



Williamsburg Planning Board

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Minutes for meeting on **March 1, 2021**

Member	Present	Not Present	Member	Present	Not Present
Amy Bisbee	X		Eric Schmitt	X	
Chris Flory	X		Steve Smith	X	
Holly Hendricks	X		Steve Snow	X	
Jean O'Neil	X				
Note:					

At 7:04 pm Bisbee called the meeting to order.

1. Review of prior meeting minutes, and vote to accept

Meeting Date	Comments	Motion to Accept	Motion to Accept as Amended	Second	Vote Yea - Nay
2/16/21		O'Neil		Hendricks	7-0

2. Accessory apartments. Recent press articles about infilling in Northampton noted. Confirmed cap of 900 square feet as a draft position. Confirmed intent to keep attached apartments by right (vs. special permit) in some zones. Confirmed sanitary facilities means bathroom, not septic/waste. Chair Bisbee to tweak draft bylaw language if/as needed..

3. Marijuana establishments. Schmitt and Smith shared background information. Board discussed issues including neighboring towns experience and examples, and timing.

Consensus was to defer the issue to a future year. Opportunity was noted to learn from neighboring towns' experience in the meantime.

4. Solar regulations. O'Neil led a review and discussion of draft proposed revisions to the solar bylaw. Bisbee shared updated language to address drainage. Other discussion topics included vegetation, site visits, energy storage (battery), and wildlife corridors. O'Neil reviewed research she's done on wildlife corridors. After much consideration, and based on the research presented (and attached below), support was voiced for the suggested 1500' buffer between the boundary lines and corners of solar array installations. This comes from a general position in the literature to make a wildlife corridor 230 - 300 m from the periphery of an edge. This gives a minimum width of a corridor to be 460 m or approximately 1500 ft. Consolidated solar redline to be shared with board for review.

5. Scheduling of planning board public listening session and public hearing. It was noted the virtual (Zoom) listening session for the town safety complex is scheduled for this week. With the experience of attending this event under its belt, the planning board expects to set dates for its listening session and public hearing at the next meeting. Those sessions are now expected to include two topics: accessory apartments (Bisbee leads) and solar updates (O'Neil leads). Schmitt to facilitate slide presentation during the session, and slide preparation as needed.

6. New business. With respect to the prior ANR of 18 Old Goshen Road for owner St. Clair, it was noted that the assessor's office flagged that the property in question was not an existing non-conforming lot. This was not consistent with the board's understanding, as informed and documented by the property owner. There was a consensus that the planning board should participate in further training on the topic of ANRs (especially property law aspects, such as the distinction between lots and tracts. The board would like to document a standard ANR review procedure for future use. The board expects to revisit this topic shortly after the town meeting.

7. Posting of planning board minutes. Schmitt noted that he was woefully behind in getting past planning board minutes posted to the website. In attempting to remedy this situation, he encountered technical hurdles (eg "no permission to upload files"). Chair Bisbee graciously offered to post the minutes for the missing time period.

8. Annual Report. Smith offered to write up a summary of planning board 2020 activities for submittal to the annual town report.

The next planning board meeting date is set for March 8, 2021, at 7pm.

At 8:29 pm the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Eric Schmitt

Environmental Law Institute document, *Conservation Thresholds for Land Use Planners*, 2003, <https://www.eli.org/sites/default/files/eli-pubs/d13-04.pdf>

“ELI found adequate information on potential ecological threshold measures for the following areas: habitat patch area, percent of suitable habitat, edge effects, and buffers. Corridor design is reviewed in brief; however, specific guidance on corridor size was not feasible given inadequate available information within the scientific literature. This survey reflects scientific information largely related to habitat fragmentation and landscape ecology issues, with a focus on the spatial relationships (e.g., size, shape, location) and interactions of land attributes over large geographic areas.⁸

...This review does not cover other important conservation elements such as how to account for the biological integrity or ecological significance of habitat patches, which land use planners should consider when determining which parcels of land to protect. In addition, the thresholds presented in this review does not adequately address the conservation of species or habitat types that are naturally rare or localized (e.g., those with patchy distributions or limited ranges).”

Relevant definitions:

Corridor – a linear strip of a habitat that differs from the adjacent land on both sides, connecting otherwise isolated larger remnant habitat patches (Forman 1995, Fischer et al. 2000).

Edge – the portion of an ecosystem or habitat near its perimeter, where influences of the surroundings prevent development of interior/core- area environmental conditions (Forman 1995).

Examples of specific edge effects are altered wind, sun, humidity, water, nutrient, and disturbance patterns. In addition, pest and predator species change which affect the interior species survival, and invasive species are more easily introduced.

The goal for us is to maintain connectivity within the forested landscape adjacent to solar arrays, such that an animal can move through the forest and not be affected by the changed land use of the array. This means that we need to designate a corridor with sufficient interior habitat that the edge effect is not present or at least reduced.

Figure 3 of the ELI report shows abiotic, bird, mammal, and plant distances “that edge effects penetrate into habitats in the United States” with maximum of 900 m (probably grizzly bears). **General guidelines call for at least 230 – 300 m from periphery of edge for a buffer zone. I recommend we set a corridor width of 460 m which is 0.28 mi, 1509 ft or say 1500 ft.**

I looked at major species of interest, the large mammals of moose and bear. Bear in our area seem to move pretty freely, e.g., across back yards. Moose use a large variety of habitat types for feeding and resting, can move a long distance quickly, and have a much larger home range than our community.

Prepared for Williamsburg Planning Board, meeting minutes of March 1, 2021. Jean O’Neil