



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES

**Friday, March 6, 2015
5:00 PM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bill Helm (Chair); Paul Gorman (Vice Chair); Michele Holton (Secretary)
Selectman Peter Bianchi; Emma Crane; Bill Dietrich; Marianne McEnrue (Alternate)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jeremy Bonin; Liz Meller (Alternate); Tim Paradis (Alternate)

STAFF: Lucy St. John, Planning and Zoning Administrator

Others in Attendance: Bob Crane and Tina Helm.

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM by Chair Bill Helm. He asked Marianne McEnrue to sit in for Jeremy Bonin, who is absent. Chair Helm noted that a quorum is present.

Review of the Subcommittee Meeting of Thursday, March 5- Proposed Zoning Amendment – Sign Provisions:

Chair Helm thanked the Planning Board Subcommittee which included Paul Gorman, Liz Meller, Emma Crane and Bill Dietrich for conducting the subcommittee meeting yesterday, Thursday, March 5th held at 9:00 AM at the New London Town Office.

The subcommittee discussed the comments raised at the Planning Board Public Hearing held on March 3rd, and listened to additional comments provided by Tom Cottrill, former Planning Board chair who was in attendance at both the Public Hearing and the subcommittee meeting.

Paul Gorman thought it was generally a good meeting. He noted that at both meetings Tom Cottrill expressed that he found the proposed language confusing, poorly-defined and objectionable. Paul Gorman expressed that the subcommittee meeting provided Mr. Cottrill the opportunity to present in a reasonable way his issues with the proposed amendment language, and board members had an opportunity to ask questions and dialogue with him about his comments and concerns. Mr. Cottrill particularly had issues with the table included. Paul Gorman noted that Tom Cottrill also provided written comments, which the Subcommittee reviewed and considered in their discussion. Paul Gorman noted that the meeting lasted almost two-hours, and that toward the end of the meeting, approximately 10:45 am, the subcommittee then discussed and directed staff to revise the draft language, taking into consideration some of the comments identified by Tom Cottrill.

Update by Staff and Subcommittee:

Ms. St. John reported that Tom Cottrill telephoned her this afternoon. He had hoped to attend, but may not be able, so wanted to convey his comments and concerns via a telephone conversation. She conveyed that he is still concerned about the language and suggested that Planning Board should not move forward with the proposed draft sign amendment. He said the previous Planning Board spent a lot of time on drafting amendments, and he suggested that the Planning Board wait another year to make any changes. He feels it will

result in a lot of upset people in town. Mr. Cottrill noted that the previous Planning Boards tackled these issues and no further changes are necessary. He expressed concern about the format, offered editorial comments, the negative tone of the language, and comments about particular provisions. He does not like the way the different sections of the provision have been moved around. “Permanent” and “temporary” signs should be returned to the document. He does not know what a “travel way” is. He expressed concern about flags, nonconforming signs, off-site signs, the text does not include enough details on the size and number of signs and the table. He also was concerned about the number of sandwich board signs at the Chamber of Commerce site, and that sandwich board signs could create liability issues for the town. He noted that this is a substantial change and the public should be informed of it. Tom Cottrill also informed Ms. St. John that he was still upset about the liquor store sign and may present the Town with a petition for a zoning amendment regarding said sign.

Ms. St. John noted that the rationale statement specifically states, the proposal is to delete the entire section and table and replace it. She noted that the word, “entire” implies acknowledgement that a substantial change is proposed.

Paul Gorman noted at the subcommittee meeting, they discussed that the Planning Board may want to prepare a letter to area businesses, the Chamber of Commerce and residents in town to outline the changes to the sign provisions. Emma Crane agreed, noting that the Town used to send out a monthly newsletter giving residents updates about what was currently going on in and around the community. The Board suggested a newsletter insert would be a worthwhile avenue to convey information to the general public.

Discussion on the revised draft sign amendment language:

The Planning Board discussed the zoning amendment timeline, and that that a 2nd public hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, March 24th. Ms. St. John also suggested that an inclement weather date, of Wednesday, March 25th be considered. The Board agreed March 25th would be the inclement weather date.

Chair Helm stated that the board has been involved in this project for the last three and a half months. He noted that Town staff has heard concerns about the existing sign provisions and the goal is to clarify the text and make the sign permit process less cumbersome to staff and the public. He maintained that staff believes the proposed language will address concerns raised and suggested that the Board move forward with the proposed amendment language. Staff noted that the Zoning Ordinance should be looked at as an evolving document, it should not be stagnant and needs to be updated as concerns and issues of the community change.

The Board had been provided a copy of the draft revised sign amendment language incorporating the direction of the subcommittee, which included incorporating some of the comments offered by Tom Cottrill and other edits. The revised draft language was sent to each board member and Tom Cottrill for the discussion today.

Chair Helm asked the Board if the revised draft sign language amendment reflected the discussion and input of the subcommittee meeting. Paul Gorman and Bill Dietrich responded they had not had a chance to read it yet. The Board then reviewed the revised text, with staff and Chair Helm noting the changes incorporated.

The Board members then offered comments and other suggested edits for consideration.

- ✓ Page 2, under Definition of Sign – Display Area: Remove the word “geometric” from the first sentence. Agreed to leave as is.
- ✓ Page 4, under Conditions of Use – Abandoned Signs: “Signs for a business or use no longer located at the site must be removed with thirty days (not ninety) of the close of business or use.”
- ✓ Page 4, under Conditions of Use – Externally Lit Signs: Remove last sentence entirely (“the source of the sign’s illumination shall not be visible from an adjacent residential uses.”)

- ✓ Page 5, under Conditions of Use – Height – change the language to read “A sign may be placed at any height on the exterior building façade, but no sign itself may be greater than 15 feet in height, whether mounted or free standing”. The Board reviewed the current provisions on page 7, regarding maximum height permitted for a free standing sign which is 15 feet. The Board discussed there is no reason to limit the height of any sign, as currently there are signs on buildings such as the Hannaford’s and other free standing signs others places around town that are more than 15 feet from the ground , and there is no need to distinguish before free standing and building mounted. It was noted that the exception would be for roof mounted signs, which are currently and proposed to be prohibited. Staff also noted that some businesses want to be able to have building mounted signs higher up on the building façade to make them more visible. The Board discussed the ambiguity of the current height restriction and some thought it applied to height from the ground and other thought it applied to the height of the signage elements. The language regarding height to read: A sign may be placed at any height on the exterior building façade, but no sign itself may be greater than 15 feet in height, and no free standing sign may be located more than fifteen (15 ft.) off the ground and the sign itself may not be greater than 15 feet in height.
- ✓ Page 5, under Conditions of Use – Nonconforming: Discussed if can change the text, or add external illumination. Agreed.
- ✓ Page 6, under Construction Requirements, Placement Restrictions:
 - 3. Internally Lit Sign – delete “except as noted herein.”
 - 4. Balloon(s) – delete “except as noted herein.”
 - 6. Off-site signs – underline first word – “No” and remove underlines from “are permitted and “... are prohibited ...” (second sentence).
- ✓ Page 9, under Signs Not Requiring a Permit – Hazard Warning Sign: remove underscore between “warn and_ protect visitors ...”
- ✓ Page 9, under Signs Not Requiring a Permit – Interior Window Sign: change last sentence to read “Window displays of products sold on site do not require a permit.”
- ✓ Page 9, under Signs Not Requiring a Permit – Real Estate for Sale, for Lease or for Rent: first sentence should read “One sign, including riders, may be placed on the property which is for sale, lease or rent.” Last sentence: put a semi-colon after intersection instead of a comma.
- ✓ Page 12, on the chart under Signs Not Requiring a Town Sign Permit – delete “Event Directional Sign On & Off-Site” category completely.
- ✓ Number everything under each broad section.
- ✓ Other editorial comments.
- ✓ Table – minor editorial comments, contractor/professional on site signs include a colon, removed-event directional signs on and off site.

Peter Bianchi noted that many towns take pictures of signs and include the photograph in the file. He suggested that there could be a requirement that the owners send in a picture of their existing signs before replacing them.

Staff will revise the draft text and Chair Helm will review it prior to staff posting the proposed sign amendment language later this week.

MOTION WAS MADE (Bill Helm) AND SECONDED (Paul Gorman) that staff incorporate the comments discussed by the Board today, and post the revised sign amendment language for the second public hearing on March 24th. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Discussion on Enforcement

Peter Bianchi reiterated the need to discuss enforcement issues, which continue to be brought to the Town’s attention. Bill Helm noted that he will be attending the March 16th Board of Selectmen meeting to discuss this issue. Peter Bianchi suggested perhaps a two-prong approach. He asked the Planning Board if we really want

to have somebody running around town inspecting every building, or do we want to simply enforce complaints? Selectman Bianchi noted that if he sees something unusual, he checks to see if the proper permits have been issued, such as with tree-cutting. He said the Board of Selectmen does follow up on any complaints about building permits.

Paul Gorman agreed the Town needs some kind of follow-through on approved building permits, septic permits, tree cutting plan and other construction, and must take action on complaints, but the Board of Selectmen has to be involved in the discussion. He personally does not want someone going around inspecting buildings on a regular basis. Chair Helm noted he will be attending the March 16th Board of Selectmen meeting, and invited other Board members to attend to express their concerns about enforcement.

Motion to Adjourn was made by Emma Crane and seconded by Peter Bianchi.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Work, Recording Secretary
Town of New London