

Town of Northfield, Vermont Development Review Board Minutes of September 24, 2020

ROLL CALL: Board members Timothy Donahue III, Colin Bright, and Steve Davis were present. William Smith and Paul Brown were absent. Also present were DRB Clerk Mitch Osiecki along with several members of the public: Matt Miles, Bill Smith, Sara Travis, Chris Mureta, Amia Cervantes, Francisco Cervantes, Bruce Crain, Chris Crain Alison Cerutti, Liz Fricke, Josh Jennings, Josh Miller and Genevieve Everett.

Vice Chair Donahue called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

INTRODUCTIONS: Members of the DRB introduced themselves. Clerk/ZA Osiecki did likewise, as did the members of the public who joined the meeting

MINUTES: Approval of minutes of August 27 meeting tabled due to lack of a voting quorum (Bright absent in August).

APPLICATION: Matt Miles had previously requested a waiver of setback standards for the purpose of replacing and enlarging an addition on his home at 53 Hill Street. A decision was tabled pending clarification of a couple of items. Matt reported that he has met with Bruce and Chris Crain and all parties are in agreement as to the location of the property boundary.

Matt clarified that he is proposing a one story, 20' x 20' addition, which will require a waiver of 1 ½ feet from the 10-foot setback standard in this zoning district. Matt stated that the 20' x 21' addition depicted on his updated sketch plan include an extra one-foot margin due to roof overhang. Since framing dimensions are used to determine setbacks, the addition is considered 20' x 20'.

Chris Crain affirmed that he is satisfied with the proposed addition and appreciates Matt's willingness to make sure his concerns were addressed.

Bruce Crain also satisfied with proposed addition, but wishes to clarify that the proposed addition can't later be modified without further review of the DRB. Mitch stated that he would include a condition in the permit approval stating that any future modification of the approved addition would require approval of the DRB.

No further questions of concerns were raised by the DRB or interested parties.

Bright moved to approve as presented; Davis seconded. **Motion passed 3-0.**

APPLICATION: Chris Mureta presented a proposal for a home occupation for seasonal processing of wild game at a property he is purchasing at 1299 VT Route 12A. Chris expects to generally serve one or two customers per day during the fall hunting season.

In response to a question about managing any waste generated by the operation, Chris stated that he sends all hides to Goodwn's Leather Shop and contracts with VT Compost Company to dispose of other waste. They pick up waste twice a week.

No further questions from the DRB or interested parties.

Bright moved to approve as presented; Davis seconded. **Motion passed 3-0.**

APPLICATION: Bill Smith and Sara Travis presented a proposal to operate an auto repair facility at their property at 505 Bean Road.

Sara explained that Bill has operated a garage in Berlin for about 20 years. Within the next year, the lease will expire, at which time Bill would like to consider moving his operation to his home. Bill will be the only employee.

Mitch explained to the DRB that at his suggestion, Sara contacted Pete Kopsco, who is a permit specialist in the Department of Environmental Conservation. Pete prepared a Project Review Sheet for Bill and Sara, which itemizes various permits that they would need to obtain from the state for this project. Mitch suggested that should the DRB be inclined to approve this application, they can condition approval on the applicants obtaining all permits identified in the Project Review Sheet.

No further questions from the DRB or any interested parties.

Bright moved to approve, conditional on obtaining any required state permits; Davis seconded. **Motion passed, 3-0.**

APPLICATION: Amia and Francisco Cervantes presented a conditional use request to operate a dog training and boarding business at a property they are purchasing at 202 Robinson Road.

Amia explained that they have been operating a family-run dog training business in Montpelier. They are in the process of purchasing a home in Northfield and plan to relocate the business to this location. They plan a modest expansion of the current business to include some boarding services. An attractive feature of the proposed location is convenient access near the Interstate.

Josh Miller spoke in support of the application. He has worked with the couple in the past and had a great experience.

Liz Fricke also spoke in support. Liz and Tom Fricke foster dogs for a local organization and were advised to work with Francisco for assistance working with difficult dogs. Liz praised the couple and welcomes them to Northfield.

There were no further questions from the DRB or any interested parties.

Davis moved to approve as presented; Bright seconded. **Motion passed, 3-0.**

OTHER BUSINESS:

Some residents have raised concerns regarding signs on the village common. There seems to be a lack of clarity regarding what signage is permitted and what entity has approval authority over this property.

The observation was made that the DRB failed to act on the sign permit accompanying Chris Mureta's home occupation permit. Chris stated that he's anticipating only a small "locator" sign to help identify his property. The sign will be unlighted and approximately 3 feet wide and 2 feet high.

Davis moved to approve the sign permit; Bright seconded. **Motion passed, 3-0.**

Back to the question of signs on the village common:

Bright addressed the rest of the DRB, explaining that residents have raised free-speech concerns. Bright stated that Governor Scott has spoken publicly supporting the right of Vermonters to speak out respectfully to peacefully protest in support of issues such as racial justice. The AOT has also stated that they are easing some of the usual restrictions related to the placement of campaign (or political) signs within the State highway right-of-way.

Mitch stated that he's spoken with two or three residents who have expressed concern about the possible proliferation of signs on the green. Some of those residents indicated they also shared their concerns with the town manager and individual select board members.

Mitch explained that Northfield Zoning regulations specifically exempt from permitting "on-premises" campaign signs and added that the DRB has approval authority over non-exempt signs. But again, that authority extends to on-premises signs, not those on town property.

Mitch has spoken to the town manager about this issue, which shows little sign of resolving itself of its own accord. Mitch stated that the town has basically three choices: allow all signs, allow no signs, or allow some while removing others (adding that he doesn't think the third choice is a viable option).

Mitch doesn't believe the Select Board has undertaken a discussion of this topic, but believes the town manager is currently inclined toward simply removing all signs.

The consensus of the DRB was that they do not have authority over signs on the village common, or on town property in general.

Mitch advised that a couple of informal conversations with the town manager indicate that the town is leaning toward a policy of "no signs on town property," though no policy has been officially announced.

NEXT MEETING: The next scheduled meeting of the DRB will be Thursday, October 22, if needed.

ADJOURNMENT: Bright moved to adjourn; Davis seconded. **Motion passed 3-0-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:46 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitch Osiecki

Mitch Osiecki, DRB Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Zoning Administrator's Office. These minutes are subject to approval at the next regular DRB meeting.