

TOWN OF STOW  
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the October 12, 2021 Planning Board Meeting

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

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

*Karen Kelleher moved to approve minutes of the September 21, 2021 meeting as amended.  
John Colonna-Romano seconded*

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

*Karen Kelleher moved to approve minutes of the September 28, 2021 meeting as amended.  
John Colonna-Romano seconded*

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

### **Correspondence**

Nancy Arsenault said she appreciated the email from Bill Byron which provided background on the adoption of current signage regulations. Nancy Arsenault said it is very useful to the Planning Board to hear from someone who was involved with the adoption of sign regulations that the Planning Board is now proposing to amend. John Colonna-Romano noted that Bill Byron's request for reasonable regulations cannot include regulation of content, per recent Supreme Court rulings.

Lori Clark addressed a recent letter to the editor in the Stow Independent and said that neither the Planning Board nor the Building Inspector can waive enforcement of an existing zoning bylaw. Lori Clark said that the prohibition on internally illuminated signs was approved by Stow voters at a Town Meeting in 1985, and the bylaw must be enforced as written, regardless of previous history of non-enforcement. Nancy Arsenault suggested that the Planning Board address some comments that have been made in the Stow Independent in a follow up letter to the editor that provides accurate context and lays out the Board's intentions for a short term and long term revisions. Town Planner Jesse Steadman suggested that the Board should wait to provide any public response about plans for a sign bylaw rewrite until after the minor revision to allow a single internally illuminated sign is potentially approved by Town Meeting.

Lori Clark asked Planning Board members how they want to proceed on this issue. John Colonna-Romano said he approves of the idea to wait until after the minor revisions proposed for Town Meeting have been voted on before making public statements about later, more expansive revisions. Karen Kelleher said that issuing public statements at this time would only further confuse the public conversations around signage regulations and enforcement. Mark Jones said that the Planning Board risks spending more time on managing public relations than fulfilling their other duties. Nancy Arsenault

suggested that the Economic Development & Industrial Commission (EDIC) should reach out to affected businesses with information about the status of enforcement and the proposed amendments to allow a single internally illuminated sign that will go before the Oct 30th Special Town Meeting. Jesse Steadman said he will make a recommendation to the EDIC to distribute an update on the proposed amendments and expectations for future revisions to signage regulations, as well as a reminder of the Oct 19th Public Hearing for the proposed amendments.

Karen Kelleher addressed earlier correspondence regarding the aesthetics of the traffic islands in the Lower Village area. Karen Kelleher said she agrees with the resident who said the new reflectors make the islands appear cluttered, and that she hopes the reflectors are temporary for plowing season. Jesse Steadman suggested that the correspondence be forwarded to the Highway Superintendent and copied to the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee. Margaret Costello noted that the correspondence called for removing the traffic islands entirely, as they had been hit by several drivers. Margaret Costello said she does not agree that the islands should be removed, and that they are performing their function of slowing drivers down. Margaret Costello said that she does not sympathize with any driver who does not take care to avoid the islands. Lori Clark said the Highway Superintendent should be further informed about the aesthetic vision for the roadway before he makes any further changes in the area.

### **Public Input**

Mark Forgues asked if the Board considers it fair that businesses in the residential district will not be allowed to have an internally illuminated sign under the proposed bylaw change while businesses in other districts would be. Lori Clark encouraged Mark Forgues to share his comment at the Public Hearing on October 19th.

Dorothy Granat said that she believes the Planning Board should attempt to set the record straight on the history and status of proposed amendments to the sign bylaw before rumors are spread uncontrollably. Dorothy Granat said that she does not think internally illuminated signs are appropriate for the Lower Village district. Dorothy Granat said that calls from some residents to halt enforcement or allow all internally illuminated signs are unreasonable.

### **Planning Board Member Updates**

John Colonna-Romano said the Green Advisory Committee recently held its inaugural meeting. John Colonna-Romano said he is optimistic about the work of that group, and that several members are well connected and knowledgeable about relevant state and federal policy. John Colonna-Romano said the group had discussed how an updated Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan can be connected with the work of the Green Advisory Committee. Lori Clark asked how frequently the committee expects to meet. John Colonna-Romano said they will meet the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month. John Colonna-Romano said he will continue to provide the Planning Board updates on the committee's work.

Margaret Costello said the city of Pittsburgh worked with NASA to develop a street lighting ordinance to limit light pollution. Margaret Costello said that there had been severe traffic stoppages on Great Road near Nan's Market the previous weekend. Nancy Arsenault also recounted the traffic slowdowns and said she had witnessed two employees of Nan's Market attempting to direct traffic in and out of the parking lot. Resident Mark Dexter said that Nan's Market hosted a wine tasting, which accounted for the heavy

traffic. Margaret Costello said the Planning Board has not agreed to such events and the traffic impacts they cause in the recent Special Permit for the site.

John Colonna-Romano said that the Town of Hudson has been nominated for an award for their Main Street.

Lori Clark said that she does not want the Board to forget about a request to redraw the Business District boundaries to place a nearby residence entirely within the residential district, and that the Board should discuss the request in detail at an upcoming meeting. Lori Clark said she also still wants to have a debrief regarding the process of the Nan's Market Public Hearing and Decision drafting and compliance process. Lori Clark said the Planning Board should begin discussing an update to the Master Plan sometime after the upcoming Special Town Meeting. Lori Clark said that after a decision is issued for the 137 Harvard Road Erosion Control Special Permit, the Board should discuss follow up actions with other Town boards and departments.

### **Plantation Apartments II ANR Endorsement**

Karen Kelleher said she is affiliated with the applicant through the Stow Elderly Housing Corporation and recused herself from the discussion.

Greg Roy said the Plantation Apartments II project will create 37 new age-restricted units through a comprehensive permit under Mass General Law Ch 40B. Greg Roy said that work is moving forward on designs for water and sewer systems for the complex. Greg Roy said that Plantation Apartments II has purchased a 6 acre parcel to create multiple public water supply wells, and that an access road is nearing completion. Greg Roy said that a portion of the Dept of Environmental Protection (DEP) Zone I radius for the wells extends across an abutting property, and so Plantation Apartments II has arranged a sale of a small portion of the abutting property so that they will be in control of the entire Zone I radius, as required by the DEP. Greg Roy said that the remainder of the abutting property will comply with dimensional requirements in the Zoning Bylaw.

Margaret Costello clarified that the new "parcel C" will be sold by the current owners to Plantation II Apartments LLC. Greg Roy confirmed that the current owner has signed the application before the Planning Board. Lori Clark noted that the abutting parcel has no frontage and asked if access is via easement through a different parcel. Greg Roy confirmed that the site is accessed via easement.

Assistant Planner Malcolm Ragan said staff have reviewed the plan for compliance with Section 2.1 of the Rules and Regulations for ANR plans.

*John Colonna-Romano moved to endorse the plan as not requiring approval under the subdivision control law and to authorize Jesse Steadman to sign on behalf of the Planning Board*  
*Margaret Costello seconded*

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

## **Planner's Report**

Jesse Steadman reminded the Board of the public forum for the Stow Acres North Course acquisition warrant article on Wednesday, October 13th. Jesse Steadman also reminded the Board of upcoming Public Hearings for Zoning Amendments on October 19th and 26th, as well as a Public Hearing for a Hammerhead Lot Special Permit on October 26th.

Jesse Steadman provided an update on paving and other work being done at Town Center. Jesse Steadman said he had spoken with the Highway Superintendent about some changes to the lane striping and queue lanes approaching the Town Center intersection. Jesse Steadman said that engineering firm Green International will provide an assessment on location for a new crosswalk between Town Building and Town Hall and attendant pedestrian beacons. Jesse Steadman said that a grant from the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will study the Town Center intersection and provide some recommendations for short-term improvements. Jesse Steadman said that part of that work will be measuring traffic counts and speeds, data which may be used for the Town Center concept plans funded at the last Annual Town Meeting. Jesse Steadman said he has received comments from the Complete Streets Committee and the Conservation Commission on the draft Request for Proposals for those concept plans, and that he will work on finalizing that draft ahead of the holiday season.

Jesse Steadman said that the Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (TSAC) will soon vote on a town wide speed limit of 25mph unless otherwise posted policy. Jesse Steadman said that the Police Chief said the policy will help with speed enforcement.

Jesse Steadman said that he is continuing to work with the non-profit OARS to initiate a climate resiliency coalition based on common watersheds near the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord rivers. Jesse Steadman said he hopes the municipalities in the coalition will be able to cooperate on joint grant applications for things like climate resiliency planning.

Jesse Steadman said that he spoke with developer John Cramer about how to improve screening at the 118 Great Road building. Jesse Steadman said that after a site visit, he identified a single primary gap in the screening at the rear of the property following some septic system upgrades, and suggested new plantings of White Pine, which would grow quickly and have intertwining limbs that would create a good screen. Jesse Steadman said that John Cramer has proposed four white pines staggered by 7 ft. Jesse Steadman said that he believes the 7ft spacing is adequate and will allow the trees to flourish. Lori Clark asked if the abutter has been approached about this plan. Jesse Steadman said that he wants to receive Planning Board feedback before approaching the abutter. Margaret Costello asked how long the trees would be able to provide screening. Jesse said it would be at least a 15–20-year solution, and that the trees would pose no risk to abutters. Jesse Steadman said he will contact the abutter with the idea.

## **Lower Village Zoning Forum Debrief**

Karen Kelleher said the presentation was informative but noted that some attendees were taken aback by some of the example photos. Karen Kelleher suggested that when the forum recording is posted the Planning Department should provide some explanation of process timeline on Lower Village planning efforts, and also make clear that the consultant's presentation was to provide input and data to the Town boards, rather than finalized goals.

Lori Clark said she wishes there had been greater emphasis placed on the idea that properties in Lower Village will inevitably redevelop and whatever bylaws are in place will shape that redevelopment. Lori Clark noted that unlike many other areas in Town, there is no current proposal to develop/redevelop Lower Village. Lori Clark said that is a unique context for this effort, and that this zoning project is not a reaction to a development proposal.

Nancy Arsenault agreed that that context would have allowed her to view the presentation with a different eye. Lori Clark said that the public comes in and out of these processes, and that the Planning Board must always be prepared to recount previous efforts and the history of any planning project.

Lori Clark said that many residents do not understand what current bylaws allow, and that creates a problem for presentation and outlining the process for rezoning. Lori Clark said that the Planning Board should provide an interpretation of the Zoning forum wherever the recording is posted. John Colonna-Romano said that there should be greater explanation provided regarding the project timeline.

Karen Kelleher said that future public forums will be more focused on receiving resident feedback.

Mark Jones said that something few people understand about zoning is that Planning Boards cannot outright prevent development. Lori Clark recalled that the Planning Board faced criticism for allowing a gun shop in Lower Village without understanding that they could not deny a retail use from that zoning district under the Zoning Bylaw.

Jesse Steadman said that the Planning Dept could have provided more guidance to the consultants about the presentation being public facing. Jesse Steadman said the Planning Board should not forget the previous decade of work that has been done planning for an updated Lower Village. Margaret Costello said that the Planning Board still should have placed the presentation in a broader context of previous planning efforts.

### **501 Gleasondale Road – Site Plan Approval for Upgrades to Existing AT&T Wireless Communication**

Jesse Steadman said this request for Site Plan Approval is differs from recent similar requests because it changes the exterior appearance and footprint of the equipment. Jesse Steadman said a judgment from 2009 ruled that the Planning Board cannot issue a discretionary permit modification related to the use, but can place certain conditions to mitigate visual and other impacts. Karen Kelleher asked if the zoning bylaw section regarding wireless communication facilities requires site plan review with a public hearing. Jesse Steadman said that the judgment creates some ambiguity, given that the proposed changes do alter footprint and exterior appearance but do not amount to a new use, and to stay on the safe side he is not looking to require a public hearing.

Lori Clark recalled the last similar request at the site, and that the Planning Board had asked questions and placed a set of reasonable conditions.

John Colonna-Romano noted that the plan never says which acoustic shielding they plan to use. John Colonna-Romano asked if there is a plan to handle hazardous spills, or any system to alert to failures. Jesse Steadman recalled that the acting Fire chief has found no issues with the fire safety aspects of the proposal but said that he would follow up for greater detail.

Karen Kelleher requested that the fire chief suggest specific conditions for the site plan approval. Jesse Steadman said that he is not expecting to hear more but will follow up with the acting fire chief.

Karen Kelleher suggested that abutters be notified of a public meeting but that the Planning Board should not conduct a full public hearing, as defined in state statute.

Karen Kelleher said that the applicant should be prepared to answer questions about noise, safety, and aesthetics. Jesse Steadman suggested that a site visit would help the Board better understand the area around the site. Lori Clark said that the Planning Board should provide as many questions up front as possible.

### **Vote to Support Stow Acres Article at Special Town Meeting**

Jesse Steadman noted that several Board and Committees have offered support for the warrant article.

Lori Clark asked who is bringing the article to Town Meeting. Jesse Steadman said it is being brought forward by the Conservation Commission, Recreation Commission, and Community Preservation Committee.

Jesse Steadman recalled that the conservation restriction approved by Stow voters for the South Course is contingent upon the outcome for this warrant article. Karen Kelleher asked about the division of land. Jesse Steadman said that 24 acres will go to the Conservation Commission and 90 acres will go to the Recreation Commission. Jesse Steadman said that the housing component will be completely separate from this article.

John Colonna-Romano noted the vague language for allowing continued short-term use for Golf. Jesse Steadman said that the driving range will remain in use for Golf for 5 years and the larger portion for a max of 9 years. Jesse Steadman said that Stow Acres plans to relocate the driving range to the South Course. Jesse Steadman said the agreement that will govern that timeline will be explained at the upcoming forum.

Board members elected to vote after seeing the public forum the next evening and take it up at the following meeting. Board members said they want to see more details of the development agreement and timelines but that they support the concept.

### **Discussion on Associate Member Policy**

Lori Clark said that at the last meeting members decided to discuss a non-voting associate members policy. Nancy Arsenault said that the Planning Board Charter says that associate members may be appointed to assist with the work of the Board as needed. Nancy Arsenault said that she does not see the need to add a member to assist with the work of the Planning Board at this time.

Mark Jones said that finding the appropriate candidate allows for the possibility to develop that associate into a full member to later be elected to the Planning Board. Karen Kelleher said that if the Planning Board believes an associate member is warranted, they should have a policy in place and should post the vacancy publicly, allowing for any interested residents to apply. John Colonna-Romano said that an

associate member may allow a greater diversity of opinions for the Board to consider in deliberations and strategy. Margaret Costello said that the Board already has a very high-quality voting associate member and does not see the need for an additional associate member. Margaret Costello said that it's wonderful others want to join, and that she welcomes them to meetings, but that she does not believe there is a need for another associate member. John Colonna-Romano said that the Board is open to receiving public feedback, and there is ample opportunity to communicate that feedback to the Board. Mark Jones said that this Board has a long tradition of welcoming public feedback.

Lori Clark summarized that there are some mixed feelings but no clear agreement that additional associate members are needed at this time. Lori Clark said that at one time there was a greater need for associate members, but that much of that needed assistance is handled by department staff.

Lori Clark suggested that an associate member policy can be discussed during the Board's annual reorganization.

*Karen Kelleher moved to adjourn*  
*John Colonna-Romano seconded*

Respectfully submitted,  
Malcolm Ragan