

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Location: Strafford Town Hall Conference Room

Date & Time: December 4, 2025 6:30PM

Members Present:

Charlie Moreno – Vice Chair

Don Clifford

Lynn Sweet – Selectman Representative

Alternate Members Present:

Donald Coker

Susan Arnold

Sue Higgins

Others Present:

Lisa Murphy, Strafford Regional Planning Commission, Senior Regional Planner

Robert Fletcher, Minutes Recorder

In the absence of Phil Auger, Charlie Moreno, Acting Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:30PM and recognized Board members Don Clifford, Lynn Sweet, Donald Coker, Susan Arnold, and Sue Higgins as present. He also recognized as present Lisa Murphy and Robert Fletcher. He stated that the closing date for new applications to appear on the agenda for the regular January meeting will be 5:00 PM, Tuesday, December 16, 2025. Revised applications for projects already under review must be submitted by Tuesday, December 30th for the January meeting.

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 as a voting member in her place. Don Clifford recused himself and the Chair appointed Sue Higgins as a voting member in his place. He also appointed Donald Coker as a voting member in place of Phil Auger.

The Chair noted that the Board previously accepted the plan as complete, conducted a site walk, and heard comments at a public hearing. He asked Michael Whitcher to present the case. Mr. Whitcher addressed the unresolved issues from a previous meeting regarding foundations, an old well, and stonewalls. He indicated that a waiver was requested and granted to construct the subdivision roadway along an existing gravel roadbed and to avoid disturbing the foundations located within proposed Lot 1-3. He plans to market the lots in the subdivision and does not want to place any deed restrictions on removal of the foundations. The foundations have no documented historical value, and a new owner should have the right to retain or remove them. The placement of a residential structure may necessitate their removal. There is also an issue of liability with the retention of the foundations and in the insurance industry they are considered an attractive nuisance which may increase insurance liability rates. The Chair asked about capping the existing well rather than filling it in. Mr. Whitcher indicated that the well may already be partially filled in and, because it serves no purpose, should be completely filled in, covered and graded to existing ground level. Donald Coker clarified with Mr. Whitcher that the stonewalls on the property were not along boundary lines and would remain undisturbed.

The Chair addressed the following with Mr. Whitcher:

- Addition to the plan for planting of trees in the area of the proposed hammerhead. Mr. Whitcher did not know if Chris Berry had modified the plan but he would ensure that it was done.
- Homeowner Agreement (HOA). Mr. Whitcher confirmed that an HOA will be recorded for those lots accessed via the private roadway. The lots accessed from Whig Hill Road and Aspen Drive would not have an HOA. The Chair confirmed with Mr. Whitcher that the property being subdivided was not included in the Whig Hill development HOA.
- Access to remaining non-buildable land. Susan Arnold confirmed with Mr. Whitcher that he will be the owner of that portion of the property and has no plans to restrict access.

The Chair opened the meeting for public comments at 6:50PM.

Kate Sawal, an abutter to the Whitcher property, asked about the boundary mismatch she questioned at the July 10, 2025 Planning Board meeting. Property lines indicated on two different plans do not match and Chris Berry agreed to address this. The Chair asked Mr. Whitcher to reach out to Chris Berry to have him work with the abutter to resolve the mismatch.

Muriel Fischer, Canaan Road, asked about the Lovely Conservation Development and was informed that the applicant requested a continuance and the case would not be addressed at this meeting. She indicated that the information to be posted on the Town website following last months meeting was not available and requested it to be posted before the next meeting.

There being no further comments, the Chair closed the meeting for public comments at 6:57PM.

The Board had no further questions or comments and the Chair asked for a motion. Donald Coker made a motion to approve the plan with the condition of the addition of tree plantings to the plan which was seconded by Sue Higgins and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Lynn Sweet and Don Clifford resumed duties as voting members. Susan Arnold and Sue Higgins returned to alternate member status.

Major Subdivision – David & Rebecca S. Lovely Revocable Living Trusts, 7-lot Conservation Development, Canaan Road and 20 Back Canaan Road (Tax Map 4, Lot 83-1)

The applicant requested a continuation, and Don Clifford made a motion to continue forward the application until the January 8, 2026 meeting at 6:30PM, which was seconded by Donald Coker and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

New Business

Minor Subdivision – Branch Brook Holdings, LLC, 2-Lot Subdivision, 746 Parker Mountain Road (Tax Map 10, Lot 8)

Thomas Severino, Branch Brook Holdings, LLC, introduced his brother, Ron, and addressed the application. He indicated that the 45-acre property was purchased in January and is proposing a subdivision into two lots, a 33.72-acre Lot 8 and a 12-acre Lot 8-1. Berry Surveying & Engineering surveyed the entire boundary of the parcel, and the application contains three waiver requests.

The Chair confirmed with Lisa Murphy that the plan met all the requirements for completeness and called for a motion to accept the plan as complete which was so moved by Lynn Sweet and seconded by Don Clifford and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed. Lynn Sweet made a motion that the application presents no regional impact which was seconded by Don Clifford and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

The Chair opened the meeting for public comments at 7:10PM and, there being none, closed the meeting for public comments at 7:10PM.

Lynn Sweet noted that a portion of the parcel falls into FEMA Zone A, confirmed with Mr. Severino that no buildings were in that area, and indicated that a note to that effect should be on the plan. The Chair addressed the requested waivers as follows:

1. Water courses, wetland delineation, and exposed ledge. Approximately one-third of the parcel delineates water courses, wetlands, and exposed ledge and provides detail around the existing home and the proposed building area of the newly created lot. It would be an unnecessary hardship to topo the remainder of the parcel. Don Clifford made a motion to approve the waiver which was seconded by Donald Coker and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members except the Chair who abstained unless his vote was needed. The motion passed.
2. Topographic contours and elevations. Approximately one-third of the parcel has been delineated with topographic contours/elevations and provides the required detail around the existing home and the proposed building area of the newly created lot. It would be an unnecessary hardship to topo the remainder of the parcel. Don Clifford made a motion to approve the waiver which was seconded by Donald Coker and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members except the Chair who abstained unless his vote was needed. The motion passed.
3. Building and septic setback lines. Approximately one-third of the parcel has been delineated such that building and septic setbacks are shown on the plan but it would be an unnecessary hardship to map the remainder of the parcel solely for the purpose of providing setbacks in areas with no intention for building. Don Clifford made a motion to approve the waiver which was seconded by Donald Coker and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members except the Chair who abstained unless his vote was needed. The motion passed.

The Chair noted that NH DOT Driveway Permits had been obtained in September 2025, and there being no further discussion or comments, asked for a motion to approve the plan which was so moved by Lynn Sweet and seconded by Don Clifford and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Minor Subdivision – Mark E. & Susan G. Montross, 2-lot subdivision, Parker Mountain Road and 4 Parsons Hill Road (Tax Map 9, Lot 10)

Josh Zuzgo, Prospect Mountain Survey, representative for the applicants, provided the Board with copies of the subdivision plan. Lynn Sweet noted that several requirements for plan completeness needed to be confirmed:

- Total track acreage. 14.699 acres as indicated in Note 5 on the first page of the plan.
- Current use status. Needs to be added as a note on the plan.
- Plan set description and plans recording location. Needs to be added as a note on the plan.
- Reference to Parsons Hill Road as a scenic road with preservation of stone walls and trees. Needs to be added as a note on the plan.

Lynn Sweet made a motion to accept the plan with conditions as noted above which was seconded by Don Clifford and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed. Lynn Sweet made a motion that the application presents no regional impact which was seconded by Don Clifford and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

The Chair asked Mr. Zuzgo to present the proposal. He indicated that Mark & Susan Montross have owned the property since 1990 which contains a house built in 1788. The proposed subdivision will establish a 2.7-acre lot which meets minimum buildable area and incorporates the house and outbuildings and leaves a remaining lot of 11.9-acres. Both lots meet the minimum frontage requirement along Parsons Hill Road. Wetlands, wetland buffer, building setback, and septic setback are delineated on the plan. The four parcels along Parker Mountain Road were created in the 1970s. Don Clifford questioned if this project would fall under a cumulative subdivision. The Board determined that the parcel to be subdivided was not the parent lot for the previous subdivision and, therefore, would not be considered a major subdivision. Don Clifford also asked if the lot line dividing the two proposed lots could be relocated to eliminate the odd-shaped lot. The Board concluded that it could not be changed due to the minimum buildable area requirement for the 2.7-acre lot. The Board briefly discussed the location of a driveway to reach the buildable area of the 11.9-acre lot.

The Chair opened the meeting for public comments at 7:41PM and, there being none, closed the meeting for public comments at 7:41PM. The Board had no further comments or questions and the Chair asked for a motion to approve the plan. Lynn Sweet made a motion to approve the plan with conditions 1) plan notes regarding scenic road, stonewall and tree preservation, current use status, and plan set description and recording, and 2) wetland scientist and survey fields. The motion was seconded by Don Clifford and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Voluntary Merger in accordance with NH RSA 674: 39a – Philp & Carolyn Auger, Brown’s Pasture Road (Tax Map 3, Lots 3A, 3B, 5 and 6)

The Chair stated that the Board cannot deny a voluntary lot merger but the merger must be presented to the Board for approval. Lynn Sweet noted that a voluntary merger cannot be unmerged at a later date. The Chair indicated that Lots 3-B, 3-C, 3-5, and 3-6 to be merged are all currently and permanently conserved with a conservation easement. Lynn Sweet made a motion to approve the voluntary merger as requested which was seconded by Don Clifford and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members. The motion passed.

Preliminary Consultation

Conservation Development – Sarah & Thomas Collins, Province Road/Evans Mountain Road (Tax Map 6, Lot 1)

Daniel O'Lone, Berry Surveying & Engineering, presented the conservation development proposal. He indicated that Sarah & Thomas Collins own a 216-acre lot which was part of a prior subdivision in the 1980s. The proposed front lot with access from Province Road will be between 30-40 acres with boundary lines mostly following existing stone walls. The remaining acreage will be transferred to the Blue Hills Foundation with a permanent conservation easement. The front lot contains an existing house, and the final subdivision plan will delineate wetland areas and natural features; however, several waivers will be requested. The Chair confirmed with Mr. O'Lone that planning for a conservation subdivision is due to the limited frontage on Province Road, and he asked if there was any question about Evans Mountain Road having been of discontinued status because previous surveys had the Collins (Faranella) ownership to the middle of the road. Mr. O'Lone stated that the old survey was likely wrong and Evans Mountain Road, which borders the property on the southwest side, remains a town Class VI road and the boundary line would go to the edge of the right-of-way. Lynn Sweet noted that the property to the north of the parcel is owned by the Town of Strafford. Don Clifford questioned if there were plans to develop the property from Evans Mountain Road. Mr. O'Lone indicated there were no plans to do so and that access to the current home is via an existing driveway from Province Road. The Chair asked if the 30-40 acre lot could be reduced. Mr. O'Lone stated that the proposed lot line follows existing stone walls and was not sure if the Collins would agree to a smaller lot.

The Chair thanked Mr. O'Lone for presenting the conservation development.

Other Business

Elaine White asked to address home-based childcare. She indicated that new state licensing rules went into effect and the state would now allow a capacity of 44 children for her daycare due to a reduction of required square footage per child. She is asking the Board to approve the prior approved capacity of 35 children to 44 children. Susan Arnold and Lynn Sweet advised Mrs. White that HB1567, Home-Based Child Care Facilities, removes the need for her to appear before the Planning Board for changes to or expansion of the facility. Approval for the facility was granted by the Planning Board in 2019, and the daycare facility can continue to operate under that approval as long as she meets state standards as inspected and licensed by the state. Lynn Sweet stated that the town would provide formal notice for her, indicating no further need to appear before the Planning Board for operation approval.

The Board reviewed the minutes of the November 3, 2025 Planning Board Meeting. Don Clifford made a motion to accept the minutes as written, which was seconded by Sue Higgins and voted upon verbally in the affirmative by all voting Board members present who attended the November 3rd Planning Board Meeting.

There being no further business before the Board, Don Clifford made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Lynn Sweet. The Board voted unanimously in favor, and the meeting adjourned at 8:45PM.

Minutes Prepared by Robert Fletcher