



Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday September 24, 2025

Meeting called to order at 6:00 PM.

Board Present: Alecia Loveless, Jerry Blanchard, Rob Gilgen, Linda Moore, April Hibberd and Sally Fitzgerald; Sean Gawlik

Public Present: Mary Moritz, Chris Jensen, Ginny Jeffries, Bob Francis, Jim Walter, Abby Hood, Michael Bruno, Cheryl Jensen, Mike Guerrero, Ron Smith, Nancy Strand, Veronica Morris, Andrea Knowles

Minutes: August 27, 2025 Rob Giglen asked to amend the minutes. On page 1, third paragraph down second to last sentence. Change: "Attorney Tilsley argued that the previous easement to 20 Twin Dr granted to Leslie Dreier by the previous owners, James and Joan Abbott, no longer exists as the Abbotts are no longer the owners of the property." To clarify that the easement wasn't legal because when the easement was granted, they were not the legal owners of the property and they did not have the authority to grant such easement. Jerry Blanchard noted his name was misspelt. **Motion:** Alecia Loveless made motion to approve the minutes as amended. Jerry Blanchard seconded, all in favor, April Hibberd abstained due to absence, motion carried.

Continued Business: None

Agenda Adjustment: The Chair noted a slight deviation from the posted agenda to accommodate time-sensitive items.

SB2 2026 Calendar & Hearing Deadlines (Zoning Amendments): Dawn reviewed the important dates for public hearings for Zoning Ordinance Amendments that will be put on the ballot for Town voting. The Planning Board may have to hold their first public hearing at the second meeting in December in order to comply with the first public hearing date deadline of January 12, 2026. The final public hearing must take place prior to January 26, 2026.

Health Officer Briefing – RVs, Septic & Greywater Rules: Ginny Jeffries is the Health Officer for the Town of Bethlehem. She had a time constraint; the Chair asked her to share her concerns first prior to needing to leave. She explained her concerns of the RV Ordinance from the Health Officer viewpoint. If someone is proposing to utilize a holding tank, it must be engineered and installed by a licensed installer and permitted through DES. She further explained if there is running water (any plumbed sink/shower with fixtures, even if fed by an external tank) that generates greywater and cannot be discharged into the ground or unapproved systems. Blackwater (toilet waste) also requires compliant systems; some alternative toilets (e.g., composting/incinerating) have distinct rules; compliance depends on equipment/type.

White Mountain School Campus Informational Meeting: Jim Walter and Abby Hood explained that the Oliverian School is a nonprofit, independent, college-preparatory high school that

currently has a purchase agreement in progress with the bank to acquire the White Mountain School campus. The Oliverian School specializes in outdoor adventure, land stewardship, and the arts and music. Their goal is to relocate to the campus in the summer of 2026 and open that fall, though they emphasized they do not wish to overpromise to current students and families, as the plan remains contingent on several factors.

The Oliverian School currently enrolls approximately 30–40 students in grades 9–12 who require specialized support and would like to increase enrollment to about 50 students. No new buildings are proposed in the immediate future, although the school may consider demolishing some older structures in coordination with the Town as needed.

A question was raised about whether the existing Site Plan approval for the White Mountain School would lapse, since the property's use as an educational facility would have ceased for more than 24 months if operations resume in fall 2026 following the school's closure in spring 2024. Another question was asked about whether abutters would be notified if the Oliverian School moves forward with the purchase, given that while the site would remain an educational use, the student population would include individuals with higher needs.

A Board member clarified that any future discussions regarding the school would focus on land use, educational operations, and compliance matters, not on individual students or their personal needs.

The Board thanked the presenters for their proactive outreach and noted that when the project moves forward, a public hearing may be scheduled to address procedural requirements, abutter notifications, and any necessary applications.

Recreational Vehicle Ordinance: Administrative staff requested clarification on whether an ordinance addressing recreational vehicles (RVs) is necessary, noting ongoing public inquiries on the topic. A general discussion followed regarding whether to seek public input, consider a new ordinance, or focus on improved enforcement of existing rules.

Several residents expressed opposition to adopting a new RV ordinance, stating that the current regulations are not being adequately enforced. They noted that RVs enable people to purchase land in Bethlehem and contribute to the local economy while constructing new homes. In many towns, RVs are typically allowed for temporary use only; however, the number of people using RVs as permanent housing has doubled since 2021 due to rising housing costs. Residents cautioned that while an ordinance might seem like a good idea, it would need to be drafted carefully to avoid unintended consequences. Some questioned whether RVs are truly a major issue in town, suggesting that there are more pressing matters to focus on.

It was noted that existing state law already prohibits the use of RVs as permanent residences, and that the challenge lies in enforcement rather than the absence of local regulation.

Participants emphasized that some residents do live in RVs year-round without causing problems or detracting from neighborhood aesthetics. It was further explained that RVs used for full-time occupancy must meet all health and safety codes applicable to permanent dwellings—such as requirements for bathrooms, kitchens, winterization, heating, ventilation, and septic systems—to prevent future issues.

A recommendation was made to revise the definition of “Recreational Vehicle” in local regulations, since the current wording leaves “temporary” undefined, creating enforcement difficulties. If the Town considers stepped-up enforcement, participants suggested beginning with public education and establishing a clear effective date before implementation.

The Board reached consensus to pause work on drafting a new ordinance and instead:

- Locate prior permit language and determine why and when it was removed;
- Prepare a one-page summary of septic and greywater disposal requirements; and
- Consider defining a time limit for what constitutes “temporary” use.

Proposed Site Plan Regulation Noise Amendment (Conservation Commission Proposal):

Cheryl Jensen and Veronica Morris presented proposed amendments to the Site Plan Review Regulations intended to replace the current vague “may require a noise study” language with clear, measurable noise performance standards and buffer requirements.

Key elements proposed were decibel metrics using A-weighting (dBA) and C-weighting (dBC) with LEQ (15-minute) averaging periods, establishing daytime/evening limits aligned with Town Quiet Hours (10 PM–7 AM) and cross-references to the new section (10.08d). The enforcement officer will be able to conduct a quick sound level check with calibrated smartphone + external mic; enforcement-grade measurements would involve a sound engineer as needed. They also explained the relationship to existing “noise ordinance”: This approach provides clear standards for land-use/site-plan decisions. This would exempt customary business noise.

A question was raised about how a proposed facility that has not yet been constructed could determine whether it would meet the standards. It was explained that comparable commercial uses operating elsewhere can be reviewed to estimate anticipated noise levels.

One Board member commented that a standard of 37 dBA is extremely quiet and may be difficult for a commercial business to meet. It was clarified that the measurements would be taken at the property line, not at the noise source.

The Board had been asked to schedule a public hearing to adopt the amendments. The Board requested that the Town staff provide a final review and schedule the public hearing.

Motion: Alecia Loveless made a motion to hold the public hearing at the second meeting in October. April Hibberd seconded, all in favor, motion carried.

Zoning Ordinance Proposed Noise Amendment (Conservation Commission Proposal): The discussion switched gears from the Site Plan Review amendment to the proposed Zoning Ordinance noise regulation amendments. Veronica Morris and Cheryl Jensen presented the proposed language and what the intent of the amendment is. They worked with Les Blomberg of the Noise Pollution Clearinghouse, who has reviewed 491 noise ordinances and assisted in drafting the proposed Zoning Ordinance amendment.

They explained that a “plainly audible” standard has been added to address noise without requiring an instrument reading. “Plainly audible” would be defined as noise that an unaided human ear can hear inside a dwelling, originating from a different property, and is characterized as being able to hear the beat of a song without necessarily understanding the lyrics or identifying the artist.

There is also a section of exempt noise creating activities such as:

- Snow removal,
- Construction, renovation, or demolition activities with a valid town permit between 7 a.m. - 6 p.m.,

A contractor commented that the proposed construction hours (7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.) were unreasonable. It was emphasized that this is a draft ordinance, and the Board can revise the proposal to reflect the community’s preferences. The process will include further refinement of the language, a required public hearing, review by the Selectboard, and, ultimately, consideration at Town Meeting.

- Lawn and property maintenance between 7 a.m. - 10 p.m.,
- Vehicles while accessing the property (vehicles while crossing the property boundary),
- Town or school sponsored events or parades,
- Noise resulting from emergency work in order to protect property or human safety,
- Noise permitted by a temporary Noise Permit, not to exceed three (3) months, granted under the Town of Bethlehem Noise Ordinance,
- Noise resulting from agricultural activity exempted under RSA 31:39, paragraph n.

It was noted that while agricultural activity is exempt, the Noise Ordinance can regulate agrotourism activities, such as weddings at the Rock’s Estate. In response to a question about logging for construction of a new home, it was explained that if logging is conducted under an approved Intent to Cut, it may be difficult to regulate because logging is a protected activity.

The Chair called for any further questions. Hearing none, the Board thanked Veronica Morris and Cheryl Jensen for their presentation and the time they have put into the amendments.

The Chair called for any other business. Nancy thanked Cheryl Jensen and Veronica Morris for the time they spent in drafting the Conservation Commissions noise proposals and thanked Dawn Ferrigno for her years of hard work.

The Board also thanked Dawn for all her years of support to the Board, and they wish her the best of luck in her future endeavors. Dawn thanked the Board and said that it was a pleasure to work with them.

With no other business coming before the Board. The Chair called for a motion to adjourn.

Motion: April Hibberd made a motion to adjourn at 7:56pm, Rob Gilgen seconded. All in favor, motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Liz Emerson
Interim Planning & Zoning Clerk