

Town of Newington, NH

PLANNING BOARD

Meeting Minutes, Monday, January 23, 2023

- Call to Order:** Chair Denis Hebert called the January 23, 2023, meeting at 6:37 p.m., followed by the pledge of allegiance.
- Present:** Chair Denis Hebert; Vice-Chair Christopher Cross; Board Members: Ben Johnson and Jim Weiner; Board of Selectmen's Representative, Bob Blonigan; Town Planner, John Krebs and Jane Kendall, Recorder
- Absent:** Board Members: Russ Cooke and Peter Welch
- Public Guests:** John Chagnon, P.E. with Ambit Engineering; Robert Schummeric, Gas Engineer for Unitil; Roger Barham, Manager for Granite State Gas Transmission; Tracey Sweeney, Senior Land Agent with Unitil; Mark Dupuis with Unitil

- I) **Preliminary Discussion:** Continuation with **Unitil/Granite State Gas Transmission/Norther Utilities** to upgrade and replace an existing gas facility with a new facility as required for system reliability. The new facility will include a meter station, pipe cleaning launcher and retriever, meter, and filter to be located at Tax Map 7, Lot 2A, and was owned by SNS Equity, LLC.

(The meeting was delayed from its 6:00 p.m. posting time until sufficient members arrived to meet a quorum. Vice-Chair Cross arrived at 6:37 p.m.)

Chair Hebert informed the applicant that it was too late to post a notice for a public hearing for this meeting, so they would preliminary discussions until the next meeting in February, and he hoped to keep the meeting brief due to the snowstorm.

John Chagnon, P.E. with Ambit Engineering discussed sewer easement, landscape, access, and utility plan.

Mr. Chagnon also reviewed the plans for grading and erosion control, and the culvert crossing. Mr. Chagnon said work in the wetland buffer would require a Conditional Use Permit

Town Planner, John Krebs asked if they might use piles of mulch instead of silt fences that often get left behind.

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Chair Hebert asked if they would use natural gas to operate their generator. Mark Dupuis with Unitil replied that they would. Chair Hebert asked how often the generator would run, and Mr. Dupuis replied that it would run for five minutes once a week during normal business hours to power electronics for diagnostic checks, and emergency LED lighting.

Vice-Chair Cross asked if the paved area close to Exit 4 would have a gate to prevent curiosity seeking traffic from pulling in. Mr. Chagnon replied that the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DoT) wouldn't allow a gate, but signage might be useful.

Roger Barham, Manager for Granite State Gas Transmission said the driveway was at 19 degrees, and wouldn't be misconstrued as a public road.

Board member, Jim Weiner commented that there would be plenty of time to stop with the facility being 250 feet in.

(Alternate Board member, Rick Stern arrived at this point in the meeting at 6:43 p.m.)

Chair Hebert suggested that they consider putting up a chain 30 feet in. Mr. Dupuis responded that they would install a gate before a chain because a chain could cause more injury. Tracey Sweeney, Senior Land Agent with Unitil noted that they would have to have the gate in the DoT right-of-way.

Vice-Chair Cross said he was not so concerned with individuals turning in, but more for the person behind them on the exit ramp.

Board member, Ben Johnson said he didn't see a difference between the first 30 or 40 feet. Vice-Chair Cross responded that he thought it more likely for someone to get out and look around if they could go further in, whereas they wouldn't if a gate was visible within 30 feet. Mr. Barham said they could put up a notification that it was a private drive with no authorized entry.

Chair Hebert asked about signage on the building and fencing. Mr. Dupuis said there would be a multitude of signs, contact information for emergency that goes to dispatch, signage for municipal responders to make the zone around the building, but no entry, no smoking, and a sign indicating that the site would be under 24/7 monitoring.

Chair Hebert asked if they had talked with the Newington Fire Department. Mr. Dupuis said Unitil conducted specific first responder firefighting training on a three year cycle that would cover what to do in an emergency if the fire department got there first, and what Unitil would do. Robert Schummeric, Gas Engineer for Unitil said Chief Hoyt advised they that use a light color to identify the presence of gas.

Mr. Stern asked if there was a suppression system in building, and Mr. Dupuis said there was.

Chair Hebert asked if a high pressure release would cause detectable odors. Mr. Dupuis said it would be an emergency with high pressure release and odors. Mr. Barham said this would be the final line of defense on a very rare occasion.

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Vice-Chair Cross said the Board recognized that Unitil gas lines were an asset for Newington and the State, and appreciated the system upgrade, and monitoring, but he was a little disappointed that they upgraded to larger line without communication to the Town, and therefore needed to place the industrial facility in the main entrance of the residential area. Vice-Chair Cross said he would appreciate including the Town in future discussions.

Mr. Weiner said it would be great to offer natural gas to more residents. Mr. Sweeney said they contacted their brother company in Lynn, Massachusetts, and understand they were in contact with the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Barham said they reached out to the residential gas service company, but they were separate. Chair Hebert said he understood they were separate companies, but suggested that they talk with the Board of Selectmen before the next meeting to show good faith. Mr. Dupuis said this was the first time he had heard that the Board of Selectmen wanted to talk with them, and he would personally reach out to them, but transmission and distribution was a totally separate company from their reliability management company. Chair Hebert said they could also meet with the Planning Board, because the Board also reviewed road paving and planning.

Mr. Krebs said they still needed to update their landscape plan tables before their public hearing at the next meeting on Monday, February 13, 2023.

Mr. Sweeney asked if the Board wanted to have Town engineering consultant, Eric Weinrieb, P.E. with Altus Engineering present at the public hearing, and Chair Hebert said it was their call.

II) **Non-Public Session:** per RSA 91-A:3, II (a) personnel

(This item was delayed to hear the next item first.)

III) **Discussion: Newington Master Plan, Housing**

Mr. Krebs passed out the 2020 Housing the Master Plan Chapter for the Board's review. Mr. Krebs said he and Chair Hebert had talked about the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) releasing a regional housing needs assessment to determine how many affordable housing units each town should have. Mr. Krebs said they thought the Board should review the Master Plan to see if needs updating considering the Workforce Housing Overlay District at the end of Nimble Hill Road was now fully developed.

Mr. Krebs pointed out that the Master Plan stated that the Planning Board recognized the need for creating long term, affordable housing for their older population, but to date, that had not been addressed. Chair Hebert noted that the Board had created the Workforce Housing Overlay District, and there were accessory dwelling units (ADU's) in town.

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Mr. Krebs noted that the 2020 Master Plan was done before the census data came in. Chair Hebert said he thought the census was inaccurate because it was done in the summer when seasonal “snowbirds” were in town. Mr. Weiner estimated there were 20% seasonal residents. Mr. Krebs noted that Newington still might be considered many people’s main residence even if they wintered for half the year in Florida.

Mr. Krebs said the Assessment Department didn’t have a record of the number of rentals in town, but there was an estimate of 30-40 ADU’s in town, only he was not sure where that number came from, and that did not address the recommendation for multiunit affordable dwellings.

Chair Hebert said he thought there might be 20 accessory dwelling units in town that would qualify toward meeting the Town’s requirement for workforce housing.

Chair Hebert said Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) suggested that 20,000 units were needed statewide, and 15,000 of those were recommended for the Seacoast, and 63 for Newington by 2024, but those were not hard numbers because it was a regional problem.

Chair Hebert said Newcastle was considering ADU’s as Newington already had, but multi-unit affordable workforce housing would be a challenge.

Chair Hebert said the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) looked at towns with municipal sewer and water, but there was no sewer available in Newington’s Residential Zone for multiunit dwellings, and there would be a problem putting housing in Newington’s port area. Chair Hebert added that residents depended on Portsmouth Water because ground water in town was contaminated, and no one knew the solution for cleanup.

Mr. Krebs said they hoped the private sector would help solve the workforce housing problem because the cost of property had gone up.

Chair Hebert said he was concerned with Governor Chris Sununu’s tribunal of judges that governor set up, and the Town needed to show that they were making an effort toward their fair share of workforce housing.

Chair Hebert said the Board needed to look at what could be done to update the Master Plan regarding the Workforce Housing Overlay District.

Mr. Weiner said he thought the pie chart showing the percentage of land use would be helpful.

Vice-Chair Cross said the State didn’t care about the cost of houses, whether they conformed or not, as their current approach was looking for growth in housing needs, and using affordable workforce housing as a popular way of getting growth to go through. Vice-Chair Cross said he was comfortable with the criteria for ADU’s that the Planning Board made available, but a developer purchasing land with some moneys coming from the State in an area like the former school that was purchased by Pease might support 20 units on two or three acres if done properly. Vice-Chair Cross said the Akerley and Shackford lot subdivisions also provided an increase to the town’s housing.

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Chair Hebert said there was land in Newington, but property costs were high, and building materials were out of reach for many even if the land was given to them. Mr. Johnson agreed, saying that he often broke even after buying land.

(Board of Selectmen's representative, Bob Blonigan arrived at this point in the meeting at 7:36 p.m.)

Minutes: Vice-Chair Cross moved to approve the Minutes for the January 9, 2023, meeting with corrections as noted. Jim Weiner seconded, and all were in favor. Bob Blonigan didn't vote.

Recording Secretary, Jane Kendall left at this point in the meeting at 7:41 p.m.

II) Non-Public Session: per RSA 91-A:3, II (a) personnel

This item was delayed to hear the previous items first.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Next Meeting: Monday, February 13, 2022

Respectfully

Submitted by: Jane K. Kendall, Recording Secretary

These Minutes were approved and adopted by the Planning Board at their February 13, 2023 meeting.