

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
Planning Board Meeting
August 23, 2023
Minutes

Present: Anthony Rodrigues, Linda Moore, Mike Bruno, Alecia Loveless, Kevin Roy, Martie Cook, and Jerry Blanchard

Absent: Sean Gawlik

Anthony Rodrigues opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance at 6:00 pm.

Jerry Blanchard was appointed as a voting member for tonight's meeting.

The Board reviewed the minutes from 8/9/23. Mike Bruno motioned to accept the minutes. Linda Moore seconded the motion, Anthony and Kevin abstained; motion passes 5-0.

The Board reviewed a request for an extension from Arrowhead Cabins located of Rt 142. The project is waiting for final approval from NHDOT. Linda Motioned to approve a 12-month extension. Kevin Roy seconds. Motion passes 7-0.

Tara Bamford and Kaela Tarvares joined the board to begin the work session to review the outcomes of the Housing Opportunity Grant survey conducted during June and July.

Mike Bruno wanted to remind the Planning Board members that work on updating the ordinances began last year, however the Aquifer Ordinance and Impact Fees were left to be reviewed this year. Tara recommends that at least one Planning Board member begin to review the draft that was prepared for the aquifer ordinance last fall. Impact fees are more of a housekeeping item and can be rolled into the work that is being done this year.

Mike suggests having a work session with Tara to discuss how the changes made this past year worked. Tara is concerned about time and suggests the focus remain on the HOP grant as there is a firm deadline of June to complete the work.

Kaelea presents a packet to the board and starts with an overview of who participated in the project:

- 30 people attended the kick-off meeting, and 20 provided feedback.
- 11 interviews were held with residents and businesses.
- 21 attended a focus group conversation.
- 26 visited our "Housing Open House" booth.
- 4 members of Town Hall staff have shared input.

There is also a plan to put up an online survey once the work gets underway, which will provide even more feedback.

The high-level themes of the outreach responses were as follows:

- Balance between housing to support tourism economy and housing for the resident workforce.
- Short-term rentals prices out local workforce for housing units.
- Families have limited housing options in the area.
- More smaller footprint homes, less apartment types.
- Reuse Main St buildings for fixed use, including housing options.

Mike wanted to add that last year the Planning Board worked on revamping our ordinances. One of our objectives was to streamline the process and to make it clearer how to go through the process. While going through the process of becoming more user friendly we also found that residents wanted less restrictions. Kaela notes that some of the changes being proposed do lead to less restrictions.

Kaela outlined a review of the zoning ordinances, including what has been accomplished, before moving towards available opportunities to reduce barriers to housing development with the goal of getting direction and preparing a draft for Town Elections in March of 2024.

The opportunities were allowing detached accessory dwelling units, remove barriers to multi-family swellings in the downtown, Cottage Communities, density regulations, and the rental of residential property.

A positive discussion regarding allowing detached accessory dwelling units took place. Tara wanted to know if it mattered to the board what the buildings looked like. The resounding theme of the conversation was yes.

Multi-family dwelling units currently require a special exception across the board. The question was asked if this ordinance could be changed to permitted use, which would change how buyers access their financing. Mike spoke against this proposal stating that this would remove the opportunity for abutters to oppose the project. He felt it was important to consider how a multi-family project would affect the neighborhood. Most of the board agreed with Mike. Martie stated she had mixed emotions.

- If the building already exists, it shouldn't have to go to ZBA.
- If someone wanted to put in a bunch of duplexes, they wouldn't have to go to ZBA.
- Most buildings on Main St are already multi-family and should be exempt.
- New buildings would need ZBA approval.

Kaela refers to the Zoning Ordinances and points out current lot coverage for multi-family units is low and asks if that is a good outcome?

Tara feels the current lot coverage standards are discouraging.

Mike pointed out that the survey results supported smaller single-family housing and not multi-family units.

The discussion moves on to Cottage Community, which would create rules for small stand-alone units within a defined neighborhood. The current Zoning Ordinances allow for cluster developments. How does that work for a cottage community, which would have smaller lot sizes, smaller footprints, front porches that all face towards a common outdoor space, with designated parking areas.

A Cottage Community offers more opportunity for families who are downsizing, and the smaller lots are more cost effective. To achieve this outcome, the minimum lots size in the Cluster Development would need to be lowered. Most of the board expressed no concerns, although Mike does not think Cottage Communities should be allowed n District 1 Main St.

On the topic of density, Tara is not sure changing the density fits the conversation. It is suggested that Tara and Kaela look at this issue further and get back to the Planning Board.

Kaele informs the board that there are currently 130 available short-term rentals in Bethlehem, with the majority of those being entire homes. How can the town regulate this? Some case law exists. The only way to separate them is to define them. Some questions to consider are:

- Should the rental of single-family homes for transient use be limited (for example, to 120 days) to discourage the conversion of homes to short-term rentals?
- Should the rental of rooms in a home where the resident is present be treated differently than rental of a whole home?
- Similarly, should the rental of an accessory dwelling unit or the other unit of a duplex where the owner resides there be treated differently?
- Should it be easier to rent one or two rooms to year-round residents or seasonal employees than it is to rent to those staying for a shorter time?
- Should some of these scenarios be considered home businesses?
- Should some of these scenarios trigger minor site plan review?
- Should the rental of units in a multi-family dwelling unit be treated differently?
- Should a permitting system to be used to set basic requirements around safety, and good neighbor policies?

The first work session with Tara is scheduled for Wednesday, September 27, 2023, at 6:00 pm.

Jerry Blanchard motioned to adjourn at 8:37. Kevin Roy seconded. Motion passes 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Dawn Ferringo, Planning and Zoning Board Clerk

