

TOWN OF STAMFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
October 7, 2024
(UNAPPROVED)

Planning Commission: Daniel Potvin, Chair, Alden Finney, Peter Greenbush, Lisa Gramlin, Sheila Lawrence, Marta Miller, David Saldo, Jim Stimpson, and David Tatro.

Visitors: Michael Denault, Jedidiah Gramlin, Beth Phelps, Debra Righi, James Righi, Diane Saldo, and Lori Shepard.

Daniel Potvin called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dan Potvin acknowledged the newly appointed members of the board and made a MOTION to have them introduce themselves. SECONDED by Marta Miller. ALL IN FAVOR. Dave Tatro, Jim Stimpson, and Marta Miller introduced themselves along with a brief background. Sheila Lawrence asked about a former non-voting member of the planning commission who had submitted a letter requesting to join the Planning Commission as a voting member (in March). Lisa said that she'd spoken with this individual when the opening became available again on the Planning Commission and that they expressed that they were not interested in the position at this time. Sheila also questioned why the board had increased back to nine members after recently requesting that the Select Board reduce it to a seven-member board. David Saldo interjected that the reason behind the reduction was because the board was having difficulty reaching a quorum. Sheila was referred back to the Select Board.

HEARING OF VISITORS: Michael Denault, appearing as a private citizen, shared with the board what happened at the last Select Board meeting. While one position was open for the Planning Commission, two people sent in letters of interest. The suggestion was made to increase the size of the board back up to nine. Secondly, he mentioned an upcoming community event, the Resiliency Fair, organized by a group of Stamford citizens. He noted the split between residents of our small town, which he says began around the time of Covid. Most recently, the issue causing division is the town sign. After spending thousands of dollars, we still do not have a sign. A permit for a new sign was submitted to the AO and was denied. The next step is to go before the Zoning Board of Adjustments to seek a variance. What Mike would like is for the Planning Board to take into consideration the future of the town and buildings (ex. a Community Center). He feels there is a lot of red tape and asks that the Planning Commission look at and consider following the state bylaws and do away with our town bylaws on certain things for municipalities. Sheila Lawrence pointed out that the Zoning Board as well as the Planning Commission had to follow the rules laid out in the bylaws. Lisa requested that Mike email her (as clerk) the exact by law he is referring to for the board to review. The board will take up the topic for discussion at the next Planning Commission meeting.

MINUTES:

MOTION by Peter Greenbush to accept the regular meeting minutes of September 9, 2024 as written. SECONDED by David Saldo. All in favor except for the new members as they were not present. Motion APPROVED.

DISCUSSION: 1. OVERSHADOWING

Dan and Jim spoke with John Dupras. He stated that every time somebody does something new on a parcel an engineer has to send a certified letter to any neighbors. That's the time to bring up any issues with the engineers. The way Vermont works is "first come first served". This means that if someone puts in a septic system and it overshadows onto a neighbor's property, that neighbor cannot then put in a well on their own land within that overshadowed area. Pete Greenbush felt that, while we all understand how things work now, we need to focus on what could happen in the future to perhaps prevent overshadowing, especially with the concern of many narrow lots in town. Dan reported that the engineer was unsure if we could create a bylaw to prevent future building from overshadowing onto other peoples' property. The board can check with BCRC for guidance. Jim felt we needed to keep in mind that this is a state law and we as a municipality cannot supersede the state law. There was a question about the role of the septic officer; at this point, the state has full control of the septic and the water. Lori Shepard noted that before the state took over Maura Hawkins did the approval for all of the septic systems. Lisa has looked into some case law on overshadowing and found that the state is more concerned with water as a public resource rather than land rights. She feels we have some latitude in this regard. Jim Righi added that there is a case that is currently going through the Supreme Court in Vermont and that if something gets done at that level the state might address this but currently it is a matter for the town to deal with.

Dan feels we should write up a bylaw addressing overshadowing and present it to the Select Board and advise them to pass it. Pete thinks this is a good idea but also thinks we need to look into where we want the town to go with the subdivided lots and what the direction for the future of the town is going to be. Do we want neighborhoods? If we continue to develop two acre lots, eventually the town is going to have to deal with access roads, etc. Marta noted that there is a huge push by the state for more development and housing. Water is a crucial through-line for rural communities which depend on wells. We need to start with keeping our water clean. Pete agreed and thought it was another topic we need to address along with proper acreage for building. Jim mentioned that in the past it was suggested, in the village setting, to require 1 acre or less before the requirement was moved to two. Dave said that the change to two acres occurred due to septic/water issues that were happening with houses being built too closely together and contaminating wells. It was noted that this is still an ongoing issue and we don't want to add on to it. The state now requires 150 from septic. Alpenwald is an issue due to the allowance of 1-acre lots for building. Jim noted that it is the job of the engineer to come at the completion of a project to certify the septic and the water design and submit it to the state. There is a problem in that not all engineers are reputable and follow through.

Dave Tatro reminded the board to keep in mind that some of these septic systems are going to be replacement systems; there may be no way to avoid overshadowing. We would need to clarify that “no overshadowing” would apply only to new development.

Dave Saldo said that one of the problems with the septic in town is that we’re supposed to be following state and local regulations, one of which is that septic tanks are supposed to be pumped every three years. It is this sort of thing that would help protect the water supply (more information can be found in the Town Plan).

2. PERMIT APPLICATION FORM REVIEW

Lisa asked the board for clarification on the “Application for a Building or Conditional Use Permit”, specifically about the “instructions for filing a zoning permit application”. She feels that it is confusing whether or not all the information asked for on the form must be provided for consideration. If not, perhaps the form needs modifying or more than one form option should be available depending on the situation to avoid the confusion. Lori Shepard agreed that it’s a generic form that doesn’t fit every situation. Discussion ensued on how this could be handled going forward. David Saldo suggested contacting VLCT for assistance.

3. RESILIENCY FAIR

Everyone in town has received a postcard promoting the event. Vendor tables for agricultural related products are available for free (contact stamfordresiliency@gmail.com).

NEW BUSINESS:

Jim Stimpson brought up a topic he has been looking into: community solar. He would like to spearhead a group of people on this. Everybody in the community who wants to be involved buys into it. We would need to raise money upfront for equipment, electrician, etc. and then Green Mountain Power would send us a check back.

MOTION by Daniel Potvin to adjourn. SECONDED by Peter Greenbush. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. The meeting adjourned at 8:33p.m.

Lisa Gramlin
Planning Commission Clerk