

Town of Searsmont
Planning Board Meeting Minutes
April 4, 2023
6:30 PM

1. Call to order: The meeting of the Planning Board convened at 6:35 pm. These minutes are a summary of the Board's discussions. A recording of this meeting is available at the Town office.
2. Roll Call - Members Present:

Christian Halsted, Chair Evelyn deFrees Jon Thurston Jon Robbins Jack DeGraff Sarah Crosby, Vice Chair Guy Hamlin	Others: Patricia Chapman, PB Clerk on Teams Selectman Redman Selectman Staples
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3. Applications: None.
4. Approval of Minutes:
 - a. J. DeGraff moved to accept the March 7, 2023 minutes as written, J. Thurston seconded. Motion passed with 7 in favor, 0 opposed.
5. Treasurer's report:
 - a. There was a budget meeting. C. Halsted has a copy of the budget from the meeting but changes have been made since the meeting.
6. Communications:
 - a. CEO Report:
 - i. F. Therio couldn't join the meeting due to technical issues.
 - ii. F. Therio has not provided a new CEO report. He did tell C. Halsted he is following up with someone on an on-going gray water issue.
 - b. Building Permit spreadsheet: no new permit activity.
 - i. C. Halsted added 13 new building permits to the spreadsheet. Once entered he will update the digital map online.
 - ii. J. DeGraff will be requesting a new permit soon to replace his current storage building.
7. Committee Reports: None.
8. Old Business:
 - a. Abutter letters – do we need proof of receipt or just proof of mailing:
 - i. S. Crosby talked to Ally at the Post Office.
 1. The green ticket you get when you send certified mail is now scannable so you don't need to get it signed to prove it was delivered.

2. You can also send “return receipt requested” to get an actual confirmation/signature back but it is expensive.
- ii. What does the board want to see and/or what is required by the LUO? Once we know that, we can go back to the Post Office to find out what the options are to meet the requirement.
 1. C. Halsted reviewed the LUO and could only find reference to the board being told the letters were mailed. There is no mention of certified mail or other special type of mail.
 2. It would be nice to have a signed paper saying the letter was received. If someone says they didn’t receive a letter, it could cause trouble later. What if someone is away and doesn’t get the notification?
 3. Is it the Planning Board’s responsibility to make sure the notice was actually received? No, the LUO currently says the applicant just needs to tell us it was mailed.
- iii. The difference between Certified Mail and Return Receipt Requested:
 1. Certified mail provides the sender with an official receipt as proof the item was mailed. The receipt can be accessed using a tracking number provided when it was mailed – it can be access electronically or by phone but the information is not automatically send to the sender, they have to request it with the tracking number.
<https://faq.usps.com/s/article/What-is-Certified-Mail>
 2. An extra fee can be paid to do Return Receipt Requested which does provide the sender with proof of deliver including a signature and with the address and date and time of delivery.
<https://faq.usps.com/s/article/Return-Receipt-The-Basics>
- iv. Should the Planning Board have discretion to require return receipt requested in specific situations? We do not want to outline the situations, just indicate that it is at the board’s discretion. No, we should be consistent and have the same notification requirements for everyone.
- v. If an abutter does have an issue and claims they didn’t receive notice, they could take it to the appeals committee and let them decide if the permit should be denied based on that
- vi. If the board wants to change this requirement, it would need to go to the town for a vote.
- vii. Certified mail costs \$4.15; Return Receipt costs \$3.35 for mailed receipt or \$2.10 for an email receipt. These are not unreasonable prices for the piece of mind.
- viii. Whatever decision is made should be consistent throughout the LUO – all sections that mention notifying abutters.
- ix. Should notification requirements for public hearings be the same as the permit application notification requirements? The notifications can’t necessarily be done at the same time as the decisions happen at different times.
- x. P. Chapman will find the document previously created that lists the different types of notifications mentioned in the LUO and share with the Planning Board to review. They can discuss adding the information to the Appendix at the next meeting.

- xi. The letter from the Planning Board to the applicant can include instructions about abutter letters. Initial notice to abutters about a permit could also include a reminder to watch for public hearing notices later.

[The Selectmen left the meeting]

- xii. Is there a way to provide notices electronically:
 - 1. Having abutters contact the Planning Board Clerk
 - 2. Putting information on the Planning Board website
 - 3. Facebook, etc. – we can't rely solely on social media but we can use these in addition to our traditional notification methods.
 - 4. Some towns have email lists that residents can sign up for to receive notifications from the town.
 - 5. In general, the town/residents, are not ready to go fully electronic.
- xiii. There are concerns with who actually receives the notifications if there is no receipt. On the other hand, how long could it take to get the receipt back. Do we hold up the process because if the receipt isn't back?
- xiv. If the applicant doesn't do the notification or any other piece that they told us they did, it is on them for lying. An appeals committee can overturn the permit if someone has a valid complaint.
- xv. Public hearing notices are the Planning Board's responsibility and those are posted in the newspaper twice, posted in the Post Office, the store, and the town office as well as mailing notices to abutters by First Class mail. The information is also on the website but that is not stated in the LUO.
- xvi. We could add a recommendation to the instructions provided to an applicant that it might be in their best interest to consider using certified mail or return receipt.

J. Robbins made a motion not to change any of the wording in the LUO regarding mailing notifications to abutters, seconded by J. DeGraff. Motion passed 7 in favor, 0 opposed.

- xvii. The Post Office could change their processes at some point as well so we may not want to get too specific about how notifications are sent or we would have to change them when the PO changes things.
- b. Clean up enough on the site plan review so that if a property is sold and the business is changing that it was clear when a Planning Board review would be required based on the change of use. Could we do this in time for the special town meeting we usually have early in the summer. We might not be able to get it done that soon but we can work on it.
- c. Age of documents – we also want to add more detail about the age of documents that can be used in a permit application.

9. New Business:

- a. J. DeGraff and S. Crosby both agreed to stay on the board. C. Halsted will nominate them at the town meeting.

b. C. Staples position on the Select Board is up for renewal this year. He is running again.

10. Adjournment: J. DeGraff made a motion to adjourn, seconded by C. Halsted. Motion passed by a vote of 7 in favor, 0 opposed and the meeting was adjourned at 7:29 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Patricia Chapman, Planning Board Clerk

J. DeGraff made a motion at the May 2, 2023 meeting to approve the minutes of the April 4 minutes as written. C. Halsted seconded. Motion passed 7 in favor, 0 opposed.