

TOWN OF STAMFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
November 1, 2021
(UNAPPROVED)

Planning Commission: Debra Burchard, Chair, Helen Fields, Kurt Gamari, John Dupras, Daniel Potvin, Aaron Malachuk, David Saldo, and Sheila Lawrence.

Jenifer Hughs and Annemarie Potvin were not present.

Visitors: Justin Henderson, Elizabeth Hubby, Karen Kuranda, Pamela Tworig, Beth Phelps, Victoria Jefferies, Susan Flash, Carolyn Brooks, and Marta Miller.

Jim 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.

RESIGNATION

Helen Fields read her letter of resignation from the Planning Commission.

MOTION by Dan Potvin to accept the resignation of Helen Fields with regret. SECONDED by Deb Burchard. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

Dan Potvin did not feel that the alternate, Annemarie Potvin, would be interested in becoming a full board member but he will check. Anyone interested in joining the Planning Commission if the vacancy is available should contact a member of the Planning Commission or the Selectboard.

SOLAR FACILITY CORRESPONDENCE

The Planning Commission reviewed the correspondence received from Justin Henderson concerning the solar project he has constructed on his property. Justin Henderson stated that he built each solar structure with guidance from the state, Green Mountain Power, and the former town Administrative Officer, Jim Stimpson. Jim Sullivan empathized with him since each 15kw project was approved individually by the state and Green Mountain Power. Later, because the projects were adjacent, the state decided to treat it as one solar facility and required a more rigorous procedure. Justin Henderson said he was not formally asking for the Planning Commission to waive the notice period, but if they wanted to, it would be great. Pam Tworig feels that screening should be required for solar structures and roadways. Jim Sullivan said the state does not require any screening but towns could create a screening ordinance as long as the standards for solar arrays are the same as all other types of development. The pros and cons of waiving the notice requirement were discussed.

MOTION by Aaron Malachuk to not approve the waiver of the 45 day notice period based on precedence. SECONDED by John Dupras. 6 in favor, 1 opposed (Dan Potvin). Motion APPROVED.

MINUTES

The minutes of June 7, 2021 indicated that the next meeting would be on November 8, 2021, but due to the Bylaw Modernization Grant deadlines, it was decided to hold the meeting on November 1, 2021.

MOTION by Deb Burchard to accept the regular meeting minutes of June 7, 2021 with the above-noted correction. SECONDED by Sheila Lawrence. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

BYLAW MODERNIZATION GRANT

Jim Sullivan explained that the state is offering large sums of grant money to help towns modernize their Bylaws. The Planning Commission had discussed the village center designation when they were revising the Bylaws so the BCRC felt that Stamford would be a great candidate for this grant. Stamford has three

zoning districts: Residential, Rural and Forest. The village center designation would create a smaller fourth district within the Residential Zone with different types of zoning/land use regulations. He explained that the town could reduce the two-acre minimum lot size in the village district, or create mixed-use housing such as a business on the ground floor and apartments on the second floor. Jim Sullivan said there would be more opportunities for entrepreneurs to invest in the town. The Planning Commission would have to revise the Bylaws and the Town Plan to create the downtown district. Many visitors were concerned that our town center cannot sustain increased growth without compromising the private septic and water systems. Jim Sullivan indicated that creating a downtown district would open up doors for small public septic and water infrastructure development. Although the town can apply for grants without the downtown district designation, Jim Sullivan said the new designation would put the town on a more competitive level for grant funding opportunities. He indicated that there is a ten percent town match to move forward and if the town does revise their Bylaws and move toward acceptable modernization standards, the \$1,000.00 would be waived. Dan Potvin was interested in learning more in order to decide whether this would be good for Stamford. Pam Tworig was concerned that reducing the density requirements could create several low income and multi-family units that would force the town into an expensive public water system and tax our school system. She said people move to Stamford because of the small, quiet, hometown community we have. If they wanted to live in a town with a busy downtown area, they would have moved to Bennington or Brattleboro. John Dupras noted that each building will still have to meet the current state septic and water regulations so the town can't develop to a density that the septic laws won't support. The board discussed the village district starting either from the state line or from the intersection of The Lane and Main Road and running north to the Roaring Brook bridge. Lori Shepard stated that during a recent webinar on this grant, the state said they hoped this grant would help solve the housing problem in the state. Pam Tworig felt pressure from the state, especially with the tight deadline. Jim Sullivan said the state supports overall land use goals of tight village centers. Pam Tworig felt the state wants towns to cluster their development and so they offer a carrot to encourage towns to do it, but there is always strings attached to grant money. Dan Potvin recalled when he was young there were two stores in town and a dairy bar; now we have nothing. John Dupras noted that we can look at the grant like the state is trying to trick us into adopting the goals they want, but we can also look at it like they are offering funding to install a septic upgrade or implement expensive infrastructure that we couldn't otherwise afford. He would like to begin the process to gather more information on what grants would become available to see if any of that funding would be useful to the town. Aaron Malachuk said it's the Planning Commission's job to look into this further and thinks growth in the center of town would be good. Aaron Malachuk said we should be planning for the next twenty years, not just looking toward next year. Deb Burchard felt the board should go through the process and would welcome public input. Jim Sullivan stated that there is a housing crisis in Vermont. People can't afford to stay in Vermont and the state is trying to create opportunities to make more affordable housing. Kurt Gamari felt paying \$1,000.00 to really sit down and create a vision for the town going forward was worth it. MOTION by Dan Potvin to approve the grant commitment to make the Zoning Bylaw changes and town plan amendments. Without a second, the motion failed.

John Dupras asked if we even need to put a lot of people through a lot of work, if the town won't benefit from the grants that would be available. Jim Sullivan couldn't address the details of the various grants. Dave Saldo understood and mentioned how many years of work went into the sidewalk project as well as the elderly housing several years ago. Jim Sullivan said this fund is probably a one-shot deal, but every year the state offers municipal planning grants and the Planning Commission could work on a village center designation with one of those future grants. This grant is a consortium grant where the Bennington County Regional Commission would receive the grant funds to work with the towns who signed up. Stamford would commit to pay our proportionate share of that grant, namely 10%, which he

believes will be \$1,000.00. It was noted that the resolution the BCRC is asking the town to sign is open ended and does not include any of the reimbursement language if the Bylaws are updated.

MOTION by John Dupras to not approve the signing of the resolution as written. SECONDED by Deb Burchard. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

Dan Potvin stated that the new Bylaws were expanded to allow for small businesses. Karen Kuranda didn't like the state telling us how our town should look. John Dupras feels it is up to the Planning Commission to create a vision for Stamford and define what a village district looks like and whether we want it. Dan Potvin said if the Planning Commission commits the \$1,000.00 from their bank account, then no tax dollars will be spent and there's nothing to lose.

MOTION by Aaron Malachuk to revise the verbiage on the resolution form to state the town's commitment won't exceed \$1,000.00 and include the language that the money is reimbursable upon completion of the Bylaw and Town Plan updates and authorize Deb Burchard as Chair to sign the resolution as amended and to forward the resolution to the Selectboard for approval. SECONDED by Dan Potvin. 4 in favor (Dave Saldo had to leave early), 2 opposed (John Dupras and Sheila Lawrence). Motion APPROVED.

MEETING FREQUENCY

MOTION by Aaron Malachuk to hold bi-monthly meetings on the first Monday of every other month, unless something arises that cannot wait and requires the scheduling of a sooner meeting. SECONDED by Dan Potvin. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

Deb Burchard asked that if someone cannot attend a meeting, they should let Lori Shepard know. The board also confirmed their prior decision that consecutively missed meetings without reason could be grounds for request of a dismissal.

NATIONAL FOREST LAND TRAILS

Aaron Malachuk would like to see mountain bike and cross country ski trails on National Forest land. The Forest Service does not do the work, but they will allow and work with towns and groups. Pam Tworig thought eco-tourism was a great idea, not motor-tourism. Aaron Malachuk will invite the Forest District Ranger to the next meeting in January.

MOTION by Aaron Malachuk to adjourn. SECONDED by Deb Burchard. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

The next meeting will be scheduled for January 3, 2022.

Debra Burchard
Planning Commission Chair

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