

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
PLANNING COMMISSION
Minutes of April 5, 2023**

**6:30 pm at Brown Public Library Community Room
(also available remotely via Town GoToMeeting Account)**

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm by Chair Stephen Fitzhugh.

Roll Call: Present for the meeting were Planning Commission members Julie Lappin, Steve Davis, and Stephen Fitzhugh. Royal Delegge was absent. Also present: Clerk Mitch Osiecki and Juli Beth Hinds of Birchline Planning.

All participants were in attendance at the Community Room, except Julie Lappin and Juli Beth Hinds, who participated via GoToMeeting.

Adjustments to Agenda: None.

Zoning Regulations

Juli Beth Hinds led a discussion of the work remaining on the ongoing effort to revise the town's zoning regulations.

A key item that remains to be addressed is an update of the list of allowable uses in various zoning districts.

Time permitting, the Planning Commission may also wish to address Home Occupations. The current regulations are somewhat dated.

Juli Beth echoed the recommendation of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission that the PC defer revising language on floodplains until after the state completes remapping the central Vermont watershed, which is slated to be completed in late 2023 or early 2024.

A brief recap of some important items awaiting final decisions:

Article 2

- Certificate of Occupancy – should we require these?

- Administrative Review – would allow the Zoning Administrator to perform a review similar to that of the DRB might do, but when the proposed changes are deemed minor. This could streamline the approval process for certain projects, while preserving the rights of affected property owners to appeal the decision.
- Waivers vs. Variances – the two terms are often used interchangeably, but there are important differences. It is important that the correct review standards be applied depending on specific relief the applicant is seeking.

Mitch offered a brief explanation of the purpose of a Certificate of Occupancy and the various ways one might be used to ensure compliance with various zoning standards.

Article 3 – Zoning Districts

- Juli Beth has added a provision to existing regulations that covers the situation of a lot spanning more than one zoning district.

Article 4

- Key change: we have added a table of dimensional standards.

Article 5

- We have revised outdated standards for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).

Articles 6 & 9

- Juli Beth is currently revising these. An updated draft will be distributed soon.

Question from Stephen Fitzhugh: storage site of PC documents.

Response: the Planning Commission has a google drive that members can be provided access to. Mitch is working on updating this site. New PC members will have access to this site shortly.

Discussion of retaining walls. Regulation of retaining walls seems more important in the village where lots are small and homes are close to one another. Perhaps not as critical an issue in rural areas.

Brief discussion of home occupations as well.

The observation was made that PC should review allowable uses.

Stephen Fitzhugh proposed that the PC soon receive a clean draft of the revised zoning regulations, with notes indication which sections still need attention. Juli Beth is working on this now and will have a draft to distribute shortly.

As previously discussed, home occupations and a table of allowable uses are the two biggest open items.

Discussion of Juli Beth's availability during the week of April 16th. Mitch and Juli Beth will coordinate schedules and we will plan to hold a special meeting one day during that week.

Question from Juli Lappin about the timeline for adoption of the revised zoning regulations. Specifically, Julie wondered if Juli Beth might be available to attend any of the public hearings. Mitch will ask Juli Beth about her availability.

Mitch also noted that the VLCT and the CVRPC both offer as a service review of municipal zoning regulation review. Depending on our timeline, we might want to contact one of these organizations and consider engaging them. Mitch will cost and any time constraints.

ZA Updates

Mitch briefly discussed ongoing zoning activity. Also noted that resident Blake Pierson has submitted a letter of interest and his appointment to the Planning Commission is on the agenda at the next Select Board meeting.

Approval of Minutes: Tabled until next meeting.

Next Meeting:

- Week of April 16, special meeting at a date and time TBD.
- May 3, 6:30 pm at Community Room

Adjournment: Steve Davis moved to adjourn; Julie Lappin seconded.

Motion carried, 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:52 pm.