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Town of Shaftsbury

Municipal Offices at Cole Hall

Meeting Minutes

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Planning Commission

Date of Meeting: September 11, 2024

Members Present: Nancy Burns (chair), Emily Cowperthwaite, Mike Foley, Zoe Contros Kearl, Mike Albus. Also present was zoning administrator Shelly Stiles.

1. Call to order

The meeting came to order at 6 p.m.

2. Minutes

Mr. Albus moved to approve the May 22 minutes. Mr. Foley seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

3. Goals for FY 2025

Ms. Stiles said she'd been asked by Select Board chair Naomi Miller to bring 43 Buck Hill Rd. to the attention of the Commission. She shared a map of the area in question. Ms. Stiles said Ms. Miller wondered whether a boundary line adjustment might be called for. Right now the entire "Cole Hall campus" (the three parcels owned by the Town) is zoned village residential. The zone requires a minimum of 10,000 s.f. per unit. The 43 Buck Hill parcel would support 3.7 units.

Ms. Stiles said there were many complications with this proposal. We don't know how many units the Select Board wishes to place on the parcel and so don't know how many units to plan for. Any boundary line adjustment would reduce the space available for the community septic and could affect the space available for the new community center (and possibly town hall). The sewer committee hasn't decided who should be served by the new septic system – only new structures or new structures as well as those in the Village that are already failing – and the proposed size of the septic system is therefore still unclear. She said the zoning district adjacent to the west is village center. In that zoning district, the 10,000 minimum doesn't exist. There, density is controlled by public water and wastewater system capacities only. The planning commission could recommend that the campus could be rezoned to village center.

Ms. Stiles said Ms. Miller would like to take action now in order to be able to provide a package to a potential builder such as Shires Housing. Ms. Stiles said she thought it made more sense to approach such builders first to find out what their minimum unit number is.

Ms. Stiles said another complicator for the sewer committee is the possibility that those in the village might not be able to afford to hook up and pay for wastewater treatment. Ms. Burns said she heard recently from someone who had gotten help from the state with their septic.

Mr. Albus said it seems to him that most on the commission find the rezoning idea to be the better one. It was agreed that the commission will review the bylaw and consider what to rezone if anything. Ms.

Stiles said anything requiring a vote of the citizens can't happen until March 2026. We don't have time to hold the necessary hearings for the March 2025 Town meeting.

4. Subdivision regulations re-write

Ms. Stiles said after researching the subdivision rules in several other towns in the county and felt that Bennington's was the best. Her suggested changes are adaptations of the Bennington regulations.

She said one of the omissions she intended to cure was the lack of any rationale in the current regulations for how a subdivision is to be reviewed by the DRB. She went to the Town Plan for those reasons and incorporated them in the revisions.

She addressed the difference between "minor" and "major" subdivisions and how they impact DRB procedures. Though statute requires the two, it doesn't define what they are. It is up to towns to decide. She recommended a definition.

Once that distinction is made by the DRB, the procedure is a step by step one, which Ms. Stiles has summarized in a new table. She said she changed some minor content, and made some regulations clearer. Ms. Stiles suggested the commission members review the new against the old.

She said going forward we might invite our DPW foreman to a meeting to talk about the road standards section. The wastewater and potable section should also be rewritten. She will ask an engineer for help. Finally, we will need to revamp and enlarge the definitions section.

We can't take the revisions to the voters until March 2026. We will need to hold our first hearing on the document by August 2025. (That deadline would apply to the rezoning we discussed earlier as well.)

5. Other business

Ms. Stiles reminded the board that in the past each member was asked what they wanted to accomplish in the coming year. Mr. Foley said, once again, he was interested in how to help people build homes, but that he didn't know how to do it. He noted that it is much easier and less expensive to renovate an existing home rather than build a new one, but there aren't many old houses out there. And skilled labor is extremely hard to find. Migrant workers are eager to work, but lack the skills needed.

6. Adjournment

Ms. Cowperthwaite moved to adjourn at 6:54 p.m. Mr. Foley seconded the motion, which passed 5-0-0.

Notes by ZA Stiles