



TOWN OF WARNER

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Select Board
Sam Bower, Chair
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Select Board Meeting DRAFT Minutes

Tuesday, 5:30 pm, August 23, 2022, Lower Meeting Room, Warner Town Hall, 5 East Main St

I. 5:30 pm Open the Meeting/Roll Call

Chair Sam Bower opened the meeting at 5:38pm and called roll:

Present: Select Board Chair Sam Bower, Select Person Christine Frost

Also Present: Administrative Assistant to the Select Board Judy Newman-Rogers, Chair of the Planning Board Ben Frost, Planning Board members: Andy Bodnarik, Karen Coyne, Don Hall, James Gaffney

Absent: Select Person Lois Shea, Town Administrator Diane Ricciardelli

II. Appointments

a. Planning Board

Chair Bower explained that the Planning Board was invited to the Select Board meeting to discuss the formation of a Housing Committee and whether the Planning Board would like to take the lead. Andy Bodnarik, Planning Board member, noted that the Planning Board has a lot of housing issues on their plate currently, including short term rentals (STR), in addition to their other regular business. Christine opined that with only two Planning Board members present, perhaps the discussion should wait. She noted that there has been a lot of interest in a Housing Committee, although there may not be enough time to get into this topic in a thoughtful way. She was hoping that they could figure out how the Committee could coordinate and how public input could be used.

Chair Bower said that there was a verbal agreement from the Select Board to move forward with a Housing Committee. To some degree, this needs to be addressed. Christine didn't feel that there was a verbal agreement, it was just a topic that came up. Andy said the Planning Board plans to dedicate the second meeting of the month to housing issues.

Chair Bower said he understood there may not be a committee created, and the Planning Board would spend more time on this topic. He said that it was still the thought of the Select Board to move forward with the creation of a Housing Committee. He provided a draft of what such a committee would or could get involved in.

Christine thought they should wait to have a meaningful conversation about this issue when more of the Planning Board could meet with the Select Board. Chair Bower agreed and said that there wasn't a timeline on this. They would be creating this Committee as a tool to aid the existing boards to help deal with this complex and ever-changing issue.

Karen Coyne, Planning Board member, asked what would be done with the information from a committee? Chair Bower said that they could propose things to the Planning and Zoning Boards, and research information for those boards as well. He thought there were a lot of pieces to a Housing Committee and why it is being created. He wanted to pen up a conversation to ask the Planning Board what would be helpful to them.

Andy Bodnarik said he did a housing study and provided a list of his findings from 2021, including available rentals. Since then, prices have increased, and the availability has decreased. He did an estimate of total housing units. It seemed that 40 units were lost from 2019-2021 but he wasn't sure why. The study included nearby towns as well for comparison. Andy said there is a lot of information out there for city by city, or county by county studies. He thought his study was a good overview of where they are with housing in Warner.

Chair Bower explained that the Select Board would like to work with the Planning Board to create a useful Housing Committee. Ben Frost (Chair of the Planning Board) said that the Planning Board took a vote on whether they would be in favor of forming a Housing Committee and the majority voted "no." But they did agree to spend more time on the housing topic. They are happy to work with the Select Board to make sure people who wish to have their voices heard, have them heard. He said the NH Regional Planning Commissions throughout the state are all current with their housing assessments. In December, the information will be updated along with a methodology of implementing workforce housing.

Ben Frost said the Regional Planning Commission is working on a methodology regarding "fair share" and workforce housing. This is a legal responsibility but they have to think about what they want to do beyond that. They have discussions about accessory dwelling units and other types of development. Chair Bower wondered if an actual committee to focus on the numbers and the data with regards to housing, would be helpful to the Planning Board, which is already pulled in so many directions.

Paul Iverson, Warner resident, said he was confused about the workforce housing and a proposal about new units to be built at exit 9. He thought workforce housing was going away in Warner. It was noted that nothing was being voted on that day. Paul said he thought there was a Zoning Variance to allow workforce housing. Chair Bower said that was a change to the ordinance to allow workforce housing in a district that it isn't usually allowed in. Ben clarified that the 2022 March Town Election portion of Town Meeting had three citizen petitions on the ballot; all were voted down. In 2021, voters were asked to change the provisions in the zoning ordinance dealing with workforce housing so they would be consistent with the state requirements. This passed. The 2022 citizen petitions were against the implementation of the changes in the ordinance. This past year, no changes were made to the Zoning Ordinance with regards to workforce housing in Warner. Chair Bower said that the current workforce housing proposal is working through the process as they are allowed in that district per the ordinance.

Mr. Iverson thought there had to be a lot of open space that went along with a high density housing development. Ben explained that in certain zones certain workforce housing or multi-family housing developments would fall under the open space provisions but this is not in one of those zones.

It was asked if there was a workforce housing definition. Ben Frost offered that the definition appeared in the ordinance and mirrored the State's definition, which has to do with income and affordability.

Barbara Iverson, Warner resident, asked why the Town felt the need to add housing? She didn't think there was a shortage of housing in the town or that there were people who want to live here who can't find housing. Christine said there had been a lot of concern from those in the community that their children can't find places in town or that they couldn't afford to live in Warner. Employers complain that they can't find help – workers can work in the town they live in and that's not the case in Warner. She understood that Lois and Sam have this committee in the forefront. She believes they first need to determine needs for housing. She thought they would be able to have a better conversation about this topic if more of the Planning Board members were present. She felt that community voices are also an important part of the issue.

Chair Bower said there seems to be a want in town to balance development and new buildings/houses with the character and rural properties of the town and for housing to be affordable. Some housing is subject to tax exemptions or subsidies. There is also finite Town space so they have to determine the capacity of Warner. How do they want the Town of Warner to look? It is a complex, ever-changing issue. The idea is having folks in Town meet once a month to talk about these complexities and then report their thoughts to the Planning Board.

Karen Coyne said she learns something new whenever she goes to a Planning Board meeting about housing. She finds that the board members are extremely knowledgeable on the housing topic. One person from the Planning Board to sit on this committee cannot represent the combined knowledge and expertise of the entire board, and if a group of residents gathers to talk about housing, she worries that they won't have the information or education about housing to be productive. She sees the need to have the expertise of the Planning Board be a part of the committee. Chair Bower said that the Committee would be advisory and would pass on any information or suggestions they come up with to the Planning Board.

Judy Newman-Rogers said what she has found is that there is a lot of talent and expertise in the town. These people need to be reached out to and informed that they could help the town with this topic. Chair Bower said residents he has never met before have come to the Town Office and asked what is going on with the Housing Committee and have expressed interest in being a part of such a committee.

Christine thought they should make another attempt to invite the Planning Board to a meeting to discuss a possible Housing Committee and what it might look like. Ben said he would be willing to go back to the Planning Board and ask them to reconsider their decision. They could create a Housing Committee made up of the entire Planning Board along with other interested people. The other issue is the grant opportunity - the Town has to apply for funds to hire a professional consultant to help with the committee. This would also help to engage the broader public in this process.

Karen wondered if they could create a Citizen's Advisory Committee who could go to the Planning Board's second meeting of the month to discuss housing. The Select Board and Planning Board would determine who would sit on the Citizen's Advisory Committee. It was thought that this was very similar to what Ben had suggested.

James Gaffney, Planning Board member, said they should identify the problem then try to fix it. He would like to hear what the Select Board have to say. He was surprised that the Select Board invited the Planning Board to this meeting. He thinks there is a deficiency between what the Town voted on and what the Select Board has chosen to do. Chair Bower said this is about how the Town treats their citizens, as well as being a zoning issue. There is a finite amount of land in Warner, and it is about finding the right balance between housing, conservation land, and lifestyle. Christine said she thought James was asking why they asked the two boards together that night. She hoped they would have a conversation about how this idea would move forward and how the public would be part of this ongoing process. James thought everything proceeds forward from a problem that has been identified. He's heard there is a shortage of affordable housing in Warner. He feels this is a supply and demand issue that is also occurring all over the country and thinks the Board is looking to create a local solution. Christine said they can't address the nation-wide problem, but they can have a discussion about what it means for Warner and to all be on the same page. James said he would like the Select Board to encourage people to be civil when discussing this issue as he has seen the opposite in the past.

Don Hall said he has been through this before and he knows the town very well. It always seemed that regardless of what they encountered, including when McDonalds first came to Warner and he was on the board then, things have a way of ironing themselves out. He doesn't know how much feedback the Select Board are getting but it would behoove them not to listen too much to the outside world. It can be harmful. They do need to tread lightly and listen to everyone, but is it in the best interest for the Town of Warner? The face of the town hasn't changed except for having a Commercial District. As he sees it, they do not have a thing to offer anyone who comes into the town, because it isn't here yet. He doesn't see why they would want to bring more people into the Town because there isn't anything here for them. He predicts that they are at the tipping point right now. In the next five years he estimates that they will have a full time fire department with two full-time employees, their own ambulance, and a full-time police department. That is what he sees coming. He doesn't think the Select Board should strip the Planning Board of their abilities to deal with the housing discussion. Chair Bower said he didn't want to do that; he was just starting the discussion about whether or not a Housing Committee would be a useful tool for the Planning Board.

Christine wanted to express her thought that whenever another board is invited to meet with the Select Board, it is for collaborative reasons. It shouldn't be seen as a negative.

Chair Bower thanked those from the Planning Board for coming to meet with the Select Board that evening. He hoped to collaborate more in the future.

b. Zoning Board Decision on Comet LLC Application

Chair Bower said personally, he supported the decision to accept the application and approve the special exception for the workforce housing development. He spent three years on the Zoning Board and recently stepped away from it to be on the Select Board. He said speaking only from his perspective he thought the Zoning Board missed an opportunity to continue a precedent they had set in the commercial and interval district of approving special exceptions with conditions. The applicant was very open to the suggestions that came from the public and the board. There is a history in the commercial and interval district of setting a precedent of using conditions, for example the McDonald's and also when the Hilton hotel was denied.

Chair Bower said from his perspective, there was discussion of the integrity of the lifestyle of the folks who would be living in the development. There was discussion of green space and parks, and increasing the trees in the area to block the noise and the light. He thought it would have been better for the Town of Warner to approve the application with conditions. Because of the precedent they had already set in that district, he felt this was a little bit of a miss. He appreciated that the project was approved.

Chair Bower said this is an experiment for the State of NH and the Town of Warner. If they are going to participate in a development like this, it should be the best workforce housing in the State of NH. He welcomed questions or comments. There were none.

The meeting adjourned at 7:14pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristy Heath, Recording Secretary
Town of Warner