

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of May 11, 2022

The meeting was held at the Community Room of the Brown Public Library, and was also streamed via the Town GoToMeeting account for the benefit of those unable to attend in person.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chair Hill-Eubanks.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Commissioners Laura Hill-Eubanks, Nancy Peck, Ruth Ruttenberg, Aaron Rhodes and Chandra Blackmer, all attending remotely. Clerk Mitch Osiecki hosted the meeting from the Community Room. Also present was JB Hinds of Birchline Planning.

Set/Adjust Agenda: None.

Public Participation: None.

Zoning Regulation Updates:

JB shared a framework of what she proposes as an updated layout/design of Northfield Zoning Bylaws. Our current regulations have seven articles; JB proposes 10 articles, but organized in what she suggests people will find to be a more intuitive presentation.

First step: Re-order. JB has copied the entire set of regulations into a new document, but has organized everything into a more logical order.

Step two: Remove all extraneous elements. There are a number of things in the current set of bylaws that don't need to be there, for example, language describing the composition and procedures of the Planning Commission or Development Review Board.

Address organizational elements first, then substantive elements.

Discussion from PC members: Do we need permission from the Select Board? Concern that they will push back if they can't easily track all changes to the current bylaws.

Suggestion: Let's set up a phone call between Jeff, JB, Laura and Mitch. JB will make a brief presentation to Jeff explaining why we are planning to reorganize the document, emphasizing readability and ease-of-

use. Jeff can update the Select Board about our work. The Select Board can invite PC to a meeting for an update if they feel further discussion is warranted. Mitch will organize a phone call.

JB continued a run-through of the current layout of bylaws. Noted that signs is a lengthy section that can be made more readable. Suggests breaking it out as a separate article due to the number of subsections.

Flood regulations are also in need of some modest revisions.

Brief discussion of some other sections needing attention. Suggested that we consider adding language for “adaptive reuse.” This can allow for creative reuse of older, possibly nonconforming structures that may no longer be usable as originally intended. Adaptive reuse can allow new life for nonconforming structures without opening up a district to new uses that may not be desirable. See language in Jericho’s zoning bylaws for a good example of adaptive reuse language.

Comment from Nancy: At some point, would like to have a detailed discussion about nonconforming uses. Has concerns that nonconforming uses are sometimes allowed to continue.

Discussion of general development standards for site plans and subdivisions.

JB shared a sample Table of Uses and strongly recommends adding such a table to the bylaws. Also share a sample Table of Dimensional Standards. Such tables increase readability and ease of use of the bylaws.

JB departed the meeting at 8:38 pm.

Approval of Minutes: Nancy moved to approve minutes of April 6; Ruth seconded.
Motion passed, 5-0.

Zoning Administrator Update: Mitch briefly discussed current zoning workflow. Through end of the first quarter, 17 permits had been submitted. As of today (five weeks later) we’re at 36 permits submitted. Busy!

Notable developments: property at 94 Water Street has been purchased and DRB has granted conditional use approval to operate a trash drop and metal recycling business at that location. Also, the Rustic Restaurant, as well as apartment units on the adjacent lot have been sold. Currently, the new owner is focused on renovating the apartment units. Has indicated plans to renovate and reopen the restaurant and bar, probably in about a year.

Next Regular Meeting: June 1, 2022 at 7:00 pm.

Adjournment: Aaron to adjourn; Chandra seconded. **Motion passed, 5-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:43 pm.