



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes
March 15, 2023
Stratham Municipal Center
Time: 7:00 pm

Members Present: Thomas House, Chair
David Canada, Vice Chair
John Kunowski, Regular Member
Nate Allison, Alternate Member

Members Absent: Mike Houghton, Select Board's Representative
Chris Zarembo, Regular Member

Staff Present: Mark Connors, Town Planner

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Mr. House called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and took roll call. Mr. House appointed Mr. Allison to serve as a voting member for this meeting.

2. Approval of Minutes

a. February 15, 2023

Mr. Canada made a motion to approve the February 15, 2023 meeting minutes. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion was approved.

3. Public Meeting:

a. Consideration of Climate Change/Renewable Energy Sub-Committee

Mr. Connors presented the topic. In the past, Mr. Houghton suggested that the Planning Board review the solar ordinance. Minor amendments have been passed over the last two years, but there is interest in a big picture review. At the voter information night this year, there was a question from a member of the public as to why the Town limits the maximum size of a ground mounted solar array. It was suggested to be too restrictive. One idea is to bring together representatives of the Energy Committee, Conservation Commission, Heritage Commission, and Planning Board to take a big picture review of what we are currently doing and would like to do in town. Mr. Connors suggested this can be an addendum to the Master Plan because the Master Plan touches on the issues, but does not get into the subject too deeply.

Mr. Connors presented a number of questions for consideration including:

- Should the Town evaluate Town-owned buildings and properties for potential renewable energy systems?
- Should the Town permit small residential ground-mounted solar installations in the side and rear yards by right without the need for Planning Board approval?
- Should the Town prohibit ground-mounted solar installations in front yards?
- Should the Town require that large new developments or redevelopments be served by renewable energy facilities and/or that electric vehicle charging infrastructure be provided?
- Should the Town join the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire?
- Should the Town take a greater role in distributing informational and educational materials encouraging sound environmental practices among residents?
- Should the Town adopt regulations or policies related to the provision of renewable energy facilities in Open Space Cluster Subdivisions (particularly in those where no conservation easements are in place)?
- Should the Town adopt policies related to renewable energy facilities in future conservation easement agreements? Should the Town encourage, discourage, or simply prohibit renewable energy facilities on conserved properties?
- Should the Town adopt standards specifically oriented for renewable energy facilities on historic properties?

The Board was supportive of the formation of this sub-committee. Mr. Canada volunteered to be the Planning Board representative on the sub-committee. The Board suggested some talking points for the sub-committee including wind energy systems, energy efficiency of building structures, limiting the scope of the sub-committee to renewable energy and removing “climate change”, and geothermal energy and discussed sub-committee members and the deliverables.

Mr. Canada made a motion to form a Renewable Energy Sub-Committee composed of six members including representatives from the Select Board, Planning Board, Energy Commission, Conservation Commission, Heritage Commission, and one member of the public. An interim report or outline should be made available to the Planning Board by July 1, 2023 and a final report with recommendations should be completed by October 1, 2023. Mr. House seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion was approved.

b. Site Plan Landscaping Standards

Mr. Connors presented the Board with the current landscaping standards in the Site Plan Review Regulations and suggested that the Board review the standards to determine if they are meeting the Town’s goals.

Mr. Kunowski asked what types of projects do the landscaping standards apply to. Mr. Connors replied any commercial developments, but a waiver can be requested for small projects. The standards may also apply to some aspects of a subdivision like common areas and entrances.

Mr. Connors presented photographs of model landscaping in Stratham and other towns.

Mr. Allison commented that with regards to Stratham’s requirement for “street trees”, he would like to see standards for tree spacing, distance to the road, etc. so that they don’t interfere with facades and signage while providing an attractive landscape.

Mr. House agrees that the standards can be updated and suggested the Board review the variety of

93 trees required with regards to the speed of their growth.

94
95 Mr. Allison prefers that a landscape architect prepare required plans because they will take into
96 account the hardiness of species and the location of plantings.

97
98 Mr. Kunowski commented that for some developments landscaping may be more ephemeral than
99 permanent. He asked if a site is redeveloped after 30 or 40 years, does the developer have the right
100 to clear and start over. Mr. Connors replied that could be addressed in the standards. For example,
101 the Town could require that some trees remain.

102
103 Mr. House commented that some buildings have character that the landscaping can compliment.

104
105 Mr. Kunowski asked if the Town has any hardscape parameters. Mr. Connors couldn't specifically
106 recall, but thinks that it might only be a recommendation if included in the regulations. Mr. House
107 suggested that standards for retaining walls be created.

108
109 Mr. Canada agrees the standards should be reviewed.

110
111 Mr. Kunowski asked if anyone from the Town is reviewing submitted landscape plans. Mr.
112 Connors replied that the Town Planner does the review and the Board has the right to request a
113 third party review.

114
115 Mr. Canada asked if the Board has the ability to waive a requirement for a landscape architect and
116 a third party review. Mr. Connors replied yes to both questions.

117
118 Mr. Kunowski asked if the Town has ever challenged a developer after-the-fact that the
119 landscaping does not conform to the presented plan. Mr. Connors replied that the Building
120 Inspector and/or Town Planner perform final inspections prior to issuance of occupancy permits.

121
122 **c. Legislative Update**

123
124 Mr. Connors presented information on House Bill 2 that it proposes to deregulate the requirement
125 for professional certifications for a number of different professions. Particular certifications of
126 interest to the Planning Board include soil scientists, certified wetlands scientists, foresters and
127 landscape architects. Several members of the community have raised concerns with this proposal
128 and have asked if the Planning Board would take a position on this part of the legislation. Mr.
129 Connors suggested that it might be more powerful if the Select Board took a position against
130 deregulating these positions as it represents the entire town instead of those of an individual board
131 or commission.

132
133 Mr. House agrees that the Select Board should write a letter on behalf of the Town against the
134 proposal. Mr. Allison does not think the certifications and licenses should be decertified. Mr.
135 Kunowski agrees that licensing is necessary and the Town should take a position against the bill.
136 Mr. Canada needs to review the proposed language in detail before commenting.

137
138 **Mr. Kunowski made a motion that the Planning Board oppose the removal of certification**
139 **requirements for soil scientists, wetlands scientists, and landscape architects. Mr. Allison**
140 **seconded the motion. There were three votes in favor, Mr. Canada abstained, and the motion**
141 **passed.**

142 **d. Goals for 2024 Zoning Amendments**

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144 Mr. Connors asked the Board if they have any zoning amendment ideas for 2024. Mr. House asked
145 the status of the revised sign ordinance. Mr. Connors replied that it is complete.

146
147 Mr. Canada mentioned a recent news article about a community in Minnesota that wanted to
148 prevent a Dollar store and he asked if there are any types of stores that Stratham should prohibit
149 and asked if it is even possible. Mr. Connors replied that would be controlled in the Table of Uses.

150
151 Mr. Canada wants to discuss the Gateway zoning with respect to development happening on an
152 ad-hoc basis with multiple exemptions being approved to the design regulations put in place. The
153 Gateway is not working well because large projects were envisioned when drafting the ordinance
154 and the projects happening are smaller than anticipated.

155
156 Mr. Allison commented that the electric vehicle charging station requirements should be reviewed
157 with respect to how much they are used. He provided an example that the drivers of vehicles that
158 can travel long distances on one charge won't necessarily use a fee based charging station outside
159 of a gym.

160
161 Mr. House suggested that the Board should review the Master Plan for Board action items.

162
163 **e. Miscellaneous Community Planning Issues**

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165 Mr. Connors briefed the Board on applications that will be forthcoming including: Aberdeen West,
166 the property on the other side of Smyk Park, Lindt Chocolate loading dock expansion, and 13-15
167 Stoneybrook.

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169 **Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:22 pm. Mr. Allison seconded the motion.**
170 **All voted in favor and the motion was approved.**