



TOWN OF STERLING PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

Butterick Municipal Building, Room 205
1 Park Street, Sterling, MA 01564

November 16, 2023 - 6:30 PM

MEETING:

Present: Carl Corrinne, Patty Page, Mike Temple, Val Pruneau, and Town Planner – Stephen Wallace. Absent: John Santoro.

Agenda

Other Attendees: Joe Curtin, Pat Fox, Lynne Shepherd, Laura Ricci, and Dick Maki.

Continued public hearing to review a site plan for accessory building at #17 Stone Crest Way

The Chair stated that the applicant has still not submitted a revised site plan for this project and needs more time to make the agreed upon changes. The Board voted unanimously (4 – 0) to continue this hearing until its January 2024 meeting, which will be held on Thursday January 25, 2024 at 6:30 pm.

Public hearing on Zoning Board proposal to amend the multi-family bylaw.

The hearing began with the Chair reading the public hearing notice. Zoning Board Chair Pat Fox went over the changes the Zoning Board would like to make to the multi-family zoning provision (Section 301-4.2) in the Protective Bylaw. Mr. Fox stated that the changes come from public input received at Special Permit hearings for several multi-family housing projects. The Zoning Board believes that the current bylaw is not “consistent in scale and site design with the single-family residential character of the Town of Sterling”. Mr. Fox noted Town Counsel’s advice regarding what land could be counted towards the minimum lot size and was inclined to delete that suggested change.

The Planning Board Chair stated that increasing the required lot sizes and setbacks for multi-family would require more land to build the same amount of housing and would prompt developers to bypass the Town’s zoning in favor of 40B housing proposals. Town Planner stated that in light of the State’s current housing crisis, State government is making a concerted effort to encourage towns to loosen their multi-family housing regulations, not make them more restrictive. Much of the discussion centered around the reduced dimensional requirements for duplexes (as opposed to other types of multi-family housing), and the Planning Board stated that this was intentional when the bylaw was crafted over a decade ago. Citizen Laura Ricci stated she could see both sides of the argument, but remains concerned that the Town is growing too fast and is losing its rural character. Dick Maki asked how these changes would impact a potential senior housing project. Mr. Fox said that could not be determined at this time and that such projects would most likely take the 40B route. Town Planner stated that most senior housing projects are built on town-owned land and that the proposed changes could make building such projects more difficult. Mr. Curtin said that unless such projects are proposed as 40B developments, they would likely need a height variance from the Zoning Board if they were to be built at the scale of the Northgate 40B project.

Town Planner suggested that both boards come together as a working group, two members from each board, to revise the bylaw in a way that both boards could support at Town Meeting. Mr. Fox was concerned that there was not enough time to implement this approach in time for the next Town Meeting. Town Planner stated that we would have until March of next year to finalize a joint proposal before bringing it to Town Meeting. The Planning Board Chair suggested that the Zoning Board withdraw the current proposal and work with the Planning Board to craft changes that both boards could support. Mr. Fox stated that he would prefer

to bring their proposed changes to Town Meeting and let the voters decide, but if the Planning Board offered an alternative, the Zoning Board would consider it. The hearing concluded with the Planning Board voting 3 to 1 not to support the bylaw changes as presented. Board members Page, Corrinne and Pruneau voted to not support the proposed changes while Board member Temple voted to support them. Town Planner suggested that each Planning Board member take some time to review the changes suggested by the Zoning Board and make note of which ones they could support and which ones they could not. For the proposed changes the Planning Board members could not support, each member should suggest an alternative. Once the Planning Board comes to consensus on how it would like to see this bylaw amended, they will refer their changes to the Zoning Board for their consideration. Both boards remain hopeful that something can be crafted that both boards could support.

Planning Board discussion:
potential zoning
amendments for May 2024
Annual Town Meeting.

Town Planner went over two potential zoning amendments he would like the Board to sponsor at next year's Town Meeting. The first was a multi-family housing overlay district located on the land currently occupied by the Northgate 40B housing project and a bylaw that would govern the overlay district. This would be the Town's attempt to comply with the new State law requiring MBTA and MBTA-adjacent communities (which Sterling qualifies as) to create zoning districts where multi-family housing is allowed by right (as opposed to by Special Permit). Town Planner stated that he submitted both the overlay district location map and draft bylaw to the State for review in early September and that the State is required to approve/disapprove both within 90 days of receipt, thus we should know whether our approach passes muster with the State by early December.

Another zoning proposal would be to add the various types of kennels defined in the Protective Bylaw to the Table of Uses because currently they are not listed in the Table. Board member Patty Page drafted up a proposal for adding the various types of kennels to the Table and the full Board agreed with this approach. Town Planner will post this change on the Board's website so citizens can review the proposed change well in advance of the next Town Meeting.

Set December meeting date

The Board held off on setting a meeting date for December as it does not look like there will be any pressing matters requiring the Board's immediate attention. Town Planner will let the Board know if his office receives any applications over the next few weeks and the Board can schedule a December meeting if something comes in.

Minutes

The Board voted unanimously (4 – 0) to approve the meeting minutes for October 16, 2023.

Adjourn

The Board voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:43 PM.

Documents Discussed at
this meeting

- Zoning Board proposal to amend the multi-family provision in the Protective Bylaw.
- Draft MBTA-adjacent multi-family housing bylaw and map.
- Draft proposal to add various types of kennels to the Protective Bylaw's Table of Uses.
- Draft meeting minutes for October 16, 2023.