

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Location: Strafford Town Hall Conference Room

Date & Time: March 7, 2024 6:30PM

Voting Members Present:

Phi Auger – Chairman
Tim Reed – Vice Chairman
Terry Hyland
Lynn Sweet – Selectman Representative

Non-Voting Members Present:

Don Clifford – Alternate

Others Present:

Robert Fletcher, Minutes Recorder

The Chairman, Phil Auger, called the meeting to order at 6:33PM and recognized Board members Tim Reed, Terry Hyland, Lynn Sweet, and Don Clifford as present. He also recognized the presence of Robert Fletcher.

In the absence of Charlie Moreno, the Chairman appointed Don Clifford as a voting Board member.

Continuing Business

Public Hearing in Accordance with NH RSA 231: 158 and the Strafford Scenic Roads Ordinance.

Eversource Energy/PSNH requested permission to trim and/or remove trees and brush for routine maintenance for power distribution lines located along Jo Al Co Road and Northwood Road, which are designated Scenic Roads in the Town of Strafford. Work is scheduled to begin following this hearing and/or later this year.

Chris Martel, Northern Tree Service, presented the request. The work includes removal of trees less than six inches in diameter and branches that are ten feet above, eight feet to the side, and ten feet below the primary utility line. The primary utility line carries electric power and is located at the top of the utility poles. Dead or dying trees that pose a hazard to utility lines, regardless of size, will be removed; however, brush removal is no longer required. Property owners are notified and may approve or refuse trimming service. Cut wood and chippings are left behind; otherwise, all debris is removed by the tree service contractor. Forty-eight trees have been identified and approved by property owners for removal. An additional sixteen trees located on town property have been identified and require town approval for removal. There will be no power interruption during the tree trimming/removal.

The Board determined that a site survey was not needed. The Chairman called for a motion to approve the requested tree trimming/removal, which was moved by Lynn Sweet, seconded by Terry Hyland and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Other Business

The Board reviewed the minutes for the February 1, 2024, Planning Board Meeting/Public Hearing. Lynn Sweet made a motion to accept the minutes as written, which was seconded by Tim Reed and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members present who attended the February 1st Planning Board Meeting/Public Hearing. The motion passed.

Board Discussion

The Chairman began an open discussion of the need for a Bow Lake overlay district to address environmental concerns and proposed changes to Zoning Ordinances. He noted the presence of several Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) members (Charlie Burnham, Jean Chartrand-Ewen, Katrina Labrecque, and Scott Hodgdon) and Strafford resident, Terry Hyland, Jr. He also emphasized the need for continuous educational outreach to inform town residents of the importance of protecting the community character and natural resources as indicated in the updated Master Plan. The Board and other attendees discussed the following:

Bow Lake

- Shoreland Protection - Evaluation and compliance with the Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act (SWQPA, RSA 483-B) as a condition of approval for building permits and ZBA applications. The Town has adopted this Act, but, to date, has chosen not to enforce it.
- Fertilizers – Control lawn fertilization and promote lawn area reduction by introducing natural vegetative trees, shrubs, and ground cover. Prohibit lawn fertilization within 25 feet of the shoreline. Fertilization is difficult to regulate, and education for landowners may be a better way to control its use. Charlie Burnham suggested only fertilizing in the fall, which would help reduce spring fertilizer runoff.
- Septic Systems - Mandatory septic system inventory and upgrades to state-approved, year-round systems triggered by building permits, ZBA approval, and property transfer. Jean Ewen felt this would be difficult to enforce due to the cost to landowners. Lynn Sweet indicated that enforcing the SWQPA would improve control and containment of sewage. The ZBA would need to take the lead on enforcement efforts. Charlie Burnham supported the need for a septic system inventory of all Bow Lake shore properties.
- Impervious surfaces - Require compliance with SWQPA as a condition of approval for ZBA and building permit approvals. The ZBA addresses this for Special Exception and Variance applications.
- Recreational Vehicles (RVs) – A number of RVs sited on shoreline residential properties are being used as “bunk houses,” which add bedroom(s) onto existing septic systems.
- Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) – Current septic systems that are not approved for the additional ADU bedroom(s) may be used, but a state-approved septic system to accommodate the additional load must be on record with the Town.
- Rentals – There may be a need to control and/or regulate Airbnb activity on lake properties.

- Bow Lake Overlay District – There is a need to establish specific criteria and guidelines for the Bow Lake area that may not apply to more rural areas in Strafford.

Terry Hyland, Jr. expressed concern on how to get the Bow Lake residents to understand and accept the need to act now to protect the lake. This would be a public relations campaign, and he did not believe that the town administration identifying the problems would be accepted by the residents. An outside consultant or expert who identifies and communicates problems and solutions would be the best way to get town residents involved.

Tim Reed suggested the primary focus should be on conducting a septic system inventory to establish a database, which would include testing each system for containment and filtration capabilities. He also suggested University of New Hampshire student involvement as a course project to assist in data collection.

Don Clifford believed the best way to initiate lake resident action would be to focus on diminishing property values when the lake becomes unusable due to pollution.

Scott Hodgdon suggested developing a list of questions to be included for a building permit that would help determine current septic system capability and identify other environmental concerns.

Proposed Zoning Regulation Changes

The Chairman recapped the 1.14.4 Frontage and 1.14.12 Building and Structures definition changes to be presented for town vote on March 12, 2024. Katrina Labrecque asked if the reference to parking lots in the Building and Structure definition change had been removed in the voting article. Its removal was confirmed.

Recreation Vehicle Zoning Ordinances

The Chairman presented RV Ordinances from other towns in New Hampshire as possible examples that could be used to develop a Strafford Ordinance. He stated that RVs are currently being used inappropriately as domiciles, which are not taxable but must be supported with Town services. Don Clifford indicated that RVs would not qualify as a domicile due to the current Ordinance that requires a minimum of 500 square feet of living space. Scott Hodgdon pointed out that no specific regulations regarding RVs could result in the Town being liable for any property damage or injuries associated with RV use as a domicile. Tim Reed pointed out that the proposed RV Ordinance was being considered for Town vote was too restrictive and did not adequately separate temporary use from permanent use. Terry Hyland, Jr, expressed his desire for the Ordinance to be simply stated, and he thought the Deerfield RV Ordinance was a good example that indicated a parked RV is permitted if it does not present a health or safety hazard or create a nuisance. However, enforcement may be difficult without specific guidelines. Terry Hyland suggested starting with the problem, educate and involve town residents through social media or Town Newsletter, and then developing a solution. Scott Hodgdon recommended the Town Attorney be present at all Planning and Zoning Board meetings to provide legal background.

Other Business

The Chairman informed the Board that this was Tim Reed's last meeting and thanked him for his participation and contribution during his tenure as a Planning Board member.

There being no further business before the Board, Lynn Sweet made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Tim Reed. The Board voted unanimously in favor, and the meeting adjourned at 8:01PM.