

Charlemont Planning Board
10/28/2021 5.30pm Meeting Minutes
Charlemont Fairgrounds
Meeting was held via Zoom

Members Participating: Bob Nelson Chair, Gisela Walker, Carlene Hayden, Dan Miller, Associate member

Others Participating (via Zoom Meeting): Peggy Sloan, Franklin Regional Council of Government Planning Director; Jonathan Mirin; Simonne Westort, Finn O'Connor.

Call to Order

Planning Board Chair Bob Nelson called the meeting to order at 5.39 pm.

Review of pending zoning amendments with Peggy Sloan

The two zoning amendments that still had not been finalized were the revised cell tower bylaw and the fine-tuning of the solar uses in the Use Table/Definitions.

Re. the celltower bylaw: The Board had asked PSloan to add language in the application requirements to conduct a balloon test; this would help residents to see how high and where the tower would be visible. This test has been conducted for another celltower application in town, and the Board finds it useful (for more details about public information and the length of test, size of balloon etc. please see the draft amendment). Language was also added to require specific data regarding the broadband coverage and identification of gaps rather than the more generic propagation maps accepted in the past.

Re. amendments to the ground-mounted solar uses: The Board discussed how to allow for reasonable and economically viable solar installations while being mindful of the need for some landscape protection, especially in the more scenic and agricultural areas. Since Charlemont increasingly markets itself as an outdoor recreation hub with its beautiful whitewater river, mountains for biking, skiing and zip lines, some care needs to be taken to avoid industrializing this landscape with a sea of solar collectors where there were open fields and wooded hills before. Towns in Western Massachusetts increasingly resist the conversion of large areas of open space, fields, riverbanks and forest into large scale ground mounted solar installations. Sizable State Incentives encourage developers to go after easily accessible open land not taking into account that in the rural areas a careful balance needs to be maintained of preserving agriculture, sustainable forestry, clean watersheds and landscape that supports wildlife. This does not negate the need for renewable energy; more solar installations can be located on flat industrial and commercial roof tops, parking lots, or along more commercial highway corridors.

Solar Commercial and Industrial installations of up to 10 acres will be allowed by special permit everywhere in the Rural Residential Districts (RR and RR/MRD); Industrial not in the

Village Center or the RR/R2 District, and are limited to five acres in the RR/R2 District. In the latter the height of the panels is limited to 20 feet.

In the context of the discussion it emerged that in Charlemont unlike many other towns it is possible to locate a commercial use together with a residential use on one lot. Though we do not have a split tax rate between commercial and residential uses, the Board holds out thinking about this some more. What about when a residence gets sold and has to 'take the commercial use with it' and how does a commercial new use impact a residential neighborhood?

Since the Planning Board had been told by the Select Board not to anticipate a special town meeting until mid -March there is enough time to finalize all the documents and to hold a first community meeting to get input into these amendments before submitting them to town counsel. The Board thanked PSloan for her competent support.

New Retail business in 97 Main Street (old gun shop)

Simonne Westort called in to explain her plans for opening a mixed commercial business combining a foot clinic (as she is a nurse presently providing this service via home visits) with a consignment/gift shop where people can bring hand- and home-made items to be sold. The location has a previous commercial permit; Ms. Westort was given a copy of it and told that if she was willing to go along with those conditions regarding hours of operation, parking, lighting etc. then she was set to go; if not she needs to apply for a new permit.

Short-term Rental ideas presented by Finn O'Connor

Mr. O'Connor is a UMass architecture student specializing in design of small spaces and has partnered with Bill Womeldorf and Associates a real estate company; they are proposing to buy land in town and build several prototypes of tiny houses, such as antique airstream trailers, geodesic domes or yurts which they see as especially compatible with Charlemont's outdoor recreation clientele. He presented a slide show to help us see what they had in mind for the units. The Board engaged Mr. O'Connor in an array of questions regarding zoning, building and sanitation codes, available land etc. No near- time decision is expected.

Amongst the Oaks Permit Addendum

GWalker made a motion to approve the drafted addendum to this special permit; seconded by DMiller, all voted in favor; CHayden abstained as she had not attended the permit hearing; Bill Harker had already signed the document because he had been on the Board at the time of that hearing but is now a Select-person.

The Tree Warden has inquired whether the Planning Board needed to sign off on two tree hearings which is required if the trees in question are on a designated scenic road. As there

are no such roads in town, the Board will inform the tree warden to go ahead with the hearing as Planning Board approval is not required. This was by a motion by GWalker, seconded by CHayden, all voted in favor.

Hathaway Solar Farm site visit

CHayden reported of her visit to the 11 acres ground mounted solar farm on Rte 2 to see whether permit conditions had been followed. Bill Harker also went along as member of the Conservation Commission; they met with Gordon Hathaway who voiced some complaints regarding the grass re-seeding, and Hayden noted the mowing along the fence hadn't been done. The solar developer was contacted by Harker and Hayden and made aware of these. The Board has some questions regarding the promised planting of bushes to camouflage the wire fencing.

All Board members agreed that this Zoom meeting had been challenging regarding the media used; should online meetings and hearings be the rule all winter, then the town needs to invest in better internet connectivity for town hall staff.

Apropos town hall staff: CHayden informed members that the newly hired secretary is having second thoughts about the job she agreed to take and is not comfortable with several tasks, making her unfit for the position. GWalker will recommend to the selectboard and the town administrator that the Hiring Committee reconvene to discuss next steps.

The next meeting will be on Thursday, November 4th in town hall.

Bob Nelson moved to close the meeting at 8.30pm, GWalker seconded, all voted in favor.

Documents reviewed:

- Draft Zoning Amendments, available in town hall
- Present Zoning Regulations available on the town website
- Amongst the Oaks Permit Addendum

Respectfully submitted by Gisela Walker