would probably notify abutting property owners as a courtesy. We would obviously want

176 to work with the abutting property owners, he said. Mr. Zaremba asked if there were reasons to
177 not accept the donation? Discussion ensued that it would be removed from the tax revenue base
178 but is a nominal value. Mr. Zaremba noted there would be a cost to maintaining the trailhead, but
179 is a separate discussion and not pertinent. Mr. Connors noted that the downside is that we find
180 out it is completely wet and we cannot build a trail. If that were the case, there may be another
181 town use for it, for example perhaps a fire department use, but there is very limited downside.
182 Mr. Canada asked for confirmation that the Planning Board is reviewing this because the Select
183 Board asked for a recommendation. Mr. Connors replied yes.

184
185 **Mr. Canada moved that the Planning Board recommend to the Select Board to accept the**
186 **donation because there is very little downside and the tax benefit is minimal. Mr. Zaremba**
187 **seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion was approved.**
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189 **b. Formation of the Pedestrian-Bicycle Sub-Committee of the Planning Board.**
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191 Mr. House asked if Ms. Hollasch is on the sub-committee. Mr. Connors replied yes and that he'd
192 like to present this topic with the Master Plan Implementation topic regarding walking, biking,
193 and automobiles which is listed later in the agenda. Stratham has had for many years the PCAC
194 (Pedestrian and Cyclist Advocacy Committee). The charge of the PCAC was approved annually
195 by the Select Board, but it was a very independent Committee. This year it was felt that some
196 changes might be beneficial and that discussion moved toward creating a subcommittee of the
197 Planning Board focused specifically on pedestrian and bicycle issues. It would change from an
198 advocacy committee however, to one that makes recommendations to the Planning Board and is
199 delegated certain tasks by the Board. The Planning Board could delegate specific activities to the
200 committee with deadlines for completion. The Sub-Committee would also be staffed by the
201 Planning Department so staff would help address these tasks.

202
203 The committee has been inactive since the start of the year and we've been recruiting people to
204 serve on it. We have a group of four members of the public and Ms. Hollasch has volunteered to
205 be the Planning Board representative. There could be a second Planning Board representative if
206 any other members are interested in serving on it. The committee would like specific tasks
207 designated to them. Mr. Connors presented ten recommendations from the 2019 Master Plan and
208 three suggested tasks to the Planning Board.

209
210 Mr. House asked if there was a consultant who worked on the first recommendation in the past.
211 Mr. Houghton believes there was someone from the State Transportation Department who gave a
212 presentation on the first recommendation of adopting a "Complete Streets" policy. Mr. House
213 suggested we find and review that presentation. Mr. Houghton stated that part of the outcome of
214 that presentation was bicycle lanes that were created in certain places around town. Mr. Connors
215 stated the second recommendation related to "Green Streets" might be able to merge with the
216 first recommendation to address both issues at once.

217
218 There are three suggested tasks for the sub-committee. The first is to produce a draft Complete
219 Streets Policy for the consideration of the Planning Board and the Select Board including
220 specific corridors or roadways where pedestrian and bicycle accommodations would be most
221 impactful. The second is to advise the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Open
222 Space Plan Committee (which has not been formed yet) on recommendations related to the Open
223 Space and Connectivity Plan and participate in public outreach activities associated with the

224 plan's development. Mr. Connors stated this task will be a big project and will take up a lot of
225 the Town's time in the fall of 2022 and into the spring of 2023.
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227 The final task is to advise the Planning Board and Select Board on pedestrian and bicycle
228 accommodations associated with any NHDOT sponsored transportation improvements and
229 participate in public outreach activities including public hearings, associated with the NHDOT-
230 sponsored projects. Mr. Connors stated Stratham may have one project this year that will be
231 presented to the Select Board in August. NHDOT suggested making some changes to Route 33
232 in Stratham and Greenland that involves changing the land widths and shoulder lengths and
233 possibly adding some accommodations for cyclists and pedestrians. Mr. Canada asked if the
234 Bunker Hill Avenue intersection plans include sidewalks. Mr. Connors replied that they do not.
235 Mr. Canada stated that we should lobby for sidewalks and noted that sidewalks in the town
236 center were funded by state and federal money. Mr. Connors agreed and added that at least a
237 crosswalk would be good. Mr. House asked if the recommendations in the Master Plan are
238 prioritized so that number 1 is the first item accomplished. A discussion followed concluding that
239 the ordering of the recommendations was not a prioritization. Mr. Zaremba asked if Mr. Connors
240 is looking for the Planning Board to authorize the group as a sub-committee. Mr. Connors
241 responded that the Planning Board does not have to tonight, but they can and that one member of
242 the group has asked to not start until September. Mr. Houghton agrees with the three tasks
243 suggested by Mr. Connors to get started.
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245 **Mr. Houghton made a motion to form the Pedestrian-Bicycle Sub-Committee of the**
246 **Planning Board. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion**
247 **was approved.**
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249 c. Discussion of Transportation Planning Priorities
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251 Mr. Connors stated that the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) asked the town to
252 prioritize projects in the Long Range Transportation Plan which the RPC maintains. The plan
253 is like a master plan for transportation projects in the region. There are four projects in
254 Stratham in the plan. Most of the projects have not yet been engineered and therefore there is
255 not a lot of detail as to what each project encompasses.
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257 The largest project is the reconfiguration of the traffic circle to make it more pedestrian
258 friendly and town center like. The idea is to change the configuration from one large traffic
259 circle to two smaller circles with sidewalks and other amenities. This project is the highest
260 budget item in Stratham in the Long Range Transportation Plan. The RPC advised that this will
261 be the hardest project to get into the 10 year plan because of the expense. The estimated cost is
262 over \$5 million. Stratham residents rated this project as a 5.7 out of 10 points. The 2nd project
263 is to add bicycle lanes or expanded shoulders to Squamscott Road which is a State road. Mr.
264 Canada asked where the Bunker Hill Avenue projects fits into this. Mr. Connors replied that it
265 is in the 10 year plan and already funded. The third project is the Portsmouth Avenue and
266 Frying Pan Lane intersection improvements. It does not specifically state signalization
267 improvements, but that could be included. The fourth project is Marin Way and NH Route 111
268 intersection improvements which could include a roundabout or traffic signal and dedicated
269 turn lanes. That project was rated lowest by Stratham residents with a 3.9 out of 10. The last
270 project is not currently in the Long Range Transportation Plan but was asked on the survey and
271 it ranked the highest. The project is to implement pedestrian and cyclist improvements to
272 Portsmouth Avenue focusing on the Gateway District. Mr. Kunowski asked if that project

273 would include the Frying Pan Lane project. Mr. Connors replied no because the Frying Plan
274 Lane project is more focused on vehicular traffic. Mr. Canada asked if the Frying Plan Lane
275 project would include aligning River Road. Mr. Connors replied that the Frying Plan Lane
276 project references River Road so it may include it but it does not specifically indicate the
277 intersection would be re-aligned. Mr. Canada asked if signalization is included. Mr. Connors
278 replied that the details are vague. The last project is the Portsmouth Avenue project and is not
279 in the long range plan.

280
281 Mr. House asked if sidewalks would be installed since it is a state road. Discussion continued
282 regarding sidewalks and their location relative to private property or in a state right of way.
283 Either way, NHDOT would require the community to maintain the sidewalks. Mr. House asked
284 if there is any action required for this. Mr. Connors replied yes and asked if the Planning Board
285 would like to add the Portsmouth Avenue project to the Long Range Transportation Plan. All
286 were in agreement to add it. Mr. Connors asked which of those five projects would be ranked
287 first and second in importance for Stratham. Discussion ensued and the Planning Board
288 determined that the Portsmouth Ave pedestrian/bicycle improvements and the Frying Pan Lane
289 intersection improvements are the top two priorities. Mr. Connors asked if the Planning Board
290 wants Stratham to write a letter to Exeter asking Exeter to nominate the Marion Way project.
291 Although the project affects traffic in Stratham, it is located in Exeter and the town where the
292 project is located should nominate the project. The Planning Board agrees with sending a letter
293 to Exeter.

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295 **d. Master Plan Implementation**

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297 This agenda item was discussed previously with the Formation of the Pedestrian-Bicycle Sub-
298 Committee of the Planning Board agenda item.

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300 **e. Miscellaneous Community Planning Issues.**

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302 Mr. Connors mentioned that the RPC is working on the regional housing needs assessment.
303 They have public outreach events scheduled on the 20th and 28th. They will be during the day
304 and if members cannot attend there is a survey that members can complete.

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306 The next Planning Board meeting is August 3, 2022.

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308 **Adjournment:**

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310 Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn at 8:23 pm. Mr. Zaremba seconded the motion. All voted in
311 favor and the motion was approved.

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