

READFIELD PLANNING BOARD

Minutes of Tuesday, November 3, 2021

Planning Board Members: Paula Clark (Chair), Bill Buck, Henry Clauson, Jack Comart, William Godfrey, Jan Gould, Don Witherill

Alternate Planning Board Member (not voting): Noel Madore

Others Attending: Ray Wendell Esquire, Phyllis Cote, Penny Eno, Jerry Bley, Grace Keene, Steve Smith, Ron “Chip” Stephens (CEO), Eric Dyer (Town Manager), Kristin Collins (Town Attorney), Leah Hayes, Kristin Parks

Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Paula via Zoom and at the Town Office.

26 Mill Stream Road— Safe Space Meeting House (SSMH):

The board continued consideration of the application of SSMH to create a community center/club. Public Meetings occurred May 25, June 2, July 27 and September 28. The Planning Board conducted a site visit on August 24 and a public hearing was held on August 25. Public comments on the application were accepted until September 7. On September 28 the board held a meeting to go over the site-review criteria.

The property is located at 26 Mill Stream Road in the Rural Residential District identified on the Assessors map 120, lot 013.

Paula recapped the actions taken so far. Town Attorney Kristin Collins presented the findings of fact compiled from the SSMH application, site review, public meeting and September 28 meeting.

Paula went through the findings of fact section by section.

Jack moved that board accept Sections 1 through 4 as written with a second by Bill G. Vote passed 7-0.

In Section 5A, Requested Use, Leah asked for clarification on which portion of the building and land fall into the Resource Protection zone. A footnote was added noting that the 26 Mill Stream Zone map would be added to the record. Don moved that with those changes that Section 5A be approved. Seconded by Bill B. All approved.

In Section 5B, Change of Use of Nonconforming Structure, information provided by the abutters for B3 was found credible. Jack moved that the conclusion be accepted. Bill B. seconded. Vote passed 7-0.

In Section 5C Site Plan Review Criteria, changes to number 7, Wetlands, were suggested. Jack moved those amendments be approved. Jan seconded. Approved 7-0.

Also in Section 5C, changes were suggested to numbers 13 and 20 and agreed upon.

Jack moved that numbers Section 5C be accepted as amended. Seconded by Bill B. Approved 7-0.

In the final section, D, Applicable Criteria, number 15, the word “specific” was removed.

Section 16, which states solid waste must be in an enclosure, was reviewed and the previous determination was reversed. The applicant now meets this standard.

Don moved that Section 5D Article 8 criteria be accepted as amended. Bill B. seconded. Unanimous vote.

Paula asked everyone if there was anything else to be discussed before the final vote. There was not. Jack moved that the application be denied. Bill B. seconded.

Paula noted the difficulties around this application and asked each board member to state their reasoning for their vote. She spoke about the land use ordinance, which states that any change of use to a nonconforming structure will not have a greater adverse impact than the existing use. She said that standard is very clear, and it is clear to her that the proposed use would have a greater impact. For those and other reasons she votes to deny the application despite her support for the SSMH mission.

Bill G. spoke of his support for the idea, saying a safe space meeting house is a great idea, but this property is not an appropriate location and the change of use will have too great an impact on surrounding properties. He is voting to deny.

Jack said he agrees with everything that has been said. He appreciates the applicants' mission and hopes they succeed in doing it, but this is not the right location, especially considering the impact on neighbors Cotes. Votes to deny.

Jan votes to deny for all the reasons stated in the written decision. She is also particularly concerned about the noise and other effects of the proposal on this particular area. She also stated support for SSMH and their quest to find a more appropriate location.

Henry is also voting to deny for all the reasons stated in the findings of fact. He said SSMH is a great cause but 26 Mill Stream is not the right place. He noted that this is why we have land use ordinances and such a thorough process. All property owners have rights that the community has agreed upon. This is not an emotional response, but a carefully thought-out decision based on the ordinances.

Bill B. said the project is one that every community needs, but it just doesn't fit this place. He votes to deny.

Don agrees that SSMH is a great idea, but there are just too many conditions that cannot be met even under a conditional approval. Votes to deny.

Final vote was 7-0 to deny the application.

Kristin asked that a vote be taken to authorize Paula to sign the findings of fact as amended. Don moved to authorize that approval. Henry seconded. All approved.

Paula said the minutes from previous meetings would be discussed at the next meeting, which is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on November 9.

Minutes prepared and submitted by Kristin Parks and Holly Rahmlow