

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Location: Strafford Town Hall Conference Room

Date & Time: October 2, 2025 6:30PM

Members Present:

Phil Auger – Chairman
Charlie Moreno – Vice Chairman
Terry Hyland
Lynn Sweet – Selectman Representative

Alternate Members Present:

Donald Coker
Susan Arnold
Sue Higgins

Others Present:

Jen Czysz, Strafford Regional Planning Commission, Executive Director
Robert Fletcher, Minutes Recorder

The Chair, Phil Auger, called the meeting to order at 6:30PM and recognized Board members Charlie Moreno, Terry Hyland, Lynn Sweet, Donald Coker, Susan Arnold, and Sue Higgins as present. He also recognized as present Jen Czysz and Robert Fletcher.

Continuing Business

Major Subdivision – Michael D. Whitcher Revocable Trust of 2002, 8-lot subdivision, Whig Hill Road, (Tax Map 4, Lot 1)

Lynn Sweet recused herself and the Chair appointed Susan Arnold in her place. He also appointed Donald Coker as a voting member to replace Don Clifford who was absent.

Chris Berry of Berry Surveying and Engineering, representing the applicant, stated that he would like to address the waiver requests to determine if plan modifications were needed. He addressed the following waiver requests:

1. No greater than 3% grade within 100-feet of the intersection (2.6.5.C).

Mr. Berry stated that the existing trail into the site is approximately 4.25% slope which is the proposed grade for the project. He referenced the Town requested Altus Engineering independent review of the development plans which indicated that modifying the slope to meet regulations will not create undue hardship to the applicant and will improve the slope on the remaining portion of the road. Mr. Berry stated that making the site entrance flatter at 3% grade will require the swales and culverts to be deeper. However, the plan, as designed, attempts to minimize ground disturbance of the site and overall impact to the area which is also the intent of each of the waiver requests.

Sue Higgins asked if it was possible to make the entrance slope more gradual. Mr. Berry indicated that the proposed slope increase is an imperceptible difference. Charlie Moreno indicated that he was not concerned about the issue and stated that the proposed plan design was better and more practical than requiring a 3% grade.

The Chair asked for a motion, and Charlie Moreno moved to approve the waiver as requested which was seconded by Susan Arnold and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

2. Minimum horizontal curve radius of 230-feet (2.6.5.E).

Mr. Berry indicated that the proposed plan tightens the curve radius in two places – 150-feet in the road and 100-feet at the hammerhead entrance. This design avoids disturbance of natural features and minimizes wetland impacts. He noted that the Altus Engineering review did not object to this waiver.

There being no comments or discussion by the Board, the Chair asked for a motion. Donald Coker made a motion to approve the waiver as requested which was seconded by Charlie Moreno and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

3. Minimum vertical curve sag K value of no less than 40 (2.6.5.E).

Mr. Berry noted that the Altus Engineering review indicated that the applicant did not request a minimum vertical crest K value waiver. He requested the addition of a waiver from minimum vertical crest K values to the above waiver request which results in no substantive change. He indicated that the smaller K values allow a shorter radius on vertical curves which tightens up the roadway design and reduces impact to the area. Additionally, the K values prescribed in the ordinances are National Highway values designed for high-speed travel. This roadway is essentially a driveway, and he believes the standard does not need to be met. Also, the areas of the roadway in need of waiver do not have large grade changes and a curve would not even be needed in one location on the roadway by NHDOT standards.

Donald Coker referenced the Altus Engineering review which offered the opinion that a greater K value at the beginning of the roadway might improve the runoff and site grading. He expressed concern about stormwater runoff and containment. Mr. Berry indicated that he did not agree with the Altus opinion and that the roadway plan design K values allow optimal stormwater runoff and containment. Susan Arnold clarified with Mr. Berry that a flatter vertical curve would allow more water to pool on a roadway. Donald Coker asked if the design could be modified more in line with the Altus Engineering suggestion. Mr. Berry indicated that the current design super elevates the roadway to eliminates icing in the sag and any change in K value would not provide any improvement. Charlie Moreno stated that he believes the plan design adequately addresses stormwater runoff.

Kate Sawal, an abutter on the northwest boundary of the site, questioned how the water runoff onto Whig Hill Road was to be handled. Mr. Berry confirmed that the low point of the roadway was located at its entrance from Whig Hill Road. The entrance is currently crowned but could be modified to direct all the runoff to swale.

The Chair asked for a motion and Charlie Moreno moved to approve the waiver as requested which was seconded by Terry Hyland, and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members except Donald Coker who abstained. The motion passed.

4. 4:1 Side slopes up to ten-feet (2.6.5, Figure 1).

Mr. Berry indicated that the project proposes 3:1 side slopes in specific locations, and Altus Engineering review indicated no objection to the waiver request.

The Chair stated that side slopes were addressed during the site walk. Sue Higgins who was not able to be at the site walk, asked about the side slopes. Mr. Berry indicated that the roadway is elevated and in some locations it is not necessary to use 4:1 side slopes which require more ground disturbance.

The Chair asked for a motion and Charlie Moreno moved to approve the waiver as requested which was seconded by Susan Arnold, and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Conditional Use Permit – Michael D. Whitcher Revocable Trust of 2002, Proposed Private Roadway Impacting Wetlands Buffer, Whig Hill Road, (Tax Map 4, Lot 1)

Chris Berry of Berry Surveying and Engineering, representing the applicant, stated that the Roadway grading will be within the 25-foot wetlands buffer and will impact 525 square feet of the buffer. He referenced the Altus Engineering review which suggests shifting the roadway 12 -feet to the north to avoid the wetlands buffer. He stated that the plan could be modified but would create other impacts the applicant is trying to avoid. He noted that the Strafford Conservation Commission voted unanimously to not oppose granting the conditional use permit.

Charlie Moreno along with Susan Arnold asked Mr. Berry what the other impacts were and where they were located on the plans. Mr. Berry pointed out that moving the roadway would result in additional grading impacts and disturbance of stonewalls. He noted that the wetlands had been highly manipulated over time and were not pristine wetlands. Charlie Moreno asked how far the roadway entered the wetlands buffer. Mr. Berry indicated that none of the paved roadway was in the buffer and it was designed to carry water runoff away from the wetland area. Only the roadway grading was within the buffer area. Donald Coker asked Mr. Berry to restate the other impacts caused by moving the roadway, which he did.

There being no further comments or discussion, the Chair asked for a motion and Charlie Moreno moved to approve the conditional use permit which was seconded by Terry Hyland and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Mr. Berry referenced the Altus Engineering review which suggested the Board discuss the roadway hammerhead design. He stated that the alternative to a hammerhead is a cul-de-sac which creates more ground disturbance than a hammerhead. The Chair suggested reducing the width of the hammerhead, and Mr. Berry agreed to a reduction that would still allow emergency vehicle access. Susan Arnold suggested the use of landscaping to enhance the area around the hammerhead. Mr. Berry indicated that he would incorporate or discuss the remainder of suggestions or comments provided in the review with Eric Weinrieb of Altus Engineering. Charlie Moreno referenced item #21 of the Altus Engineering review which highlights the need for assurances that the residential locations on the lots when constructed will comply with the intent of the stormwater management design provided with the subdivision approval. Mr. Berry stated that there is a fine balance in creating a lot where the owner can construct a residence on any buildable area in the lot and making accurate assumptions on a stormwater management plan but would attempt to depict appropriate structure locations on the plan. Mr. Berry did not plan to incorporate the Altus Engineering suggestion to have a driveway access one of the lots boarding Whig Hill Road. The subdivision was planned to minimize additional access on Whig Hill Road.

The Chair asked if there were any additional questions or comments from the public, and seeing none called for a motion for application continuance which is mutually agreed upon by both parties due to the time period to act upon the application exceeding 65 days. Susan Arnold made a motion for continuance to the November 6, 2025, 6:30PM Planning Board meeting at the Strafford Town Hall. The motion was seconded by Charlie Moreno, and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Lynn Sweet resumed her Board member position as Selectman Representative and Susan Arnold returned to her position as an alternate member.

Conditional Use Permit, Jessica & Michael Baker, 25 Fire Road 32, Proposed driveway to new home impacting the Wetlands Buffer (Tax Map 26, Lot 1A)

Chris Berry of Berry Surveying and Engineering, representing the applicant, indicated that the Conditional Use Permit focuses on the impact to the wetland area at the rear of the property and the Board, at a previous meeting, was inclined to grant the permit if improvements were made in other areas. Specifically, the Board asked for a vegetation plan along the shoreline in front of the proposed residence to reduce or eliminate lawn area. There is a relatively flat area close to the proposed residence deck and the revised plan indicates a band of plantings within this area with two paths to the lake and two tree plantings off to the side.

The Chair and other Board members questioned the reason for the approximately 25-foot wide lawn area on a sloped area close to the lake. Mr. Berry indicated that it was the preferred choice to stabilize that sloped area. The Chair suggested a planting of low-growing shrubs to eliminate lawn maintenance and fertilizer applications. Mr. Berry noted the other massive benefits of this project and doesn't want to minimize how they enhance the enjoyment of the property. He suggested increasing the width of the shoreline vegetation plantings by 15 feet on the steeper slope toward the lake. Charlie Moreno agreed with this suggestion but felt the plantings could extend all the way to the shoreline because the sloped area would not be used for family activities and the lawn area would be eliminated. Sue Higgins noted that the waterfront of the property is a stonewall, there is no beach area, and a crushed stone walkway could be installed to access the dock. Donald Coker noted that the community thought the Town Master Plan made it clear that protection of the lake was very important. He asked if there was some way to forbid the use of fertilizers on this particular property. Sue Higgins indicated that NH RSA 431 prohibits use of fertilizers under shoreland protection guidelines. Sue Higgins also questioned if the location of the septic system leach field that was proposed to be partially on an abutters property had been resolved. Bruce Freeman, the abutter in question, was present at the meeting and confirmed that the Zoning Board of Adjustment granted a variance for the septic system and the State will require filing of a legal document indicating an easement for the leach field extending onto his property.

The Chair asked for a motion. Donald Coker made a motion to approve the Conditional Use Permit which was seconded by Lynn Sweet; however, Charlie Moreno asked for more discussion on the permit. A modified vegetation plan needed to be presented before approving the CUP or it needed to be a condition of approval of the CUP. Jen Czysz suggested including the plan changes in a motion to approve the CUP. Donald Coker withdrew his motion to approve. Lynn Sweet indicated she was in favor of making the modified plan a condition of approval to eliminate the need for a plan presentation at the next Planning Board meeting. Mr. Berry suggested that a conditional vegetation plan include a 30-foot wide planting from along the shoreline stonewall up the slope to the flatter area in proximity to the proposed residence. Charlie Moreno indicated that a walkway would be needed through the planting area and along the stonewall and that grass could be planted in the flatter area in front of the residence. Lynn Sweet made a motion to approve the Conditional Use Permit subject to a 30-foot wide planting buffer from the toe of the slope to the water with walkways of pervious material and inclusion of a reference to RSA 431 on the site design plan. Donald Coker seconded the motion and it was voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Other Business

The Board reviewed the minutes of the September 4, 2025 Planning Board Meeting. Charlie Moreno made a motion to accept the minutes as written, which was seconded by Lynn Sweet and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members present who attended the September 4th Planning Board Meeting.

A Work Session is needed to address the recent New Hampshire Legislative zoning and subdivision regulation changes. The Board agreed to meet on October 21, 2025, at 6:30PM. The Chair will also send Board members a revised version of proposed subdivision changes for review prior to the meeting.

Susan Arnold mentioned the need to include in the meeting agenda an opportunity for general public comments at the beginning of each meeting.

Charlie Moreno noted that the Master Plan sub-committees will meet on October 14, 2025 at 6:30PM.

There being no further business before the Board, Lynn Sweet made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Charlie Moreno. The Board voted unanimously in favor, and the meeting adjourned at 7:43PM.

Minutes Prepared by Robert Fletcher