



TOWN OF STRATHAM

Incorporated 1716

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TO: Members of the Planning Board
FROM: Mark Connors, AICP, Town Planner
DATE: March 11, 2021
RE: **Flexible Mixed-Use District (former NH Technical College site)**

The former New Hampshire Technical College site at 275 Portsmouth Avenue is unique in Stratham. Spanning 90 acres, including a 110,000 square-foot building and 475 parking spaces, the site represents the single largest vacant commercial property in Stratham and one of the largest in the Seacoast Region. This parcel has come up several times in the Planning Board's discussions regarding housing in Stratham, and this memo provides some background regarding the history of the property as well as the Flexible Mixed-Use District, which was created for this parcel.

Property Background

The following timeline outlines some of the major events in the recent history of the site.



- 1980: Final plans are submitted to the Town for the construction of the New Hampshire Vocational Technical College - Seacoast Area in Stratham.
- 1982: Construction is completed on the three story, 110,000 square-foot facility and the first classes are offered there.
- 1989: The college changes its name to NH Community Technical College - Stratham.
- 1993: The college opens a satellite campus at the Pease International Tradeport in Portsmouth.
- 2005: The New Hampshire State Legislature passes legislation to close the Stratham community college campus and consolidate operations in Portsmouth. The legislation requires the Stratham property be sold for "not less than its fair market appraised value."
- 2007: In anticipation of the closure of the Stratham facility, Town voters approve a new Zoning District for the community college parcel. Called the Flexible Mixed-Use District, the new zoning designation allows a variety of commercial and residential uses.

- 2008: Webster Continuing Care presents preliminary plans to the Planning Board to transform the property into a senior housing and “aging in place” community. The company signs a Purchase and Sales Agreement with the State.
- 2009: The Community College system opens a renovated facility at the Pease Tradeport and the Stratham campus closes.
- 2010: The State terminates the Purchase and Sales Agreement with Webster Continuing Care for failure to meet specified deliverables.
- 2011: Heating service is disconnected and the building is winterized.
- 2013: The NH Executive Council formally approves the sale of the property to Juliet Marine Systems for \$2.75 million. Juliet Marine Systems announces plans to utilize the property as a Research and Development facility, employing approximately 200 people, for the manufacture of a stealth defense vessel known as the “Ghost Ship.” Then Chancellor of the Community College System notes that the sale “is a win for the New Hampshire economy” that will “create jobs, expand relationships with local suppliers, and support the local tax base.” Juliet Marine Systems presents preliminary plans to the Planning Board regarding its plans for the parcel.



- 2014: The Community College System completes the sale of the property to Juliet Marine Systems. In a unique arrangement, a mortgage agreement is executed where the company makes mortgage payments directly to the Community College System, with final payment due in October 2024. The mortgage deed requires Juliet Marine to “keep the Property in good condition and repair and... make no waste of the Property.” The mortgage deed also requires Juliet Marine to obtain written permission from the Community College System before the sale or lease of any part of the property or before any major repairs, renovations, or improvements are undertaken.
- 2018: A news report notes that the building and property continue to sit vacant and deteriorating. The report notes that the property is listed as for sale or lease. The Community College System notes the company is current on its mortgage payments. A company representative notes that “there’s a lot of interest in the property and we are regularly showing it.” Press reports indicate the US Navy is not interested in the Ghost Ship technology and that the company is in discussions with US-allied nations.
- 2019: The Code Enforcement Officer issues an enforcement letter to the property owner requiring that the owner stop utilizing the site for vehicle storage or obtain necessary Town approvals.
- 2021: The property continues to sit vacant and remains listed for sale or lease. No building permits for repairs or renovations to the facility have been issued by the Town since 2014 when Juliet Marine Systems obtained ownership. The property is currently assessed at \$2.055 million by the Town.

Flexible Mixed-Use District

The Flexible Mixed-Use District allows senior housing, congregate care facilities, retirement homes, and Retirement Planned Communities by right. Single-family housing, and duplexes are also permitted. Multi-family housing is permitted by Conditional Use Permit only and is limited to 2-bedroom units only. Workforce housing, including elderly workforce housing, is also permitted by Conditional Use Permit.

The district also allows for a variety of commercial uses by right including educational facilities, hotels and conference centers, indoor recreation centers and health clubs, and medical offices and facilities. Other commercial uses are permitted by Conditional Use Permit, including restaurants, banks, general commercial and retail, cultural uses, and outdoor recreation/entertainment uses.

Currently, residential housing is the strongest driver of the real estate market. As written, the zoning incentivizes Planned Retirement Communities (age 55 and over housing) over other forms of housing. The reason for this is that this use enjoys special allowances under the Zoning Ordinance, including no minimum lot sizes, maximum density determined by NHDES septic system design rules, a maximum of 24 units per building (where other multi-family uses are restricted to a maximum of eight units per building), reduced wetland setbacks of 50-feet (where they range from 50 to 100 feet for other uses depending on the soils classification).

The Planning Board should discuss whether it would like to modify the zoning such that all housing types, regardless of whether they are age-restricted or not, enjoy the same regulatory approach such that one is not incentivized over the other. Some very simple measures would be to allow multi-family housing and workforce housing by right in this district, as we do for senior housing, and to remove the restriction that limits multi-family housing to 2-bedroom units only. Additional incentives could be created for multi-family and workforce housing, such that they are equivalent to Planned Retirement Communities (PRCs), or the incentives for PRCs could be reduced.

The Board also may want to consider the commercial uses allowed by right and those permitted by Conditional Use Permit. If the Board is interested in further incentivizing commercial development, it may want to consider allowing restaurants, banks/financial services, cultural uses by right instead of by Conditional Use Permit.

Moving Forward

Since this only a single parcel owned by a single owner, the Board may want to consider inviting the property owner to meet with the Board to see if there are any measures the Town can take to promote the redevelopment of the property. Since the Community College System of NH still enjoys some authority over the property, the Board could also invite representatives from CCSNH to participate.







3.7 FLEXIBLE/MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT (03/07)**3.7.1 Purpose.**

This section provides for the redevelopment of the NH Community Technical College site, which is a very unique property in Stratham. If no opportunity for change were provided for within this ordinance, proposed reuses could be limited to state, federal or other governmental institutional uses.

The purpose and goals of this section are to provide for the possible redevelopment of the site within the following guidelines:

- a. To encourage a mixed-use environment, which would allow opportunities to develop or provide for the adaptive reuse of existing structures where flexible performance standards would provide for the protection of abutting neighborhoods, surrounding properties and uses.
- b. To provide for limited commercial, office, and light industrial uses which are similar in nature, and which improve employment opportunities and strengthen the economic base of the town. Such activities should be sensitive to the natural environment, “Dark Sky” lighting standards, adjacent residential areas and other community facilities.
- c. To utilize compact village development guidelines, which would encourage the creation of human-scale development with “Town Center” pedestrian friendly spaces, centralized park areas and recreational opportunities.
- d. To encourage any new development to meet energy efficiency standards and sustainability practices.

In order to maintain protections for surrounding properties, development under this ordinance may require more stringent buffer requirements for neighboring residential zones and uses. Due to the sensitivity of the environment and potential proximity to residential areas only specific alternative uses will be permitted.

3.7.2 Zone Defined.

The Flex/Mixed Use Development Zone District shall include: Map 22, Lot 16.

3.7.3 Allowed Uses.

The following uses are allowed primary uses within the zone:

- a. Retirement Planned Community as defined in section 5.6.
- b. Senior multi-family housing, congregate care facilities, retirement home or other supported or independent living arrangement for active adults.
- c. Adult, family, or child-care facilities.
- d. Educational facilities.
- e. Medical offices, laboratory, clinic, medical support service, or short and long-term care facilities.
- f. Research and development, corporate and business offices.
- g. Professional services.
- h. Hotel/Conference Center and related Facilities.

- i. Indoor recreation/entertainment center/health club.
- j. Those uses currently allowed within the RA and PRE zones unless otherwise prohibited or limited within this section.

The following uses shall require a Conditional Use Permit issued by the Planning Board and shall only be allowed as subordinate or complimentary use to any of the above primary uses:

- a. Multi-family housing, limited to 2-bed room units.
- b. General commercial and/or retail, limited to a maximum of 20,000 S.F. per unit.
- c. Outdoor recreation/entertainment facilities.
- d. Food service or full service restaurant, limited to a maximum of 10,000 S.F. per unit.
- e. Bank (drive-up and/or office) or financial service.
- f. Light Industry.
- g. Cultural uses.
- h. Social service or church/religious use.
- i. Veterinary Hospital or clinic.
- j. Any other use, which may be determined by the Planning Board to be subordinate and/or accessory to a primary allowed use.

3.7.4 Development Standards.

Any re-use of existing structures where no major external changes are made, parking requirements do not exceed current available spaces, no increase in current septic discharge occurs and traffic impacts are not increased from previous community college use shall be treated as a minor site review by the Planning Board with expedited review and approval.

Any proposed new development shall require full site plan review by the Planning Board and comply with the following standards:

- a. All drainage shall be entirely controlled and reintegrated on-site.
- b. Site layout should attempt to reflect a compact village style.
- c. All new construction shall follow environmentally sustainable practices and BMP's, which would qualify for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) credits.
- d. All new site work shall implement Low Impact Development (LID) BMP's.
- e. All signage shall follow the standards within section 7.3 of these ordinances as allowed within the Town Center zone except for setbacks, which shall only apply to an external lot line. The Planning Board through the Site Plan Review process shall approve all internal lot line setbacks for signage.
- f. Any new development shall meet the requirements of Sections 5.2 Landscape Design Standards and Section 5.15 Architectural Plans of the Stratham Site Plan Review Regulations.

In addition the Planning Board through it Site Plan Review and Subdivision application process, may require any additional standards, which shall mitigate adverse impacts from

any proposed uses. The Board may require additional buffers or performance standards, which will reduce or eliminate any objectionable activities or impacts.

3.7.5 Setbacks and Streetscape:

- a. Setbacks to any existing exterior lot line shall be 100’.
- b. Setbacks for any new construction on any new interior street shall be measured as a build-to line of no less than 20’.
- c. All new street construction shall provide for a sidewalk with curbing where appropriate and also where appropriate a 4’ green buffer strip between the paved portion of the street and the sidewalk.
- d. Any new lots within the parcel shall require no more than 50’ of frontage and shall allow for zero lot-line setbacks to allow attached structures or for a 10’ minimum separation between structures.

3.7.6 Prohibited Uses.

The following restrictions shall exist and uses not allowed within the Flex/Mixed Use district:

- a. Adult Oriented Uses.
- b. Recycling Facilities.
- c. Automotive Sales.
- d. Gas/Service Stations.
- e. Junk Yards.
- f. Hazardous Waste Storage.

3.8 GATEWAY COMMERCIAL BUSINESS DISTRICT (REV. 3/11, 3/13, 3/16, 3/17)

3.8.1 Authority:

- a. The action of the Town of Stratham, New Hampshire in the adoption of this Ordinance is authorized under RSA 674:21.II Innovative Land Use Controls and RSA 674:16 Grant of Power.
- b. This Ordinance was adopted to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the Town of Stratham and its citizens, including protection of the environment, conservation of land, energy and natural resources, reduction in vehicular traffic congestion, more efficient use of public funds, health benefits of a pedestrian environment, preservation of community character, education and recreation, reduction in sprawl development, and improvement of the built environment.
- c. This Section was adopted as one of the instruments of implementation of the public purposes and objectives of the Town’s Master Plan. This Ordinance is declared to be in accord with the Master Plan, as required by RSA 674:2.