

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of December 13, 2023
6:30 pm at Brown Public Library Community Room
(also available remotely via Town GoToMeeting Account)

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 pm by Chair Stephen Fitzhugh.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Planning Commission members Steve Davis, Royal DeLegge, Steve Fitzhugh and Julie Lappin. Blake Pierson was absent. Clerk Mitch Osiecki was also present.

Also in attendance were Wally McLean (resident), Debbie Zuaro (Conservation Commission), Tom Bright (resident), John Stevens (Select Board), and Russ Barrett (Conservation Commission).

Julie Lappin and Russ Barrett attended remotely via GoToMeeting; all others attended in person at the Community Room.

Adjustments to Agenda: None.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes of October 4:

Steve Davis moved to approve. Royal DeLegge seconded.

Discussion: Steve asked that the draft minutes be edited to include two decisions:

1. PC has proposed that the minimum lot size in the Low-Density Residential district be reduced from 5-acres to 2-acres for purposes of creating a new lot for a dwelling (1 or 2 family). Minimum lot size will remain 5-acres for all other purposes.

2. PC has also proposed to reduce the minimum road frontage on a new dwelling lot from 200 feet to 100 feet.

Vote to approve: 3-0.

Zoning Regulations

Review of remaining discussion points in draft regulations that have not yet been resolved. To wit:

Page 8. Section 2.4.1(G)

Exemptions differ for “fences “and “walls,” yet in the regulations no distinction is made between fences and walls. Note: we’re talking here about walls, not retaining walls.

Decision: remove reference to walls. Fences less than seven feet in height will be exempt from a zoning permit.

Page 37. Section 3.2.5 – Zoning Districts.

The regulations currently refer to a Village Center only in downtown Northfield. There is also a VC district in Northfield Falls.

Decision: revise language to include descriptions to both Village Center districts.

Page 46. Section 4.7.3 – Protective Standards.

Part (D) refers to Section 4.6(D), which is incorrect.

Decision: Mitch is working with JuliBeth Hinds to correct this language.

Page 47. Section 4.7.4 – Activities within Protected Areas.

Part (A) refers to the development of non-conforming structures as outlined in Section 8.X, which is incorrect.

Decision: Mitch is working with JuliBeth to correct this language.

Page 49. Table B – Dimensional Standards.

- a. We have opted not to include a Forestry/Conservation district for now. Agreed?
- b. Any other thoughts about the table?

Decision: Correct, no new district for now. No other suggestions.

Page 52. Table C – Table of Uses

- a. Any concerns about presentation of this table?
- b. Pages 56 & 57 have some open items to resolve in the Medium Density Residential District.

Decisions: Layout of table is fine. As for open items:

- Office – should require Conditional Use review.
- Restaurant, short-order or “fast-casual” – same, Conditional Use review.
- Restaurant, sit-down/eat-in only – same, Conditional Use review.
- Service Establishment – same, Conditional Use review.
- Theater – not allowed in this district.
- Self-storage facility – not allowed in this district.

Page 68. Section 5.10.4 – Required Conditions.

Part (L) has some sloppy language: “The top of the natural slope in cut for any excavation and any mechanical equipment shall not be less than fifty feet from any lot line.”

Decision: change this to read: “... the top of the cut slope ...”

Page 70. Section 5.12.2 – Nonconforming Structures.

Part (B)2 outlines the authority to reconstruct after a disaster, citing authority under Section X.X.

Decision: remove the clause “except as authorized under Section X.X”

Page 85. Section 6.4.6 – Enforcement.

Parts (B) and (C) enumerate fines, which are within the allowable range specified under state statute. Agreed?

Decision: yes, the proposed fine amounts are reasonable.

Page 134. Section 9.0 – Zoning Map

I’ve inserted a temporary link to the current Northfield Zoning Map. I have asked Brian Voight of the CVRPC to update the current zoning map, to reflect the correct downtown and Northfield Falls designated Village Center districts.

Decision: none. I will advise the PC on the timeline for completion once I’ve heard back from Brian.

And a miscellaneous item: a couple of sections of the regulations make references to enforcement via the Vermont Civil Court, rather than through Environmental Court. I have left a message with the VT League of Cities & Towns – Municipal Assistance Center. I’m told they should be able to offer, as a free service to member towns, a review of our language with respect to enforcement mechanics. Not sure of their turn-around time. I’ll keep the PC apprised of progress on this.

Zoning Administrator Report

Mitch gave a summary of ongoing zoning activity.

CVRPC Report

Royal DeLegge shared a summary of recent business of the CVRPC.

Other Business

King Street Battery Storage Facility. Steve Fitzhugh explained that Delorean Power has filed a notice for a Certificate of Public Good (CPG) Hearing on a project to site a battery energy storage facility adjacent to the King Street substation. The proposed facility is said to be 9 Megawatts (3 MW for 3 hours). There is a public comment period open until November 27. Both the Northfield Select Board and Planning Commission are statutory parties to this project. The PC may wish to offer a comment on this proposed project.

Power poles in floodplain on Water Street. Steve Fitzhugh also explained that Northfield Electric Department (NED) has several power poles in the floodplain along Water Street. There used to be a berm along the power poles to keep reduce the impact of flooding on neighboring properties. After FEMA buyouts of several Water Street properties, the berm was removed but the poles remain. Possible relocation of these power poles is under consideration. There are three options being explored:

1. Leave the poles in place;
2. Move the poles across the river (they will remain in the floodplain);
3. Relocate the poles to an existing utility right-of-way (ROW) that runs through the middle of Freight Yard Way. This option is seen as less than optimal, since it will impact future development of the Freight Yard Way properties.

Option 1 is a possibility and would require no further action. Doing either option 2 or 3 would require a Section 248-J Certificate of Public Good (CPG) hearing. As with the King Street Battery Storage facility, the Select Board and Planning Commission would be considered statutory parties to such a project and would have the opportunity to offer comments on the project.

Next Meeting:

- January 3, 2024, 6:30 pm at Community Room

Adjournment: Steve Fitzhugh moved to adjourn; Steve Davis seconded.

Motion carried, 4-0.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 pm.