

TOWN OF STOW
PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of the January 11, 2022 Planning Board Meeting

Planning Board members present: Lori Clark, Karen Kelleher, John Colonna-Romano, Nancy Arsenault, Margaret Costello

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

Minutes

*Karen Kelleher moved to approve the minutes of the January 4, 2022 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 correspondence that showed another opinion on the activities at Nan's Market. Karen Kelleher noted that the zoning enforcement officer has been copied on all correspondence and will be aware of any non-compliance issued. Karen Kelleher said the Planning Board's has a greater role to play once an application for a Special Permit modification is received.

Public Input

Sarah Cleary addressed her recent correspondence regarding Nan's Market and said that a Planning Board member had called her emails on the topic "burdensome". Sarah Cleary said her correspondence is provided for the Board's information in the leadup to a future Special Permit modification. Lori Clark said that the Board later discussed the importance of hearing abutter concerns about permitted properties. Sarah Cleary said the Planning Board has taken different attitudes about Special Permit compliance at Nan's Market than at Stow House of Pizza.

Planning Board Member Updates

John Colonna-Romano said the Green Advisory Committee (GAC) is planning to propose to Select Board that all future major upgrades to municipal buildings use only green energy, meaning electric heat pumps and no use of fossil fuel heating. John Colonna-Romano asked for Planning Board input on the idea. Nancy Arsenault said she would like more information on the potential cost impacts to municipal buildings. Lori Clark said the Town would be smart to provide a positive example as the Planning Board and other work to further building electrification in Stow. Karen Kelleher said she would support prioritization of green building standards, but not necessarily a rigid mandate. John Colonna-Romano said the Police Department has also been approached about all-electric cruisers, and reported that the technology does not support the PD's needs at this point. Lori Clark said that some police departments in other parts of the country have purchased Tesla EVs. John Colonna-Romano said that Stow is not the sort of department for which those cars are suitable.

John Colonna-Romano said the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has received several funding requests, and there may not be funds to cover all eligible projects. John Colonna-Romano said the CPC has considered bonding to cover the costs of some proposed projects, subject to Town Meeting approval. John Colonna-Romano said the CPC is limited to funding the historic preservation element of the library renovation.

Lori Clark asked for Planning Board input on an upcoming meeting with the Select Board. Lori Clark said the bylaw changes associated with Active Adult Neighborhood (AAN) developments should be discussed. Lori Clark said the Select Board will want to be aware of warrant articles the Planning Board expects to bring to Town Meeting. Jesse Steadman said the Planning Board should discuss their workplan for the next several months ahead of the discussion with the Select Board. Lori Clark said the Select Board will want to discuss Lower Village planning efforts and determine how federal ARPA funding may support these efforts.

Karen Kelleher said that AAN planning is an important topic but cautioned the Planning Board against discussing specifics of the Athens Lane development until a Public Hearing is opened. Karen Kelleher said the meeting should not dive too deep into permitting specifics and should be a broad overview of the Planning Board's goals for the next year. Karen Kelleher said specific permitting issues could be addressed at a later meeting. Lori Clark said clearly laying out the Board's workplan will help open clear lines of communication with the Select Board.

John Colonna-Romano said that Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (SMAHT) has requested CPC funds to build up to 6 units of affordable housing at a site on Red Acre Road. John Colonna-Romano said the chair of SMAHT has discussed a zoning change to allow the development by right. Lori Clark said that if SMAHT wants to discuss the zoning change proposal they should clearly tell the Planning Board what problem they wish to solve and how a zoning change would solve it. Lori Clark said that SMAHT should not wait to approach the Board in late March with a surprise zoning amendment. John Colonna-Romano said that other affordable housing projects have been held up in the past during permitting, and that SMAHT is hoping to lower zoning barriers.

Karen Kelleher said that such a zoning change would be unlikely to pass a Town Meeting. Margaret Costello said that the zoning change proposal may be anticipating opposition that is not there. John Colonna-Romano mentioned that the buildable area at the lot does abut some houses.

Jesse Steadman said he has been very clear with the chair of SMAHT that the next step is to present the zoning change idea to the Planning Board. Karen Kelleher said she hopes SMAHT has some specific ideas for a zoning change and are not just expecting the Planning Board to design the amendment.

Margaret Costello provided an update on a project to turn a small school lot in Gleasondale into a park. Margaret Costello said the Conservation Commission currently controls the parcel and may turn over control to the Recreation Commission following a positive Town Meeting vote. Margaret Costello said transfer to the Recreation Commission would finally allow the park project to begin moving forward. Margaret Costello said several Gleasondale residents have helped fund a design for the future park. Karen Kelleher recalled that the Select Board wanted to sell the parcel several years ago, and that she had suggested development into a park back then. Karen Kelleher said she is very glad to see that idea come to fruition after many years.

Planner's Report

Jesse Steadman said that the Board will have a letter of support for the Stow Acres Local Initiative Program (LIP) application to approve at the following meeting.

Jesse Steadman said the Building Commissioner will attend the next meeting to discuss enforcement options for Special Permits.

Jesse Steadman said previous discussions with the owner of D&D Farms floated the possibility of an overlay district to allow some landscaper uses alongside agricultural uses. Jesse Steadman said that staff have been discussing the possibility of such an overlay district, including other relevant properties, but would like further guidance from the Planning Board before more effort is spent on the idea. Jesse Steadman said the Board has several other zoning priorities to consider. Jesse Steadman said the important questions involve what lots could be included in a hypothetical overlay, and which uses should be allowed.

Karen Kelleher said she would prefer to investigate zoning options at this particular location before looking at a town wide zoning district. Lori Clark said that the Board should understand whether such an overlay would be beneficial for other parts of town. Lori Clark said the Board would need to consider ways to mitigate impacts of allowing landscaper uses near more residential development. Lori Clark said she is open to exploring the concept but does not have enough information to weigh the risks vs benefits of further allowing such uses in otherwise residential districts. Lori Clark said any proposal will have to balance impacts risks with thoughtful mitigation. Lori Clark said that the Board cannot loosen zoning without a credible demonstration that current zoning will be enforced.

Lori Clark requested some broad concepts from staff for such an overlay district, to determine if the board wants to invest resources into further study. John Colonna-Romano said the Board needs to have clear standards to mitigate any impacts to all nearby residential uses. Jesse Steadman said staff will put together some ideas for discussion later with the Board.

Collings Foundation Special Permit and Settlement Compliance

The Board reviewed the draft letter to the Collings Foundation regarding compliance with their settlement agreement and permitting. John Colonna-Romano wondered if there is some uncertainty between parties about the exact definition of “demonstration”. John Colonna-Romano said he believes any hands-on driving activities should be considered a “demonstration”. Lori Clark said she believes the terms of the settlement agreement are quite clear about what qualifies as a “demonstration”.

John Colonna-Romano moved to approve the letter to the Collings Foundation
Margaret Costello seconded

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

Wireless Communication Facility Site Plan Approval – 501 Gleasondale Rd (Verizon)

The Planning Board and staff introduced themselves.

Danielle Sabourin of Airosmith Development and Sylvester Bhembe of Hudson Design Group introduced themselves as representatives of Verizon Wireless.

Danielle Sabourin summarized the proposed work as replacement of wireless antennas on an existing array on the Gleasondale Mill smokestack. Danielle Sabourin said more antennas are being removed than replaced.

John Colonna-Romano asked if the antennas are internal or external to the smokestack. Sylvester Bhembe said they will be mounted on the exterior of the smokestack, just as the former antennas were. Margaret Costello said she is pleased to see that the project involves some structural repairs to the tower and the mill roof. Margaret Costello said that she appreciates that the costs of preserving the smokestack are being covered by Verizon.

John Colonna-Romano asked how the antenna will be covered to blend with the brick pattern of the smokestack. Sylvester Bhembe said there is an option to wrap the antennas in 3M film to camouflage against the brick or paint the antennas to match the general color. Sylvester said there is a slight functional improvement for the antennas when wrapped with the 3M film. Sylvester Bhembe said that antennas on the outside of the pole masting will be wrapped in the 3M film and the remote radio heads internal to the pole masting, but still on the exterior of the smokestack, will be painted.

Karen Kelleher asked if the Police and Fire Departments have been consulted about the proposed work. Jesse Steadman said they have been notified but the Planning Department has not received any response of yet.

Margaret Costello asked if the chimney repair work will be subcontracted, Sylvester Bhembe said it will be.

Wireless Communication Facility Site Plan Approval – 501 Gleasondale Rd (AT&T)

The Board reviewed the draft Site Plan Approval.

Lori Clark recalled the applicant said the generator would operate sometime around 9-10am in the midweek. Lori Clark asked if the comment should be captured in a finding. Margaret Costello said she does not believe the operating time needs to be regulated, given the proposed noise barriers. Lori Clark requested that the operating time be included as a finding of the site plan approval.

Jesse Steadman said he would like the applicant to return to the Board with revised construction drawings, showing the detail of the proposed noise barrier. The Board agreed to include that requirement in the Site Plan Approval.

Margaret Costello requested it be made clear in the Site Plan Approval that only one Planning Board member visited a similar backup generator in operation, albeit in a very different site context.

Lori Clark requested a condition that the noise abating fence be continue to be maintained.

Karen Kelleher moved to approve the Site Plan Approval for Modification to Telecommunication Facility in Accordance with MA District Court Judgement Civil Action No. 06-10659 GAO for 501 Gleasondale Road, AT&T, as drafted and amended

John Colonna-Romano seconded

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

John Colonna-Romano moved to authorize Karen Kelleher to sign the Site Plan Approval on behalf of the Planning Board

Margaret Costello seconded

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

Margaret Costello said she appreciated the process on this Site Plan Approval, and that she is pleased that abutters concerns have been addressed.

Review Town Center Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Concepts Request for Proposals

Jesse Steadman summarized that funding to secure concept plans for Town Center transportation improvements was approved by Annual Town Meeting in May 2021, and that the Complete Streets Committee has already requested some revisions to the draft Request for Proposals. Jesse Steadman said the RFP as drafted is clear about the need for plans that can move the town toward funding through the state Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Jesse Steadman said revisions to the RFP have been in the scope of work and deliverables sections.

Margaret Costello said she is glad the draft RFP proposes connectivity improvement south from Town Center toward Circuit Drive. Karen Kelleher said the Complete Streets Committee agreed that connectivity to the neighborhood near Circuit Drive should be improved.

Jesse Steadman said that Town Center intersection has some clear improvement pathways. Jesse Steadman said that MassDOT firmly requires certain alternatives analysis including the feasibility of a rotary intersection.

John Colonna-Romano asked if the library improvement projects could have some impacts on the project, as they are proposing the traffic patterns on Common Road be changed. John Colonna-Romano asked if there could also be some impacts to the old fire station. Jesse Steadman said he has worked with the Library Director to include the preferred concepts for the library in the final RFP package.

Nancy Arsenault said she is hopeful the proposed improvements will be sensitive to the aesthetics of Stow and the small town character at Town Center. Nancy Arsenault said she has seen road improvement projects in other small towns that have looked out of place in their context. Jesse Steadman said that

securing concept plans that the Town can comment on before 25% design documents gives the town a fair degree of control over any proposed work.

Jesse Steadman said that projections of traffic needs must be considered in planning any roadway improvements, and there must be a delicate balance between those needs versus historic preservation and neighborhood character. Margaret Costello questioned the philosophy of building roadways to accommodate future projected traffic. Margaret Costello said she is more interested in the town limiting possible traffic growth on Route 117. Jesse Steadman said that MassDOT will consider mode shifts in any funding proposal for TIP funding, and their projections will not always necessarily indicate a traffic increase. Jesse Steadman said the project is not focused on increasing vehicle capacities, and pedestrian and other modes of connectivity improvements are a central priority.

Jesse Steadman agreed to add a sentence to project goals to make it clear that a primary goal is to increase pedestrian connectivity and safety in Town Center. Margaret Costello suggested language to de-emphasize single occupancy vehicle travel.

Nancy Arsenault commented that roadway improvements require landscaping solutions to blend it with the surrounding area. Margaret Costello said that the town should plan for transportation that does not blindly accommodate vehicle travel.

Nancy Arsenault commented on the low use of School buses by Stow families. Jesse Steadman said he is working with the new Superintendent of Nashoba Regional School district and the local Safe Routes to Schools coordinator to consider transportation improvements tailored to the schools near Town Center.

Planning Board Workplan

Jesse Steadman identified the following broad priorities:

- Transportation (multiple boards)
- Lower Village Zoning, revise draft zoning bylaw amendment following consultant comments and public forums
- Sign Bylaw rewrite, beginning with Lower Village
- Potential overlay district to afford some flexibility to landscapers
- Master Plan Update

The Board requested that Lower Village base zoning be prioritized over sign amendments.

Karen Kelleher asked if the Board wants to consider rezoning the D&D Farms area a priority. Margaret Costello said she is not comfortable rezoning the site given the nearby residential abutters in order to facilitate the sale of the property. Lori Clark said the Board will consider some simple concepts for a possible overlay district and upon consideration will reconsider that project's priority.

Lori Clark addressed the upcoming meeting with the Select Board. Lori Clark said that the Board should present its clear proactive priorities, such as transportation, lower village, signage. Lori Clark said the Board should provide an overview of recent and expected permitting.

Lori Clark said it is important that the Select Board be informed about ongoing issues and the Planning Board's approach to addressing problems. John Colonna-Romano suggested that the Planning Board request assistance from the Select Board to move forward some stalled, persistent issues. The Board referenced the ongoing flooding on Harvard Road as an example of issues that would benefit from greater town wide communication and collaboration.

Jesse Steadman said the Select Board has already expressed some interest in allocating American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to a water feasibility study for Lower Village. Jesse Steadman said he would like to present the proposed work to the Planning Board before a formal ARPA request is submitted to the Select Board. Jesse Steadman said the Economic Development & Industrial Commission is also interested in sponsoring the proposed work. Jesse Steadman said it will be important to communicate how the water, zoning, and road improvements in Lower Village are interconnected.

Jesse Steadman said that it will be important to move the Master Plan process forward when meeting with the Select Board. Jesse Steadman said that staff have met with local diversity activists and professionals about advancing an inclusive and participatory process. Jesse Steadman said it will be important to develop an outreach plan for all groups that are involved with the Master Plan process. Jesse Steadman said staff are working on an engagement and outreach framework for the Select Board and Planning Board as that process moves forward.

Resident Katie Fisher requested that the water feasibility study include the possibility to add undersized lot houses in the surrounding area to connect to the system. Katie Fisher said there is an increased risk of contamination from nearby business uses. Katie Fisher also inquired about the process to expand the business district. Lori Clark suggested submitting a written request to be discussed as an agenda item at a later date.

The Board scheduled Feb 1st, 8th, and 22nd meeting dates.

Respectfully submitted,
Malcolm Ragan