

TOWN OF BEDFORD
May 24, 2021
PLANNING BOARD WORKSHOP
MINUTES

A workshop meeting of the Bedford Planning Board was held on Monday, May 24, 2021, at the Public Safety Complex located at 55 Constitution Avenue. Members who were present: Mac McMahon(Chairman), Bill Duschatko (Town Council & Vice Chairman), Hal Newberry, Steve Clough, Charlie Fairman, Matt Sullivan, John Quintal (Alternate), Matthew Nichols (Alternate), Becky Hebert (Planning Director), and Jillian Harris (Assistant Planning Director, attended electronically)

I. Call to Order and Roll Call:

Chairman McMahon called the workshop meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Pricilla Malcolm and Kelleigh Murphy were unable to attend the meeting. Chairman McMahon explained that there will be no voting because this is a workshop discussion and none of the Alternate Members were appointed to vote.

II. New Business:

Ms. Hebert stated the Planning Board is holding this informal workshop to discuss recent Board training opportunities, procedural questions for the Board, and community planning topics and priorities for 2021.

Ms. Hebert asked if the Planning Board had reviewed the recommended workshop webinar “The Workings of a Planning Board.” The Board members discussed the workshop and agreed it was a worthwhile training opportunity.

Ms. Hebert introduced the next discussion item “meeting format” and “packet format.” She explained that the Town is asking Boards how they feel about resuming in-person meetings or if the Board would prefer to continue with the Zoom format for meetings. The Board discussed whether members of the public would feel comfortable and safe at the BCTV meeting room and asked if we had enough space for social distance. Ms. Hebert explained that there would not be six feet of space between Board members around the horseshoe and there is limited space in the BCTV meeting. Mr. Fairman said is less of a need for social distance because many people are vaccinated and the state restrictions are becoming less restrictive. The Board was concerned that not everyone from the public would feel comfortable attending an in –person meeting and agreed to continue with the Zoom meeting format through the summer. In-person meetings could be scheduled to start in September.

Ms. Hebert asked if the Board would like to continue to receive electronic packets or if they would like paper copies. The Board discussed and agreed to email the Planning Department with their preference. Ms. Heber said paper copies of the packets could be placed in the vestibule of the Town Office building which is always open and accessible.

Ms. Hebert asked the Board if they were satisfied with the format of the staff reports. The Board agreed that staff reports were very helpful and did not suggest any changes. Mr. Newbury asked about waivers and said he thought the Board has done a nice job over the years reviewing waiver request. He thought that in general the Board should limit the number of waivers granted and should not give the impression that the waivers are a “given” and will automatically be granted. The applicant should explain in detail how they meet the criteria.

The group discussed the process for recusal and reviewed a memo prepared by the NH Municipal Association titled “I Recuse Myself.” Ms. Hebert explained the recusal procedure and the difference from abstention. If a Board member has conflict of interest and feels they should not participate, the correct procedure is to recuse themselves and step away from the meeting. The group also discussed the Town’s social media policy and Ms. Hebert cautioned Board members not to participate in online public discussions about pending applications because it could jeopardize their ability to participate in the Planning Board review process.

Ms. Hebert asked if the Board had any planning topics or priorities for staff to work on this year. The following topics were suggested:

- Review regulations and present a plan to minimize the release of greenhouse gases;
- Investigate ways to preserve Bedford’s affordable housing stock and discourage teardowns;
- Provide Board members with additional information about NH’s workforce housing law; and
- Review opportunities for increasing the development density in the Performance Zone.

Ms. Hebert agreed to review the priority topics and report back to the Board at the September workshop.

MOTION by Mr. Newberry to adjourn at 8:48p.m. Mr. Fairman duly seconded the motion. On a unanimous roll call vote, the motion carried.