

TOWN OF STAMFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
September 19, 2022
(UNAPPROVED)

Planning Commission: Debra Burchard, Chair, Carolyn Brooks, Kurt Gamari, Sheila Lawrence, Aaron Malachuk, Daniel Potvin and David Saldo.

Maura Hawkins and Jenifer Hughs were not present.

Visitors: Beth Phelps, Debra Righi, James Righi, and Pamela Tworig.

James Sullivan, Bennington County Regional Commission.

Lori Shepard, Secretary.

Deb Burchard called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

HEARING OF VISITORS

None.

MINUTES

MOTION by Aaron Malachuk to accept the regular meeting minutes of August 1, 2022 as written.

SECONDED by Deb Burchard. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

The board deferred accepting the minutes of August 29, 2022 until the next meeting since not everyone in attendance was at the last meeting.

BY-LAW MODERNIZATION GRANT

Jim Sullivan will be retiring and hopes to assist the town with the next phase of the grant process. He said the village center designation is not a regulatory area. It is a community-oriented area with a focus to allow grant opportunities within its boundary. The next phase would be to create a village zoning district or new land use district. The village center designation area serves as a focal point for the land use district which has boundaries that often extend a quarter mile out. Right now the town has three districts: residential, rural and forest. This next phase gives the town the ability to carve out a fourth district with different regulations. Jim Sullivan explained that possible zoning changes would be:

- to reduce the minimum lot size from two acres to one acre, or possibly lowering it more and considering some form of public/community water and/or wastewater system.
- to increase the maximum building coverage from 30% to 40% of the lot size.
- to reduce the road frontage requirement from 150 feet to 100 feet or less.
- to allow more than three units in a multi-family building and consider lifting the restriction that one of the units be occupied by the owner; i.e. allow apartment buildings.
- to allow for Planned Unit Development with certain density allowances.

Pam Tworig noted that much of the area on the map is within the flood zone. Kurt Gamari stated that the New Development Act makes development exempt from Act 250 to allow for priority housing. Jim Sullivan agreed but said it doesn't exempt the contractor from meeting other state and environmental regulations. Jim Sullivan said the proposed area he drew on the map and presented is just for purposes of discussion. The Planning Commission can determine the boundaries of the district and can decide if they want it, how big they want it and what they want to allow in it. Dan Potvin said he doesn't see people in town wanting to open it up. Aaron Malachuk felt just because the Planning Commission opens up the parameters, it doesn't mean people are going to build here. A lot of the houses in the center of town are already on small lots. Deb Burchard noted that allowing multi-family housing could have a huge impact on paying for students in school. The board talked at length about the potential pros and cons of increased students and whether it would have higher tax consequences. Jim Sullivan agreed that the town needs to decide whether to encourage or discourage growth. He said in many towns families are struggling and the state is

pushing to create more affordable housing by encouraging towns to revise and open up their By-laws. Dan Potvin said houses in the center of town will increase costs because we will have to add public water and/or sewer. Jim Sullivan said it would be a small pre-treatment facility, not the huge type people envision. He said this grant program is designed to promote workforce/affordable housing. The board discussed Alpenwald and its 300 one-acre lots and the environmental problems and headaches it has caused the town. Pam Tworig feels the board will not have the support of the townspeople to change the acreage or character of the town. Jim Sullivan stated that he was hearing a lot of negatives and not too many positives. Carolyn Brooks asked what argument Jim Sullivan would use to promote the By-law changes. He responded that these changes would create a walkable community with houses close together, sidewalks and coffee shops that would attract young people. Jim Sullivan suggested that the board shouldn't move forward if they aren't in agreement with it and if townspeople won't approve more compact development. If the board does not make any qualifying revisions, the \$1,000.00 payment will not be forgiven. He suggested the board talk about it and either drop the whole thing or, in the alternative, they could draft a proposal and hold a public hearing to see if there is any public support.

DISCUSSION OF THE ZONING BY-LAWS

Kurt Gamari would like to review Section 7.2. Dan Potvin said that was put in specifically to allow family members to live on your land. Kurt Gamari felt with long thin lots and a private road you can start accessing all the acreage in back. Increased traffic causes road deterioration and some of our roads are already beyond their capacity. Kurt Gamari was concerned that the town could be pressured into upgrading and taking over the roads. Dan Potvin felt the town does not have to accept them.

Pam Tworig asked if increasing houses in town would affect the town's green energy goal. Jim Sullivan didn't think so and noted that the state has a lot of grants available. Some households can qualify for free weatherization grants, others can get assistance for 50% of the cost through Efficiency Vermont.

Deb Burchard wanted to plan the structure of future meetings. The Planning Commission will break down the By-laws into categories to be reviewed at each meeting. She feels there are a lot of things the board can do to tighten things up. Kurt Gamari feels the board needs to work on definitions, Section 7.2 and the Forest District now that development is no longer under conditional use. He also stated that the By-laws are useless without enforcement. The seasonal camp within a residential area was discussed. Carolyn Brooks suggested hiring a professional, or at a minimum, increasing permit fees or creating an hourly rate so the Zoning Administrator will be paid to follow up on permits and enforcement. Dave Saldo reviewed the Zoning Administrator section of the Selectboard Handbook. It states that it is the Selectboard's job, after consulting with the Planning Commission, to remove the Zoning Administrator for cause. If someone disagrees with the Zoning Administrator's issuance of a permit, they can appeal his decision to the Zoning Board of Adjustment. The Zoning Administrator must administer the By-laws literally and must prohibit any development that is not allowed by the By-laws. Dan Potvin noted that no formal complaint has been made.

The next Planning Commission meeting will be Monday, October 17, 2022 at 6 p.m.

MOTION by Deb Burchard to adjourn. SECONDED by Sheila Lawrence. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Debra Burchard
Planning Commission Chair

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