



Townsend Planning Board Annual Report 2022

Chairman: Laura E Shifrin
Vice Chair: Michael Virostko
Clerk: Robert Therien
General Member: Carol Hoffses
General Member: Ian Ortiz Santiago
Associate Member: Vacant

2022 continued to be a challenging year working with hybrid meetings, yet the Planning Board continues to show remarkable resilience by adapting several new procedures to accommodate Townsend's residents' requests for the many functions this board acts upon. These major responsibilities include the review and approval of Subdivisions and Site Plan projects requiring Special Permits; Approval Not Required (ANR) Plans for subdividing lots, and applications submitted under the Scenic Roads Act. The board was even able to hold several important public hearings for new zoning bylaw proposals and zoning bylaw amendments which unfortunately were not moved forward. The Planning Board is also the Stormwater Authority to oversee the Stormwater Management Bylaw which did include monitoring of existing permits and addressing new Stormwater Permit applications. Our updated Master Plan was also approved in 2022. The Planning Board has made the commitment to continue to look at the Master Plan on an Annual basis and make changes as needed.

The Members of the Planning Board have also shown great resilience in adapting to many major changes in administrative adjustments by adapting to a new IT system and getting educated in "live virtual meeting protocols" and "cloud drive" information sharing. The Board did make changes in organization this year. We want to thank Lance McNally for his years of dedicated service as Chairman of the Planning Board. Laura Shifrin took over the Chairmanship in May and continues with her dedicated service along with being the Planning Board representative to the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission Executive Committee, Vice Chair of the Townsend Housing Authority, Vice Chair of the Town's Assessors Board and Chair of the Town Properties Committee.

New Planning board member, Robert Therrien serves as the Clerk, continuing member Michael Virostko is Vice Chairman and represents the Planning Board on the Capital Planning Committee. Continuing member Carol Hoffses Chairs the Open Space and Recreation

Committee and is the Safe Routes to School liaison. The Board welcomed new board Member Veteran Ian Ortiz Santiago who previously served as our Associate member and filled the seat vacated by Julie Byers, Esq. The board wants to Thank Julie and state that we miss her insight. We are fortunate to still have Selectmen, Charles Sexton-Diranian to support the Planning Board as the Board of Selectmen liaison. The Board is grateful for the hard work, commitment, and dedication of these outstanding individuals.

Elizabeth Faxon continues to provide support as the Planning Board Administrator by managing agenda business and serving as liaison to applicants, their attorneys and representatives, engineering firms, developers, contractors, Town Counsel, and the public. She was also appointed as the Planning Board Representative to the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC) to fill a void that current members cannot fill. Beth's dedication and knowledge has again proven a great asset to the Town in providing the Planning Board with outstanding support. Because of the many changes in policy this year, Beth's attention to detail and ability to work with the public and other entities effectively provided the Planning Board with the confidence that all matters before the Board are handled professionally and efficiently. The role that Beth performs is far reaching and having a Land Use Coordinator for a few months this year made things a bit easier but ended in late 2022. Her flexibility, knowledge, and ability to shift gears between administering both the Zoning and Planning Boards was instrumental in allowing both to remain up to date in its board business and allowed for each to maintain normal operations throughout 2022.

Despite the extenuating and difficult circumstances presented to the Board with the pandemic and changes in town policy, the board was able continue conducting business in 23 full, televised board meetings. All Planning Board business is currently up-to-date and any in-process items for 2022 have been completed and decisions and Approval Not Required (ANR) plans have been written and signed by the full board when necessary.

There were several permitting applications brought before the Planning Board during the year. The board in its role as Stormwater Authority for major stormwater management permits, monitored ongoing conditions of Stormwater Permits for projects at 22 West Meadow Road solar installation, 3 Wheeler Road earth excavation, and North End Road Campbell Farm OSPD Definitive Subdivision. 2 Site Plan Review/Special Permits were approved and issued for the conversion of 256 Main Street from commercial to a residential apartment building, and the conversion of 241 Main Street to a mixed use commercial and residential building. The Board approved two projects under the Scenic Roads act on Old City Road and North End Road and approved a preliminary definitive subdivision plan for Seaver Road. The Board approved four Approval Not Required (ANR) Plans.

The Town Administrator requested that all Boards and Commissions review the fees within their purview to make sure they are commiserate with the fees charged by other cities and towns for the same services. To comply with the Town Administrator's request the Planning Board Chair appointed a workgroup to review and evaluate neighboring towns' Planning Board fee schedules. This workgroup reviewed and analyzed the Planning Board fee schedules from the towns of Shirley, Lunenburg, Ashburnham, Westford, Pepperell, and Groton and made a recommendation to the Planning Board for fee revisions based on this analysis.

To ensure currency of the town bylaws, the Planning Board, as time allows during regularly scheduled meetings, reviews the bylaws under the Planning Board purview for currency and makes recommended changes as necessary.

The Master Plan Committee delivered an important report this year: the 2022 Townsend Master Plan Update. The Planning Board approved the Master Plan on August 29, 2022 and will continue to update sections annually. The Planning Board is continuing to work to involve Spaulding Memorial and Hawthorne Brook schools in the Safe Routes to School program. The Program, administered by the State, sponsors events for walkability and bike ability education and awareness for the youth of Townsend. The Board prepared to move two warrant articles at the Special Town Meeting, regarding updates to the site plan review special permit bylaw and proposed amendments to the Age restricted development bylaw. The Board moved the proposed amendments to site plan review special permit forward to Town meeting and plans to continue working on the Age restricted development bylaw as a future proposal.

The Planning Board continues to work closely with Town counsel, the Building Department, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Health, Highway Department, Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, Board of Assessors, Townsend Housing Authority, Town Clerk, and public safety officials to gather perspective and comment on applications under review and gather input to develop and amend bylaws. We are dedicated to a collaborative effort with all town efforts and strive for a better community through planning and implementation.

Respectfully submitted,
Planning Board Members