

CORNWALL SELECT BOARD
Joint Meeting with the Planning Commission
July 27, 2020, 7:00 PM
Via Zoom Teleconference

Select Board Members Present: Benjamin Marks, Magna Dodge, Ben Wood

Planning Commission Members Present: Conor Stinson, Don Burns

As only a quorum of Select Board Members were present, the meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM by the Select Board.

Magna D. moved, Ben W. seconded, a motion approving the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

There followed a general discussion of the Select Board's and Planning Commission's goals in updating the town's zoning and land use regulations. There was a consensus among those present that all valued Cornwall's residential and rural character and that there was no desire to see general commercial development in the style of towns along Route 7 or to have big box stores or franchise/pattern businesses in town. Don Burns spoke about the need to address the state's requirements to map the town's natural resources. Don pointed to sample language from the Town of Waltham as an example of how such natural resources could be recognized in a way that balanced the needs of landowners with the state's goals.

The discussion then turned to the Planning Commission's work for the coming year and its available resources. In addition to the work on Cornwall's zoning regulations, the Cornwall Town Plan is due for an update. This raises some potential process concerns as, in the view of the Planning Commission, the town's zoning regulations are supposed to be reflective of the Town Plan's goals rather than drive the Plan's vision for Cornwall's future. In addition, the professional work schedules and family commitments of current Planning Commissioners – particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic and attendant uncertainty about the ACSD school system's pandemic response – have reduced the available hours of the Planning Commissioners to attend to large projects.

Ben W. suggested that the current zoning regulations could be modified in a minimalist way to address certain technical deficiencies and that the zoning regulations, so modified, could remain in place while a more substantive revision was considered. Among those deficiencies were Route 30 residential set-back distances, the definition of side lots for land-locked parcels, and other similar problems identified by Cornwall's Zoning Administrator during the drafting process for the current draft of the proposed land use and development regulations. Don Burns asked for the view of the Development Review Board concerning whether the current zoning regulations worked from a legal process standpoint. Magna D. responded for herself that she thought the current zoning regulations were fairly straightforward to apply and that they had been used successfully in the past year and a half to address major and minor subdivisions, contentious specific issues such as Party Barns in mixed use sections of town and renovations/additions to current property. Ben M. offered that to the extent that the Planning Commission's resources were stretched thin, the Select Board could undertake to make the minor revisions that Ben W. suggested and forward a document to the Planning Commission for review. Conor S. said that he would raise the issue with the Planning Commission at its next regular meeting (scheduled for the following night). A discussion of the practical problems related to conducting a public hearing on zoning regulation changes during the Covid-19 pandemic was postponed.

The discussion then turned to the staffing of the Planning Commission. In the view of the Planning Commissioners present, the current level of Planning Commission staffing and participation are insufficient to meet its work load. Participation at Planning Commission meetings is down and there are two vacant Planning Commission seats that have not had regular members for over a year. There was general agreement that an effort should be made to adequately staff the Planning Commission. Conor S. agreed to prepare a notice for the next town newsletter.

On motion duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35 PM by unanimous voice vote.