

Town of Princeton, MA Planning Board

Meeting Minutes May 18, 2022

Town Hall Annex and GoToMeeting

Board Members present in-person: Ian Catlow, Rud Mason, John Mirick, Tom Sullivan, and Alternates Corey Burnham-Howard and Lisa Drexhage.

Board Member present via Go-To-Meeting: Ann Neuburg

Public Participation, in person and remote, as noted

Call to order: 7:30 PM

141 Sterling Road

Carl Soderberg appeared in person and discussed informally his plans for an addition to his house at 141 Sterling Road, which is a prior lawfully existing non-conforming structure. On the westerly side, his lot is adjacent to a long, narrow, unbuildable lot. His house does not meet current setback requirements. The proposed addition will not meet current setback requirements. He is not making any material changes in grading or drainage, and is not changing the location of his driveway. He will be applying to the ZBA for a Special Permit under Section VII.2 of the Zoning By-Laws, and to the Planning Board for Site Plan Review. The Board discussed with him the criteria for Site Plan Review, and informally advised him that the materials that he provided for the informal discussion would be sufficient for the formal application. The expectation is that the ZBA and the Planning Board will hold a joint meeting.

29 Dowds Lane

Susan Connell appeared in person and discussed informally the addition to her covered riding arena (barn), which was constructed in accordance with a building permit. The addition runs along one side and was designed for storage of hay and farm equipment used in the operation of Cornerstone Ranch. She briefly described the activities of Cornerstone Ranch, and reviewed with the Board a survey plan that showed that the location of the addition to the building meets setback requirements. The addition does not affect access to her property, or vehicular or pedestrian movement within the property. She came to the Board at the suggestion of the Building Inspector who was uncertain if Site Plan Review was required. The Board noted that "agriculture" and "farming" in both the Zoning By-Laws and the Right to Farm general by-law (Chapter XVIII) have expansive definitions which encompass the activities of Cornerstone Ranch. The Board felt that the addition to the riding arena was allowed as an agricultural activity and did not fall within the activities and uses listed in Section XII that require Site Plan Review.

Beaman Road

The Chair reported that he had put this topic on the agenda in response to a call about a possible Backlot Development, but no one appeared. Beaman Road resident Steve Jones (participating remotely) stated that he thought this probably involved the 55 acre parcel for which the marijuana grow facility had been proposed, with the goal of building houses without frontage on Beaman Road and avoiding the expense of constructing a public way into the property. The Chair explained that a special permit for Backlot Development would allow the construction of one more house than would be allowed in an ANR subdivision. There was no further discussion.

Organization and Focus for Coming Year

The Board unanimously approved John Mirick as Chair, Tom Sullivan as Vice Chair, Rud Mason as Secretary, and Ann Neuburg as CMRPC representative. The Board unanimously agreed to recommend to the Selectboard to re-appoint Corey Burnham-Howard and Lisa Drexhage as Alternate Members.

As well as responding to matters brought to the Board by residents or referred to the Board by the Selectboard, the Board expects to continue working on Master Plan issues, housing, the development of a solar farm on the old landfill, and a response to the “high density” zoning statute and regulations. The Chair encouraged Board members to propose other issues on which the Board could be proactive.

Solar Farm Working Group

John Mirick reported that the group has had a site visit, and is moving forward to identify and address likely issues. Corey Burnham-Howard is part of this group as the representative from the Environmental Action Committee.

Housing Production Plan

Ann Neuburg reported that the group held a community forum on housing needs on May 16 to discuss the results of the survey and to get input to help shape Princeton’s vision, goals, and policies for housing. Tom Sullivan, Ed Cichon (in person), and Linda Nash (participating remotely) had comments. Ann emphasized that the group is soliciting input, and that no plan has been developed or presented.

High Density Zoning

John Mirick reported that the Selectboard and the Town Administrator, working with CMRPC, are taking the lead in responding to the recent amendment to Ch. 40A Sec. 3A which requires MBTA Communities to have at least 50 acres zoned for high density housing – up to 15 units per acre – or face exclusion from several state funding programs. Ed Cichon (in person), Steve Jones (participating remotely), and Linda Nash (participating remotely) commented upon the

unfairness of the Legislature imposing high density zoning requirements on Princeton and other small towns without adequate municipal infrastructure. Those points have been made as comments in response to draft regulations, and may influence the final regulations which are expected sometime this summer. In the meantime, the Selectboard and Town Administrator are keeping the Town in compliance with interim steps for continued eligibility for program funding.

It would be helpful to know the level of Princeton's historic, current, and projected future participation in the state funding programs as Princeton may want to consider giving up the opportunity to participate in the programs rather than attempting to designate areas for high density zoning.

There was some discussion about designating an area and then leaving it to developers to try to deal with the need for wells and septic systems, such as the area north from East Princeton along Rt 31 and Rt 140 (closest to Westminster MBTA station) or along Worcester Road from Post Office Place to north of PMLD (closest to services and amenities) mentioned in earlier discussions. John Mirick pointed out that even if there is no feasible way to reach the 15 units per acre set out in the proposed regulations, such a designation would mean that construction would no longer be limited to two acre minimums. A developer might use such a designation to propose single family homes on acre or half acre lots, or duplexes and other multi-family residences. If the feeling is to move in that direction, he suggested that the approach should be through an overlay district, with some design criteria so that any more dense development will be consistent with Princeton's rural appearance.

Feeling of the Board was to convey these thoughts to the Selectboard and Town Administrator.

Review and Approve Regular Meeting Minutes of April 20, 2022

Lisa Drexhage had some corrections for the draft minutes.

MOTION to accept minutes as corrected passed unanimously (Corey Burnham-Howard abstain - not present at 4/20/22 meeting)

Next Meeting June 1, 2022

Unless something comes up which needs an earlier meeting, the next meeting will be June 1, 2022, in the Town Hall Annex at 7:30.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

MOTION to adjourn passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

John Mirick