



Townsend Planning Board Annual Report 2020

Chairman: Lance McNally
Vice Chair: Laura Shifrin
Clerk: Chaz Sexton-Diranian
General Member: Jerrilyn Bozicas
General Member: Veronica Kell
Associate Member: Carol Hoffses

2020 was a very challenging year which caused disruption in almost all town business because of the COVID-19 pandemic, yet the Planning Board has shown remarkable resilience by adapting several new procedures to accommodate Townsend's residents requests for the many functions this board acts upon. These major responsibilities include the review and approval of Subdivisions and Site Plan projects requiring Special Permits; Approval Not Required (ANR) Plans for subdividing lots, and applications submitted under the Scenic Roads Act. The board was even able to hold several important public hearings for new zoning bylaw proposals and zoning bylaw amendments and currently will be able to submit recommendations to the upcoming Town Meeting relative to these proposals. The Planning Board is also the Stormwater Authority to oversee the Stormwater Management Bylaw which did see applications this year and has always been in charge of overseeing the updating of the Townsend Master Plan. These and several other functions were delayed at the beginning of the year because of the extenuating circumstances of the pandemic but were rectified by early to mid-June of 2020 to allow the board to get back on a regular meeting schedule.

The Members of the Planning Board have also showed great resilience in adapting to many major changes in administrative adjustments by adapting to a new IT system and getting educated in "live virtual meeting protocols" and "cloud drive" information sharing. The Board did have some changes in organization this year, yet Lance McNally still remains in the steering seat as Chairman of the Planning Board. Laura Shifrin continues with her dedicated service as the Vice Chair along with Planning Board representative on the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, Chair of the Townsend Housing Authority, Vice Chair of the Town's Assessors office, and Chair of the Town Properties Committee. The Board was sad to see Veronica Kell step down from her position as Clerk of the board. She was also the Planning Board representative to the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee, the Capital Planning Committee and many other valuable roles that will surely miss her insightful contributions.

Planning board member, Charles Sexton-Diranian then stepped into the vacant role of Clerk to add to his duties of State Representative to the Townsend Housing Authority among many other town functions he assists with. Member Jerrilyn Bozicas continues her faithful service as General Member to add to her other town duties as a valued member of the Finance Committee and always present in any town election as a volunteer. These changes created a vacancy for a General Member which allowed the board to unanimously vote Carol Hoffses to fill this void and allowing a vacancy with an Associate Member which is still needing to be filled. The Planning Board still is in search of an interested and motivated resident to serve as an Associate Member to fill this vacancy.

Elizabeth Faxon continues to provide support as the Planning Board Administrator by managing agenda business and serving as liaison to applicants, their attorneys and representatives, engineering firms, developers, contractors, Town Counsel, and the general public. She was also appointed as the Planning Board Representative to the Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC) to fill a void that current members cannot fill. Beth's dedication and knowledge has again proven a great asset to the Town in providing the Planning Board with outstanding support. Because of the many changes in policy this year, Beth's attention to detail and ability to work with the public and other entities effectively provided the Planning Board with the confidence that all matters before the Board are handled professionally and efficiently. The role that Beth performs is far reaching and not having a Land Use Coordinator made things most difficult for her. But, her flexibility, knowledge, and ability to shift gears between administering both the Zoning and Planning Boards was instrumental in allowing both to remain up-to-date in its board business, and allowed for each to resume to somewhat normal activity for the remainder of 2020.

The Board started off the year with setting meeting dates and arranging members schedules only to be redirected to virtual board meetings after the February 27, 2020 meeting. Despite the extenuating and difficult circumstances presented to the Board with the pandemic and changes in town policy, the board was able to regroup and conduct business in sixteen (16) full, televised board meetings with four (4) in person meetings that were held before the closing of Town Hall to the public. The Planning Board's Administrator worked remotely from March 9th until August of 2020 and still continues to operate in a hybrid/remote office environment for safety reasons. All Planning Board business is currently up-to-date and any in-process items for 2020 have been completed and decisions have been written and signed by the full board when necessary.

There were several permitting applications brought before the Planning Board during the year. The board issued two Stormwater Management Permits, 48 Fitchburg Road and 3 Wheeler Road with a third for 59 West Meadow Road that was still in process at the end of the year. Renewals for Cell Tower Site Plan Review/Special Permits for two cell towers in town were approved virtually for the locations at 12 Ball Road and 60 Warren Road respectively. There was a definitive Subdivision Approval decision for a Seaver Road extension and lot approval which the board denied by a vote of four yes to one no. Two site Plan Review/Special Permits were approved and issued, one for 29 Main Street, Veterinary Hospital, and the other for the Depot Street parking area designated for Squannacook Rail Trail parking. Two amendments for the Campbell Farm Definitive Subdivision Approval and its associated Open Space Preservation Development Special Permit and approval for a project change of relocating a fence and

alteration to a detention basin to allow for continuation of agriculture use of a parcel for the Locke Brook Solar Array on West Meadow Road. And finally, the board approved five Approval Not Required (ANR) applications for Shirley Street, South Row/Emery Road, Warren Road, 198 North End Road, and West Meadow Road. Some of the above meetings were in-person but most were virtually.

The Planning Board continues to be heavily invested in its ongoing grant work which has continued to pay large dividends for the important planning and implementing efforts of the town. The Planning Board applied for and was granted the ability to establish a CORE team for, and participated in, the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program (MVP). It was because of this grant; Townsend became a Massachusetts Designated Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community for its completion of the Community Resilience building process. Townsend's Board of Selectman then adopted both the 2020 Townsend Hazard Mitigation Plan Update and the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan which was approved by FEMA & MEMA and now opens up the ability for Townsend to apply for more improvement grants. The Planning Board then submitted an MVP Action Grant in June of 2020 to perform a Water Supply Assessment Study which was not awarded; however, this action item is in the boards 2021 action planning to resubmit.

Townsend also applied and received a grant to perform a walkability and bikeability study which is currently in process and is dovetailing with several other projects with several other boards and committees. The Planning Board is also heavily invested in getting the schools to adopt the Safe Routes to School program endorsed by the State which will have events for walkability and bikeability education and awareness for the youth of Townsend. To round out the granting work the board has been involved in, the Montachusett Regional Planning Committee (MRPC) has awarded Townsend with two very important planning grants dealing with the State's continued housing issues. The board was awarded with the District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) grants which will allow for Townsend to write and adopt zoning proposals for an age-restricted development bylaw and participation in the State's Chapter 43D local expedited permitting program. Both grants work is continuing into 2021.

Most importantly, the Planning Board has been very vested in making sure the Town's most important planning effort, the Master Plan Update, continues to move forward. Because of the issues associated with the pandemic, not much progress was made with the Master Plan Committee. The Planning Board reappointed past members guided the committee forward and reestablished motivation to continue with the update. Valuable progress on this document has now been made and a completed plan is expected by mid-2021.

The Planning Board continues to work closely with Town counsel, the Building Department, Zoning Board of Appeals, Board of Health, Highway Department, Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, Board of Assessors, Townsend Housing Authority, Town Clerk, and public safety officials to gather perspective and comment on applications under review and gather input to develop and amend bylaws. We are dedicated to a collaborative effort with all town efforts and strive for a better community through planning and implementation.

Respectfully submitted,
Chaz Sexton-Diranian, Clerk