

Town of Princeton, MA Planning Board

Meeting Minutes September 7, 2022

Town Hall Annex and GoToMeeting

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

Board Members present via Go-To-Meeting: Ian Catlow, Rud Mason, and Ann Neuburg

Public Participation, in person and remote, as noted

Call to order: 7:30 PM

ANR Plan Review

The Board reviewed a revised plan presented by Melissa Hawthorne for the subdivision of a large parcel at 143 Ball Hill Road into one parcel of approximately 16 ½ acres with the existing house and a second parcel of 26 acres. On March 2, 2022, the Board had given an ANR endorsement for the subdivision. When the buyers were preparing to record the plan, they discovered some reference errors on the plan. The new plan corrects those errors. There are no substantive changes. The resulting lots have adequate frontage and area, and the new house lot has at least one acre of upland. .

MOTION to give ANR endorsement to the new plan

Motion: Tom Sullivan; second Corey Burnham-Howard

Vote: unanimous

Solar Energy Generation Systems

The Board reviewed a rough draft of a possible by-law prepared by the Chair following the August meeting as a focus for discussion of issues. The purpose of the proposed by-law is to facilitate and encourage the use of solar energy, subject to reasonable regulations. The concern is that unless Princeton has reasonable regulations, solar energy generation systems could be located anywhere in Princeton as a result of the recent Waltham decision by the Supreme Judicial Court applying the language in Ch. 40A sec. 3 paragraph 9.

There was consensus that the by-law would benefit from a “definitions” section; that our by-law should require compliance with all state and federal laws, regulations and codes, rather than simply the building code; and that frontage on a public way was not necessary if there was a deeded easement which included access by the Town as needed. The Board discussed whether regulation should be keyed to the use of the solar energy on site or off site (as in rough draft), or to the size of the systems. There was discussion about limiting large systems to

business and business industrial zones, with the addition of overlay districts. Board members will consider possible overlay districts.

For the next meeting, the Chair will prepare a new draft for discussion. When the Board is generally comfortable that issues have been addressed, PMLD, Police, and Fire will be asked for input.

High Density Zoning as MBTA Community

The final regulations responded to comments raised by Princeton and other small rural communities. It appears that the regulatory goal for Princeton is 69 units. The density seems unrealistic unless a project can be tied into a sewer system. The location closest to an MBTA commuter rail station is along Route 140, roughly opposite the “T” intersection with Fitchburg Road. Princeton might be able to satisfy regulations with a high density zone on Route 140, even if as a practical matter it would be unlikely that a developer would build there.

The “carrot” for high density zoning is the ability to participate in various state programs. It would be helpful to know how much Princeton has benefited from those programs, and likelihood of future benefits. Town Meeting may decide that potential financial benefit is not worth the potential change in character resulting from high density zoning.

Housing Production Plan Committee

Ann Neuburg and Deb Cary (both participating remotely) outlined the concepts being discussed by HPPC which include the possibility of allowing original construction of homes with accessory apartments, original construction of two family homes on 3 or more acres, and original construction of three family homes of 5 or more acres, with the requirement that the residences have the appearance of single family homes. The multi-unit construction could be combined with cluster zoning. Multi-unit residences would have to have an owner occupying one unit. Multi-unit residences could also be condominiums,

Board discussed requirement that multi-unit residences have the appearance of single family homes. Current by-law provisions involve conversion of existing single family residences. It may be a challenge to draft an “appearance” requirement for new construction. There was discussion about revising the Village Overlay provisions and the Open Space Residential Design (cluster zoning) provisions to include/encourage two and three unit residences.

HPPC may have formal recommendation in time for consideration at September 21 meeting.

Review and Approve Regular Meeting Minutes of August 3, 2022

MOTION to accept minutes passed unanimously

Next Meeting September 21, 2022

The next meeting will be September 21, 2022, in the Town Hall Annex at 7:30.

Meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm p.m.

MOTION to adjourn passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

John Mirick