

Charlemont Planning Board
January 15th, 2026, 6:00 PM Meeting Minutes
Via conference call and in person, Town Hall

Members Participating: Bob Nelson, Lori Shulda-Merrigan, Molly Cantor

Members Absent: Jennifer Mooney, Bill Harker

Others Participating: Star Atkeson, Jen Nielsen, Jeff Nielsen, Sarah Reynolds

On phone: Colleen Champ

Bob Nelson called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Agenda Items:

1. Hinata Retreat Road

Jeff and Jen Nielsen came in for the Hinata Road discussion, so it was moved up to the top of the agenda. Some townspeople and out-of-towners had been inquiring about the closed road, so Lori brought it to a meeting. Jeff went over the situation with the road. It was heavily damaged by an 18-wheeler. It is a beautiful road, and they will fix it in the spring. At this point it will be a 3-season road, with primary use in spring, summer and fall. When it is fixed to be safe to plow, they will do that. They will need to do some more blasting and extend it in certain areas. They predict that a neighbor won't be happy with the necessity of extending the road. The road was not properly sealed and would need a lot of work if it were ever to be paved.

The Niensens said that they have been in touch with the residents of Warfield Road and that they are fine with them using the road, the cars will be minimal now that construction is almost over.

Sarah confirmed, as per town counsel, that that the road / driveway serves the original purpose of the permit and diverts most of the traffic in the spring, summer, and fall.

The Board let the Niensens know that they should come into the PB if there is a change to their plans as presented in the Special Permit application so that the Board can decide if it is a substantial change or not. The Board was not aware that two cabins were placed in an alternate location previously, which they have since deemed as not a substantial change. However, they would like to know in advance.

Jeff drew out another proposed change of cabin location from the original application. They are placing the cabins so that there is privacy from the road. Molly confirmed with the Niensens that the building inspector and engineer were onboard and had approved the change.

Lori Shulda Merrigan moved that the two cabins presented to be placed in a different area is not a substantial change. Bob Nelson seconded the motion. All in favor.

The Board talked with the Niensens about visiting Hinata in early spring during the week. Between 11-2:30 would work.

Although the board thought they were being thorough having hired the consultant for the Special Permit, in the future if there is a complex Special Permit, they are authorized to run it by the attorney and building inspector for more clarity.

2. Review / Approve Minutes from November 6, 2025

Bob Nelson made a motion to approve the November 6th Minutes as written. Lori Shulda-Merrigan seconded the motion. All in favor.

3. Review Bylaw change drafts: State mandated requirements for Town regarding Marijuana applicants; Accessory Dwelling Units language for Bylaws

Bob has added the proposed revisions to the Charlemont zoning bylaws and the board reviewed them. He had taken the Cannabis Control Commission's model bylaw and added Charlemont. There was some confusing wording, that none of the members could parse. Bob will look into it. Bob used another Town's ADU bylaw. Members and Star had some questions about the necessity of the primary residence being owner-occupied. That may have come down from the state. Colleen Champ, offered that it was to prevent developers from buying up single family homes and adding ADU's to the property for profit. Bob will look into it for next meeting.

4. Master Plan Implementation Committee next steps

Lori is on this, Liz was involved. Bob suggested making an announcement at Town Meeting that if anyone would like to help, they could let one of the planning board members know, it would be nice to move things forward. Star suggested that she send out Liz's email calling for member for the committee on behalf of the Planning Board and that the Planning Board host these meetings within their meetings. The Board is fine with that. Once they are through with the bylaw changes, they can host one Master Plan implementation meeting per quarter with actions taken by members in between the meetings. They imagine getting 4 extra people from other boards.

5. 2027 Budget request

Bob Nelson made a motion to level fund the Planning Board's 2027 budget. Molly Cantor seconded the motion. All in favor.

6. Planning Board seats to fill: Molly was appointed for one year, so should be put on the ballot. Jen's term is for 3 years, although it says 5 on the website. Lori is up in 2030. Bob bemoaned the fate of Planning Board membership. There are 3 seats open on the ballot. Molly suggested meeting once a month, as she has noticed that sometimes there isn't much on the agenda. If things come up, they can meet a second time. Bob noticed that none of the members are motivated to move things forward as former member Colleen was. Bob thinks the bylaw revisions will be more time consuming than expected.

Bob Nelson moved to close the meeting at 8:00. Molly Cantor seconded the motion. All in favor.

Documents reviewed in meeting

Agenda for 1/15/2026

Minutes from November 6, 2025

Bob's draft of the ADU and Marijuana bylaws

2027 Planning Board budget request excel excerpt

Hand drawing of cabin placement at Hinata