

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of July 6, 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 7:04 pm by Chair Hill-Eubanks.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Commissioners Laura Hill-Eubanks, Nancy Peck, Aaron Rhodes and Chandra Blackmer, all attending remotely. Ruth Ruttenberg was absent. Clerk Mitch Osiecki hosted the meeting from the Community Room. Economic Development Director Tom Davis was also present. JuliBeth Hinds (Birchline Planning) also attended the meeting remotely.

Set/Adjust Agenda: None.

Public Participation: None.

Laura welcomed Tom Davis and JuliBeth Hinds and introduced parties who have not yet met.

Zoning Regulation Updates:

JuliBeth led a discussion of next steps regarding revisions to Zoning Bylaws.

JuliBeth met with the Select Board on June 14 (Laura and Mitch were also present) to explain the rationale for the reorganization of the Zoning Bylaws.

JB explained to the Select Board that the reordered bylaws will serve as a starting point for a “red-line” version of the document that will show all changes made to the revised bylaws.

An important point of concern for the Select Board is to let residents know what their rights are with respect to zoning bylaws, and what options they have to have grievances addressed.

JB plans to have the red-line draft of the document ready in time for the August PC meeting.

She advised that it might be useful to plan to hold a workshop to discuss the more involved sections (particularly, subdivisions and dimensional standards).

JB suggested that the October meeting might be an appropriate time to plan for walk-around to view a few sites that may help residents better envision some elements of the revisions.

We could potentially be ready to an initial public hearing by November or December.

It may be desirable to identify stakeholders who might be interested in discussing key development issues (height standards, setbacks, conditional uses, etc.).

Tom Davis explained to the PC that one of his principal objectives is to identify sites suitable to support significant housing development in town. Tom is actively exploring opportunities to work with any landowners interested in developing additional housing infrastructure. Northfield, like the rest of the state, faces a huge demand for housing, including from employers (including Cabot Hosiery Mills and Norwich University) trying to fill open jobs.

Further discussion of housing options. To what extent might we wish to allow clustered housing or co-housing developments?

JuliBeth mentioned that she could be available on Aug 1 or Aug 2, if those dates are convenient for site visits in town. The August PC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Aug 3.

JuliBeth departed at 7:30.

Tom addressed the PC to discuss various projects he's working on or keeping abreast of.

There is currently an enormous amount of money available for many potential development projects. This is a fantastic opportunity for the town, but it requires quick action, organized and motivated decision-makers.

Potential projects include brownfield remediation, hospitality, co-worker/maker spaces. Tom is currently networking with Norwich University and regulatory bodies to identify the most promising areas worth exploring further.

This is a promising time to explore opportunities with NU. They have a newly installed president who has expressed interest in partnering with the town.

Nancy Peck said she would like see more partnerships between towns for recreational purposes.

Tom said that he's working on developing contacts at the state level who can assist with housing opportunities.

Other Business

Northfield BESS, LLC is a recently proposed project that seeks to develop high voltage battery storage at a site adjacent to the electrical substation on King Steet.

Nancy Peck wondered if the town can require or recommend screening of the infrastructure to keep the project from becoming unsightly. PC will have to look into the degree to which it can influence the aesthetics of such projects.

Approval of Minutes: Chandra moved to approve minutes of June 1; Nancy seconded. (Need to edit draft minutes to correct “next meeting” date). **Motion passed, 4-0.**

Next Regular Meeting: August 3, 2022 at 7:00 pm.

Adjournment: Chandra moved to adjourn; Nancy seconded. **Motion passed, 4-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 pm.