

TOWN OF SHELBURNE

Planning Board

MINUTES

Regular Meeting ~ June 17, 2025

A duly posted meeting of the Shelburne Planning Board was held at the Town Hall meeting room, on Tuesday, June 17, 2025.

Present: John Wheeler
Will Flanders
Paul Hollings
Faith Williams
Geoff Stack

Absent: None

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 p.m. by Chair John Wheeler, who noted the meeting was being recorded.

Minutes

A motion was made by Faith to approve minutes of May 20, seconded by Paul. Roll call vote: 4 yeas; 0-nays 1 abstention; motion passed

Official Welcome of Geoff to the board! Geoff asks, by way of orientation, that board members share a bit about themselves: where they live, what they do and their experience on the board.

Mail, Memos, and Other Correspondence – No new ones. One letter from Deb Andrews last month. Members review and agree to add her comments to the affordable housing discussion

ANR Plans/Subdivision – None.

John offers Geoff and explanation about ANRs and the Subdivision bylaw; there is a short discussion about updating the subdivision bylaws 6-7 years ago: FRCOG rep had suggestions for additions to the bylaw shortly before its passing regarding the width of roads into subdivisions, but at that time, the board felt they didn't have the time to address those suggestions before town meeting. Those suggestions were never adopted.

The Planning Board has authority to make changes to subdivision rules without going to Town Meeting. Will suggests that this would be a worthwhile item to add to the plan for the coming year. Geoff agrees; street design most important part of a plan. FRCOG presentation included multiple options for subdivision width of roads, sidewalks and medians. Faith wasn't aware that this wouldn't have to go to Town Meeting for approval and agrees with Will that it should go on the agenda for early in this year's work. John says process is to hold a public hearing and then vote on changes. Common driveways rules are part of subdivision rules and proposed changes would allow for them to be narrower than currently allowed.

Zoning Relief/Special Permit Applications – None.

Appointments – Welcome to Geoff, who has been sworn in. Motion to reappoint Will to CPC, seconded; motion passes unanimously.

Old Business: Implementation of Short Term Rental. Paul tried to call Randy at Board of Health, but he will work with Joe to implement. It would make sense for Randy to initiate this with Joe; they are acquainted. Will leave this item on the agenda for next month. Paul says he will follow up.

New Business:

Report from Susan (via email) about Downtown Plan; a coordinator for the program has been hired, and will start soon. She has been unable to directly connect with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce about this program.

Survey –

- how do we format it? Geoff asks why the format first? The form should follow the function. The questions are the most important.
- The purpose of the survey is in part to help shape the board's understanding of what people feel the board should be working on. Geoff asks: is the survey meant to get a temperature check or to set the agenda?
- Faith: speaking for herself, in the past year, it wasn't clear what informed the work we were doing, and she'd like to know what direction people in town would like the board to go, and also maybe developing a common language. When you stand up at Town Meeting and talk about affordable housing what does that mean and do we share an understanding of what affordability means – is it de-restricted properties that aim at a certain income level or is it something else? Another example: at town meeting it seemed that most people weren't clear about what a Battery Energy Storage System is, which isn't a problem, and people listened and learned about it, but it may not have been one of the top five things anyone but the PB was interested in.
- We could expand the conversation about affordable housing. People in town upset because their kids can't afford to live here but aren't necessarily interested in making Shelburne affordable for newcomers. General trends toward zoning laws that favored less development may now be shifting. The laws of unintended consequences: less development-friendly zoning wasn't intended to make property more exclusive or expensive.
- The definition of affordable as spending 30% of your income on housing is useful. We have a direction and part of the PB role is to identify that direction and then educating and getting feedback. Up to the board to have ideas and to stimulate conversation. Maybe the way to structure the survey is to say: we're thinking of looking at affordable housing; what are your concerns/thoughts about it? The Planning Board is tasked with setting up the rules of land use. There isn't much the PB can do to help business.
- There's the question of what makes a healthy village? Maybe start the question there and see what the similarities are – expand that to be what makes a healthy town? There was a Charette done years ago that was about livability, that might be available. That could be very helpful so that we don't have to do another Charrette. There hasn't been an update of the town master plan since 1999, including both Buckland and Shelburne.
- How do we stimulate people? Sending out a survey to people who haven't thought about this and don't know how to think about it might not get us a whole lot. Expanding it to be about livability might elicit more useful responses. John will look to find the open space and recreation plan because they did a lot of surveying to find what people cared about and there were some suggestions about what the planning board could do in that report. Housing comes up because it has palpable effect: restaurants having a hard time finding help, and teachers can't easily afford to live here. This is true in other towns as well.

Housing

Paul spoke with Megan Rhodes at FRCOG about several things: 1) the sq ft requirements (20,000sf) in village/commercial and village/residential zones as so many properties are nonconforming. Plots in V/C even smaller. 2) where should the planning board be looking for opportunities for affordable housing?

She said:

- There is a document available that shows every building in Shelburne that is nonconforming right now; this is useful to make the argument for reducing the size of allowable lots and to adopt the bylaws to reflect what currently exist; she said Salem has an interactive map on their town website that shows nonconforming lots. Will remembers seeing this document; Alyssa Larose had it and might know where to find it. John recalls that 70% of VR was nonconforming and 90% of VC
- Our bylaws don't define manufactured housing, as opposed to a mobile home, which is defined. Manufactured homes are defined as having foundations that are anchored to the ground; these types of homes are significantly less expensive to build and if they are allowed by right, Shelburne would get points on grant applications for housing funding. Will thinks they are allowed by right, that they are included in the definition of a house and one can do anything except put in a mobile home. Paul says Megan was saying we needed to have it specifically defined.
- Change definition of multifamily dwelling, which currently limits them to occupancy of up to four families, to "more than two families" so that there could be more than four families. Also, removing the special permit requirement for multifamily dwellings would be good. Towns that do this get extra points on grant applications for housing funds.
- Suggested that the 86000 sf for R/A could be lowered through a special permit and Board of Health approval for siting of septic and well; Paul noticed that for V/R, homes that are not on town sewer and water require only 40000sf. If the requirement was consistent for both, that might create more options

Megan would be happy to come and talk with the board any time. Paul will send out the notes he took. Geoff asks what her role is. Livability Program Manager.

John says that a couple of years ago Buckland was able to reduce their lot sizes; he has the new dimension schedule that Buckland has. Alyssa Larose, who worked with Shelburne on this went to work for Buckland and shared lessons learned from what didn't work well here. John will look up and find description of Buckland's revised lot dimensions. They didn't go down as much as the Shelburne PB was proposing – they went from 20000 to 10000 instead of 20000 to 5-7000. Maybe that was part of the problem. Part of the work for this year might be trying again to lower lot sizes, particularly in V/R and V/C

Will reports that CPC can initiate projects; it doesn't have to wait for proposals. The Community Coalition president told him that the CPC can initiate projects for housing, open space and recreation and historic preservation. Jen Hale is on CPC and works in rural development in the regional housing authority and she and will are setting up a meeting with Moriah Kurtz at FRCOG who works on housing. She is working on the possibility of there being funding for a regional housing trust that would include CPC money that could work to fund affordable housing.

Will is curious about whether the former site of Posada could be developed despite septic problems. Residences are more punishing on septic systems than commercial spaces. Important for the PB to consider what kinds of things could be adopted that would earn points when applying for state money. The owners of the Singley lot next to Foxtown were unable to develop because the conditions necessary in town were not there. They would still like to do something with that lot. Larger scale developments are more affordable at scale; five unit projects are tough. BSE is a project that can produce a meaningful number of units more affordably and more feasibly. Houses were torn down to build the school.

There are an estimated 20-30 units of public housing in Shelburne now. Rents are based on expenses; the programs that developed that kind of housing don't exist anymore. The federal govt backed away from that kind of subsidy to instead using low income housing tax credits. This makes for a housing program overseen by the IRS. There has also been talk of tax title property in Shelburne, for example Calls on Rt 2. It is possible to manage 40

unit buildings on well/septic but the question is does the town want to do that? Hard to engineer a many-unit septic system. Very expensive. Are there institutional organizations that do senior housing/veterans housing that are looking for units now?

Franklin County Regional Housing Authority has a development arm called RDI and they are not exclusively an affordable housing developer in Franklin County but they're doing a development in Erving; they manage Highland Village and own some land in Shelburne that would be cost prohibitive to develop if they wanted to develop it as affordable housing. The community Builders are doing the Wilsons project in Greenfield and that might be 70 units, and RDI will be doing a 40 units there. Soldier On develops veteran housing.

Are any of these developers open to units they could rent – not complexes but individual units on scattered sites? The history of affordable housing was that they would see an opportunity and do it – smaller building with few units spread over a wide area. But now the move is to consolidate into larger complexes

Another option is using a market model, creating mixed income housing. As the conversation moves forward, important to keep in mind a flexible way to think and talk about affordable housing, especially when even the term affordable can be loaded when it comes to federal policy. Is there other language that can open up that conversation. Increasing the amount of housing lowers the cost of housing and rent generally. By having more market rate houses lowers the costs broadly.

The survey, getting FRCOG in, between now and next meeting think of questions we should ask on the survey. Also do an expansion of the housing plan that was done a few years back but do it in a community forum. Maybe the survey done first, and make sure we've educated ourselves about what truly viable options are and who are resources are. Start with past surveys; what we garner now might not be so different from what those groups got then.. Invite Andrea Donlan from the Small Town Housing Group and Megan Rhodes to our meeting in August, and if that doesn't work, in Sept.

Committee and Regional Project Updates - none

Two Town News – Posting a notice that the board will be soliciting input and launching a survey would be helpful; Faith says she'll see if she can get something done by the deadline

Other business not reasonably foreseen 48 hours prior to the meeting – None.

Public Comments – None

Schedule Next Meeting – The next meeting will be on July 1, at 6 p.m., at the Town Hall.

At 7:40 p.m. a motion to adjourn the meeting made by Paul and seconded by Faith. The vote in favor is unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Durkee
Administrative Assistant