

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the March 19, 2024, Planning Board Meeting

Planning Board members present: Lori Clark, Karen Kelleher, Nancy Arsenault, John Colonna-Romano, Margaret Costello, Deb Woods (Voting Associate)

Lori Clark called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Planning Board Member Updates

John Colonna-Romano stated the Green Advisory Committee had agreed to hold a Comprehensive Plan: Meeting in a Box at their next meeting.

Karen Kelleher reported the Complete Streets Committee did the Comprehensive Plan: Meeting in a Box activity related to transportation at their meeting yesterday.

Margaet Costello said she recently attended the Citizen Planner Training Collaborative 2024 Annual Conference. She said that green energy sources, such as commercial solar panels, will be a hot topic soon on the state level. She also revealed plans for an Earth Day trail blazing activity and a party in the Gleasondale neighborhood.

Nancy Arsenault suggested that Margaret Costello report on her findings on underground electrical utilities at a future Planning Board meeting.

Lori Clark noted that she will not be available for the April 2nd meeting, due to travel. Margaret Costello confirmed the public hearing for Cottages at Wandering Pond will be continued, without testimony until April 16th.

7:00 PM Public Forum – Firearms Business Zoning Bylaw

Valerie Oorthuys presented the proposed firearms business zoning bylaw. She covered why this bylaw is being considered and how zoning can be used to establish where and how firearms businesses can operate in Stow, per state regulation. The Planning Director established the purpose and process of the bylaw. Highlights included definitions, particularly the term *firearms business use*, and several maps used to describe the locational requirements. Locations would only be allowed in industrial districts only. This would be an additional use in this district, without overlay or a change to the town's underlying zoning. A buffer restriction of 500 ft from residential parcels and any parcel where children gather, such as a park, would also be created. A special permit process would be established with the bylaw. It would align to state laws and local licensing regulations and would also give the Planning Board authority to further restrict hours, screening, operations & security, signs, and lighting. In addition, a revocation process would be created.

Planning Board Comments

John Colonna-Romano asked what would happen should a residential use exist within the Industrial District, would a cross between the two be allowed. Valerie Oorthuys noted this would not be an issue, as the bylaw looks at where the building would be within the lot and allows for flexibility roadway

design or driveway creation. His second comment had to do security plans, which would not be subject to police approval, but said there would still be a need for the police to review security plans and to provide comments. In terms of Planning Board review, Valerie Oorthuys offered that Town Counsel be consulted to see if other towns have used a peer reviewer for operations & maintenance, and security review. She noted the technical nature around Stow's adult-use marijuana bylaw is similar and though a completely different use, it provides police an avenue for looking at security plans, surveillance and making sure that operations are safe. In addition to local review, applicants will also need to align with requirements at the state level and federal level.

Deb Woods confirmed from Valerie Oorthuys that a lot is similar in definition to a parcel. It can vacant or not buildable. Lori Clark noted that lots can be subdivided. Members discussed the map of potential locations for a firearms business, the process of a special permit, and whether or not a business owner would need to obtain state/federal licenses before applying. John Colonna-Romano confirmed that under the new bylaw several firearms businesses would not be allowed to location in the same building.

Margaret Costello asked for an explanation of the process by which a lot is subdivided. Valerie Oorthuys said in order to create separately defined lots, a person would start the process through the Planning Board, by filing either a Subdivision Approval Not Required Plan (ANR), or a Subdivision Plan. She that without being an Engineer it is hard to say how lots are divided, but they typically need to meet a minimum size requirement and the owner needs to include roadway specifications. She said it is important to keep the topic in mind, as a potential for change, within the context of this bylaw.

Public Comments

Roy Miller, 20 Brandymeade Circle, received confirmation from Valerie Oorthuys that the business owner, not the owner of the facility, would be responsible for obtaining a permit to operate a firearms business, first, through the police department. The resident raised several hypothetical questions which engaged the Police Chief, the Planning Director, and the Planning Chair.

Mark Forgues, 9 White Pond Road, noted the difference in the distance of abutter notification for a public hearing (300 ft, property line to property line) and the firearms business buffer to residential (500 ft, building to property line). He asked if the notification distance could be increased. Valerie Oorthuys said she would check into the matter. The Police Chief confirmed that this type of business could not be licensed within a residential property. Later in the discussion, he received confirmation from the Planning Director that a building (even if very large) would never be considered for multiple lots due Stow's side set back requirements.

Valerie Oorthuys referenced a map for Rumel Mahmood, 32 Peabody Drive, to display those parcels that might be impacted by a firearms business. Lori Clark noted this map is reflective of today's ownership /lot definition, and lots can be subdivided. The Planning Director clarified that only one business of this type would be allowed, per lot. She offered background information to explain the choice of buffering, over the limitation of overall licenses. She noted there are few municipalities for Stow to model and that the bylaw needs acceptance of the state's attorney general. Lori Clark welcomed the resident to submit his opinion on the subject.

Bill Byron, 469 Gleasondale Road, confirmed with Valerie Oorthuys that the attorney general has yet to pass a bylaw with the limitation on the number of firearms businesses and a buffer enforcement. The Planning Director added that clarification, on what is acceptable language regarding buffering, is needed.

Rumel Mahmood, 32 Peabody Drive, received confirmation from Lori Clark that edits to the bylaw can happen even after the warrant is printed. Revised wording would then be presented at Town Meeting. She reiterated that tonight is a forum to get general feedback, but that a public hearing would be held before Town Meeting, date TBD, and this would be another chance for the public to provide feedback.

Lori Clark confirmed for Lucia Carrington, 227 Boxboro Road, that it is unclear if the state attorney general will pass a bylaw that allows control of the number of firearms businesses and enforces a buffer. She noted the preference of those expressed opinions on the call that evening. The Planning Director confirmed that the bylaw would not cover private gun ranges, which can exist so long as there is a discharge range outside of 500 feet from another property.

Lori Clark offered a word of thanks to those who listened and participated. Valerie Oorthuys said feedback would continue to be welcomed through the Planning Department and the public forum concluded.

The Planning Director gave a short update on engagement efforts related to the *Comprehensive Plan*. She encouraged members to fill out the online survey/crowd map and noted that A Meeting-In-a-Box Activity was planned for members later in the evening.

Nancy Arsenault asked about *MART's ride service to the Acton Train Station*. Valerie Oorthuys noted there were several contributing factors to a lack of ridership. Rides to and from the area's shopping centers have reportedly been more popular.

Town Center Streetscape Project

Members discussed the memo and engagement strategies, with the hope of better communicating with local businesses, residences in the area, as well as Randall Library, the church and the town building, with the goal of understanding existing conditions, navigational challenges and potential uses for the town hall and former fire station. Lori Clark questioned how the Board should aggregate/prioritize feedback, after it had been solicited. Valerie Oorthuys offered past work on construction projects would provide guidance. She added it is possible to take information back to the Engineer to address site specific issues, or at least try and work concerns. The project's working group and the Complete Streets Committee would also weigh in on priority actions.

Members reacted very positively to the list of questions. Nancy Arsenault was hesitant about conducting outreach via another survey. Members agreed, with so many upcoming projects in town underway at the same time, public engagement efforts can be challenging. Survey fatigue aside, however, soliciting feedback was necessary. Margaret Costello noted the importance of surveys in allowing people to feel heard on matters that are important to them. Lori Clark said she liked the idea of a targeted approach for people who live, or work in, or have a business in Town Center.

Valerie Oorthuys reported that everyone in the project bounds had already received one mailing. Members agreed that Planning Staff should move forward in creating a survey format and being the process of sending it out as communication. Nancy Arsenault confirmed that it would appear as news/announcements on the Town's page, which links to social media. Deb Woods suggested a link to a video presentation be sent to various Boards and Committees to encourage a feedback loop to the Planning Board. Karen Kelleher suggested impacted property owners be invited for a discussion, after surveys are returned and the Planning Board begins to synthesis the results.

Housing Production Plan Update

Valerie Oorthuys walked members through four goals/strategies of the 5-year draft document. She noted that feedback from the Planning Board is welcomed in her preparation for the presentation forum on March 27th. Lori Clark noted positive engagement around the topic. She suggested adding more context at the forum to explain why Stow is creating a housing production plan.

Valerie Oorthuys noted a change made by the state to require each town to recommend specific parcels. Michael Slagle prepared several maps to guide members through a preferred locations activity. Maps were shared on screen. The Planning Director explained that past planning efforts have uncovered certain areas in town where housing development is suitable, but to keep in mind where housing development can also be encouraged. She added that parcel identification may be part of an activity at the forum, but no locations would be presented, as feedback is still being generated.

Valerie Oorthuys guided members through the process of locating parcels, pausing throughout to explain the state's requirements under the HPP. She noted the first goal under the plan is to reach the state's definition of affordable housing with newly constructed, deed-restricted housing. Projects in Stow that are already in the permitting phase would fall under this category, such as Stow Acres, The Cottages at Wandering Pond, Plantation II, and Bird Meadow Lane (Red Acre). In speaking of the 2nd goal of diversified housing, Valerie Oorthuys noted that members agreed with encouraging mixed-use in Lower Village. The Board completed the activity, as others locations in town were noted.

Comprehensive Plan: Meeting in a Box Activity

Members shared a Community Vision for Stow in 2035. Ideas about housing types and business development were also shared.

Adjournment

Karen Kelleher motioned to adjourn.

Margaret Costello seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Lori Clark - **Yea**; Karen Kelleher– **Yea**, Nancy Arsenault - **Yea**; John Colonna-Romano - **Yea**, Margaret Costello – **Yea**

Respectfully Submitted,
Julie Windzio