

Approved Minutes
Webster Planning Board
Joint Meeting of Planning Board and Conservation Commission
October 8, 2020

(Due to Covid-19 Pandemic meeting held via ZOOM)

The joint meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. Attendance was taken. Planning Board members present were Susan Rauth (Chair), Paul King, Craig Fornier and Alternate Kathy Bacon. Conservation Commission (WCC) members present were Susan Roman (Chair), Isabel Brintnal, Sally Embley and Dan Moran. Chair Rauth noted that there was a quorum of Board members and a quorum of Commission members present. The purpose of the meeting was to finalize the approach for the regulation of agricultural uses in the draft wetlands ordinance, to review buffer sizes and setbacks for smaller lots, and any other issues related to the ordinance.

The group first reviewed the proposed language changes to the draft wetlands ordinance for agricultural uses that had previously been distributed. Susan Roman explained that existing agricultural uses and operations, which is a broad definition of activities including animal husbandry, will be allowed to continue, under the ordinance. Expansion, alteration or change to another agricultural use will be permitted in the District with the approval of a Conditional Use Permit. All other agricultural uses and operations shall be prohibited uses. The Planning Board and WCC members present agreed with these proposed updates.

Chair Rauth next explained the research and consultation that had been undertaken with several members of the Central NH Regional Planning Commission (CNHRPC) concerning the impact of the ordinance on smaller size lots. A map produced by CNHRPC was displayed that showed that the majority of lots less than two acres in size are located around the lakes: Pillsbury Lake District, Lake Winnepocket, and a few other areas along the river. A question was raised as to why Pillsbury Lake was not specifically named as one of the lakes in the draft ordinance. Pillsbury Lake is not a natural water body. The lots are very small and setbacks are governed by the Shoreland Water Quality Protection Act. However, wetlands located to the north and to the south of Pillsbury Lake were included in the GZA study and are included in the Level 1 District.

The proposal discussed was to reduce the Level 1 District from a 100' wetlands buffer to a 75' buffer, for existing lots less than two acres in size. The Level 2 District wetlands buffer would remain at 50' from the edge of the wetlands for all size lots. However, it was suggested that the District setbacks for existing lots less than two acres would be reduced from 50' to 0 feet for primary dwellings, garages with vehicles, and accessory structures. The buffer for the septic and other waste disposal systems would remain at 75', which is a State requirement. Underground fuel and chemical tanks would require a 100' buffer on lots 2 acres or more and would be required to be located in the basement for existing lots less than two acres.

It was noted that most of the two acre lots in town are already developed and therefore the impact of the wetlands ordinance would be minimal. Any new two acre lots created by subdivision would be subject to the regular buffers; i.e., no decrease in buffer size for newly created lots.

Chair Rauth asked if there were other issues or questions about the draft wetlands ordinance. There were no further issues and the Planning Board members agreed with the proposals discussed. Craig Fornier made a motion to approve the wetlands ordinance, with the proposed changes discussed at tonight's meeting. Kathy Bacon seconded the motion and the roll call vote was unanimous.

The meeting then focused on the components of the public information and education campaign, to be led by the WCC. The activities will include writing and distributing several short summary papers to be presented on the Town website and at the budget hearing meeting. These papers would include an overview of the ordinance; a brief summary of the GZA report; a bibliography and scientific basis for the District buffers and setbacks; and a summary of the purpose of the ordinance. A video series is currently in production to highlight the types of wetlands. There are four videos written and produced by Dan Moran posted on the Town website. An additional two videos will be added to cover the types of wetlands. It was suggested another video could be produced to offer a general overview and summary about why wetlands should be protected. Dan said he thought that was possible.

These components will comprise a guide for understanding the ordinance and the importance of wetlands. In addition to the Town website, information will be made available for publication in the Grapevine and on the Town Office bulletin board. Information can also be shared on the Webster social media outlets. It was suggested the link to the wetlands videos could be easier to find on the website. Chair Rauth offered to discuss this issue with Russell Tatro, the Land Use Coordinator. She also offered to coordinate the Grapevine submissions with Dee Blake.

The WCC will be meeting the week of October 12th and will be discussing the public information and education efforts and schedule in greater detail.

The WCC members left the meeting at 7:52 p.m. The Planning Board members spoke briefly about the agenda for the monthly meeting and adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Rauth
Chair