

PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

Date: 9/13/23

In attendance at Town Hall: Tom Ewing, Van Stoddard, Richard Nathhorst

In attendance by Zoom: Swan Keys, Tim Shores

Absent: Molly Daniell, Steve Freedman

Meeting began at 7:30pm

Minutes taken by Tim Shores

7:30 pm to 7:58 pm: Due to lack of documentation of a changed password on the Town-owned Zoom account, the Planning Board spend the first half hour struggling to set up a Zoom call with working audio and video at Town Hall. Richard used another Zoom account which required significant configuration of cabling. This could all be avoided if the Town would allocate appropriate resources for public meeting accessibility. Until we do that, Leverett will fall short in its support of public participation.

- Review and accept minutes of the previous meeting. Voted unanimously to approve.
- Summer Planning Board business:
 - Neal Woodard, 61 Amherst Rd, wrote to Tom: Neal wants to build a shed or garage and put the solar panels on that structure. Tom consulted with former Planning Board chair Ken Kahn and Building Inspector Jim Hawkins. They concluded that because the solar system will be mounted on a structure and not ground-mounted, there is no need for Planning Board review.
- At 7:45 ANR (“approval not required”) for Matt Sicard, Harold Eaton & Associates. These parties did not show up for the meeting.
- Tom reported that Lisa Stratford has been issuing kennel licenses to residents who are not in parts of town that permit commercial kennels, because they aren’t in a commercial zone. Lisa has been following State guidelines for kennel licensing. The Planning Board discussed allowing kennel licensees to apply for a special permit in all zones. Van believes abutters should be notified of the request for a special permit. Swan suggests that we consider a process that gives licensees a path of least resistance and that takes neighbors into consideration. We'll review again at a future meeting, perhaps when Lisa will be able to join.
- Review of Solar Bylaw and possible changes.
 - Richard described the outcome of the Leverett Community Solar Survey conducted by the UMass Amherst Clean Energy Extension: the Extension released the survey results summary on July 4, 2023, and the Community Solar Action Plan for the Town of Leverett on July 19, 2023.

- Richard advised the Planning Board us to follow recommendations from the Solar Action Plan, Section 7, “MUNICIPAL ZONING, BYLAWS, & PERMITTING”, and plan to change zoning bylaws according to section 7.2 “Next Steps & Action Items”, including consideration of Electricity Transmission Rights of Way, Vegetative Screening, Project Size, Siting Restrictions, Energy Storage, and Pesticide Use.
- Per the report, the recommended Next Steps are:
 - Review bylaw recommendations; potentially proposing bylaw amendments at a subsequent town meeting.
 - Provide accessible information on the town’s website about the solar planning process and how large solar projects are reviewed and permitted.
 - Compile a list of standard practices to 1) advertise public hearings regarding large solar projects widely, 2) advertise public hearings regarding proposed solar bylaw amendments widely, 3) identify resident interest in reduced electricity rates to solar project proponents, and 4) negotiate appropriate PILOT payments.
- Tabled: This matter will require thorough review and deliberation by the Planning Board, and preparation of zoning changes to propose at a future Annual Town Meeting (in the spring, not a Special Town Meeting in the fall, since past practice has been to propose significant zoning changes only at Annual Town Meeting).
- To prepare for zoning changes to propose to the Special Town Meeting scheduled for early November 2023:
 - Tom, Van, and Richard volunteered to form a subcommittee to read the zoning bylaw and identify minor changes to propose at November’s Special Town Meeting.
 - Examples of minor changes: references and footnotes to text that is no longer in the bylaw; ambiguous phrasing; minor contradictions; clarify language about roof-mounted and ground-mounted solar installations.
 - This bylaw review subcommittee will schedule the required public hearing in October.
 - The Planning Board voted unanimously to form this subcommittee with the responsibilities described here.
- Status of Phase 2 of the development of a Leverett Comprehensive Plan.
 - Tim reported that the Steering Group was relatively idle during the dog days of summer, and since late August has begun actively planning community vision events and the town survey for October through December.
 - Steering will meet twice in September (the 19th and the 26th, at the Safety Complex and by Zoom) to make final decisions about event and survey content and logistics.