

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of April 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 7:15 pm by Chair Hill-Eubanks (start delayed by technical difficulties).

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Commissioners Laura Hill-Eubanks, Nancy Peck, Ruth Ruttenberg, Aaron Rhoades, and Chandra Blackmer. Clerk Mitch Osiecki was also present, as was JB Hinds of Birchline Planning. Laura, Nancy and Mitch were present in the Community Room; all others attended remotely.

Set/Adjust Agenda: No adjustments

Public Participation: None

MPG: Laura welcomed JB Hinds to the meeting. JB introduced herself to PC members and made a brief presentation regarding her approach to zoning regulations.

Good land development bylaws:

1. Conform to Chapter 117 of State Statutes.
2. Make clear distinctions between actions that require ministerial approval (ZA) and those that are subject to discretionary approval (DRB).
3. Give as much up-front direction to applicants as possible. (Our site plan review standards need work.)
4. Have clear statements of purpose for each zoning district and the subdivision standards, both clearly related to language in the Town Plan.
5. Include clear, consistent and comprehensive definitions.
6. Don't try to regulate elements beyond the authority of zoning.
7. Avoid the word "should."

Brief discussion of the purposes of zoning permits, site plan reviews and Planned Use Developments (PUDs). A PUD is a sort of conditional use, and as such requires a public hearing.

Touched on regulation of clustered tiny homes and co-housing. Co-housing has some good applications, but must be clearly defined to distinguish it from traditional multi-family housing.

Advocated for explicitly defining the “building envelope” of a lot.

Discussed advantages of formalizing the sketch plan review process. The Conservation Commission could play a role in this review.

Planning considerations:

1. New or revised zoning districts.
2. What types of common activities do not need DRB review?
3. What type of development could be accomplished through PUD rather than site plan review?

Mechanical considerations:

1. Define everything and link within the zoning document.
2. Incorporate Chapter 117 by reference on procedures.
3. Move board organization to a separate document.
4. Reconcile language on agricultural uses, floodplain regulations, wireless and other non-discretionary elements.

Ruth Ruttenberg raised concern about the town forest being considered part of a residential district.

JB listed a few general changes she would recommend to the overall framework of the bylaws.

List of policy issues related to Town Plan. Zoning districts, purposes, uses – what do you want to see accomplished?

Suggested a new table of uses and dimensional standards.

Subdivisions and Conservation Commission input.

Procedures – should be clear and understandable.

Concluded with a few Decision-Making discussion points:

1. Must we account for all of the words/sections in the current document through redline, or could a new outline/skeleton be agreed upon?
2. Who will 'approve' drafts, and how?
3. What happens when there is disagreement? Vote? Consensus? Weight of the group, with minority report?

Next Regular Meeting:

Ordinarily, May 4, 2022 at 7:00 pm, but there's a conflict. Will tentatively reschedule for:

- May 11 at 7:00 pm (Mitch will confirm availability of Community Room)

JB departed meeting at 8:50 pm.

Other Business

Discussion of Berlin Zoning Regulation updates. Some of the updates address specific items, most having to do with a proposed designated town center.

Mitch will share with Jeff Schulz.

Approval of Minutes: Aaron Rhodes moved to approve minutes of special meeting on Feb 23; Ruth Ruttenberg seconded. **Vote to approve: 5-0.**

Aaron Rhodes moved to approve minutes of regular meeting on Mar 2; Chandra Blackmer seconded. **Vote to approve: 4-0-1.** (Rutenberg abstained).

Adjournment: Aaron Rhodes moved to adjourn; Nancy Peck seconded. **Vote to approve: 5-0.**
Meeting adjourned at 9:03 pm.