

TOWN OF RUMNEY  
PLANNING BOARD MEETING  
MINUTES  
January 12, 2021

The December 2020 Planning Board meeting was a Zoom meeting hosted by Tara Bamford.

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm

Present: Brad Eaton, Brian Flynn, Armand Girouard, Isaac DeWever, Don Winsor, Sarah Rubury, and Judi Hall. David Cook joined the meeting at some point during the PowerPoint.

Also Present: Tara Bamford

The purpose of this meeting was to review and accept the Planning Board Survey Report prepared by Tara Bamford.

Tara shared the PowerPoint that she prepared. This would be shared during a public meeting in “normal” times.

The first slide is “The Numbers”. Tara asked Judi for confirmation on number of postcards sent out. Judi responded that there were 1133 postcards sent to 03266 addresses. These included some Groton or Dorchester addresses that are also 03266. The estimate is about 20. Tara will change the wording to Rumney zip code rather than Rumney addresses. Of the 477 out of town addresses about 21 were addressed to corporations or large entities that were removed. Tara will adjust the numbers accordingly.

Tara reviewed the number of responses from IP addresses with multiple responses. Most had different responses and some only had comments filled in. At most, there might be 24 “extra” surveys. About 60 respondents were anti zoning and only filled out the comment sections. If we remove these 84 from the total received, 340 respondents took the survey seriously and answered most of the questions.

Q1 – What is your relationship with the town of Rumney?

Most of the respondents own homes in town and almost 60% live in Rumney year-round.

Q2 – Goals that should guide Rumney’s consideration of a zoning ordinance?

The following got over 20 responses:

- Protect Property rights
- Preserve/Protect character, sense of community.

- Protect natural resources
- Town appearance
- Type and size, residential vs. commercial, compatible uses together
- Protect property values, reduce tax burden

Many responses included issues that zoning would not address.

Q3 – When you think about what types of development are appropriate for various locations in Rumney, or next door to you, what factors are important?

Protection of property values, amount and type of traffic, size and appearance of development, noise and protection of water quality were the most important factors.

Q4 - In the table below, for each type of development, please check off EVERY area of town where you feel it would be appropriate.

Tara colored the percent of responses based on percent – green for two thirds or more, between one third and two thirds is red. The remainder are black.

RT. 25 appears to be the dumping ground for all types of development. Single family homes in all areas of town. Small businesses and community buildings are acceptable in the village areas as well as other areas.

Percentages are for responses to that question.

Q5 – Should smaller lots and more concentrated development be allowed in and around the village areas?

Tara was surprised that almost half of the respondents said no to this question. Perhaps an indication that the village should remain the way it is.

The respondents that answered “maybe” listed type/use, consistent with village character, size of development, traffic, septic and water, and appearance as considerations.

Q6 – A range of options is available for Rumney to manage the impacts of development on our natural resources, from education of landowners to regulating where development can occur.

For each row below, please check off the “strongest” approach you would support.

There was not a strong response for “regulations” but the combination of “regulations” and “conditions” indicated there is support for some management of development.

Q7 – Do you have reservations about Rumney adopting a zoning ordinance? If so, what are your biggest concerns?

Over 50 responded for both “restrictions on property owners” and “no concerns”.

Tara’s Observations:

Support for

- Maintaining village/rural character
- Keeping big box stores and gas stations on Rt 25

- Protecting Stinson Lake
- Water quality protection
- Minimal regulations
- Protecting property values

Concerns about:

- Being told what to do on own property
- Unfair application of ordinance
- Problems zoning won't address

And some misconceptions

- Zoning is up to the Planning Board vs voters
- Zoning vs. Building Code
- Enforcement of state regulations

Next Steps to Consider:

Educate the community

Engage the community in the process

Explore a simple ordinance

- Focus on a few high priority issues
- Impacts vs. uses
- Allows many things without a permit
- Has very permissive grandfathering

Tara suggested that if we need to do some education of the voters about what might be included in a zoning ordinance and why some of the concerns townspeople have would not be addressed by zoning (noise, trash). She also said she thought we should leave lot size alone and have minimal setback requirements.

Comments on the report

Armand – Education is the largest piece and first step. Misconceptions on what zoning is and isn't.

Tara – this isn't really part of the report itself.

Judi - Education and community input is the next step. Additionally we then need to put together a group to explore zoning comprised of residents from different parts of town, different ages and backgrounds, supporters and non-supporters to look at what Rumney needs.

Tara – Would a community wide zoom meeting be a good idea since we can't meet in groups.

Judi – Not sure that would be best for Rumney.

Don – Timing is off. We should sit on this for now.

Brad – Agrees

Tara – Good idea. Community meeting should come first before small group.

Brian – More comfortable to attend a meeting in person. We probably can't accomplish as much in a Zoom meeting as in an in-person meeting.

Brad – What about small incremental Zoom meetings to keep in touch with the community to build up some credibility and to explain why we are pursuing this and why we are biased towards zoning. We could explain why this would make our lives easier and less gray area if we had some type of zoning ordinance as a tool to work by than being told by applicant's attorneys that we have no building permitting, no zoning, no site plan review therefore we are helpless. I was offended by the statement by the attorney.

Don – A lot of people don't have access to Zoom.

Brad – But there are a lot of folks who have commented on Facebook.

Judi – There were several people asking for paper applications because they didn't have access to either a computer or the internet. Maybe we can have an in-person meeting by late summer. In the meantime, we can take advantage of our new website to keep information going to the public.

Brian – The report will be on the website and maybe we can follow-up with information once a month or so explaining some of the comments and concerns that people had. That way people will have information so that when we have a public meeting the information will be out there. Maybe the first thing we need to tell people is that the Planning Board cannot force zoning on the town. It has to be voted on by the people at a town meeting. This seems to be the biggest complaint, that we are trying to sneak something in underhandedly.

Brad – Some of this may be intended misinformation to nip our efforts in the bud right away.

Brad noticed that David Cook joined the meeting and asked him for any comments he might have.

David – Agrees with previous comments about education. There should be notification in bold that the Planning Board does not decide on its own that Zoning should be implemented.

Brad – Jim Buttolph explained this on Facebook and it just takes people actually willing to believe it.

Tara – Will the Planning Board have a page on the new website? If so, you might want to have a box with rotating bullet points to explain some of these things.

Judi – That’s what I was thinking we would do. Answer questions and comments about what Zoning is and what our plan is.

Isaac – The website will make communication much easier. Zoning has been a hot topic in Rumney for a long time and this will give us a place to start until we can have an in-person meeting. Meanwhile we don’t have an idea of what this ordinance would look like which makes it seem underhanded. We should have a general idea to explain to people what we are thinking about.

Tara – I don’t think you want to do that.

Isaac – We should at least do something. People get really confused when we have nothing to point at.

Judi – But we have to get an idea of what the town wants and what it will accept.

Tara – I am suggesting that you put on the webpage what the next steps are. Large meeting then small groups then a preliminary draft of what zoning might look like for Rumney. Don’t forget the final steps include public meetings on drafts before you go to the final step of voting at town meeting. I think that this would clear up the questions.

Brian – So they can clearly understand. Easier to understand if you know where you are going and how you are getting there.

David – Do you think it would be easier to address some of the comments like “blight can’t be handled under zoning” or “the Baker River Corridor falls under state regulations”? Bullet point those questions. Those answers already exist and we don’t need to explain. Provide links to those answers.

Brian – That’s part of the education. If there are things we can’t provide with zoning we should make that clear and let people know right up front. Good idea.

Tara – Maybe you want to post some documents along with your next steps to explain.

Brian – It might help to get the answers out there so that everyone understands so that when we have a meeting people already have some information.

Judi - We could go through the report and address a different question or comment each week and clarify on the webpage.

Brad – I like the idea of putting out a simple bullet pointed form and just correcting the most misinterpreted sections and making those available to people.

Tara – I'm not sure the survey was misinterpreted but rather zoning was and what it can and can't do.

Brad – Well I think some of the questions were misinterpreted.

Don – Some people told me they didn't fill out the survey because they didn't understand it. So that's why I think we just need to have a public meeting to explain.

Armand – After reading over the survey it is apparent that a large number would like to have zoning or performance standards in place. They may not understand how it would be put in place and how it would work. And also, a lot of people may not understand that zoning is not a cookie cutter response. It is response to what the community wants and needs and is not the same for every town. Letting people know that a zoning vehicle in Rumney will look nothing like a zoning vehicle in Plymouth.

Tara – Overall it seems to be a 60/40 split between those in favor of zoning and those against it.

Armand – We should somehow let people know what could happen without zoning. Twenty, thirty years from now we could be trying to work with our hand tied behind our back which is where we are now because if we don't do anything it will change. If we want to do anything about it we need to act now to keep what we have now.

Judi – People also have a view that zoning will take away their rights but when it's their neighbor, stepping on their rights they're against it. It has to be a balance. Another misconception is that zoning brings development. But rather zoning allows a town to have development that fits the character of the town.

Armand – All of our interpretations of the survey and Tara's help indicate that we have enough information to move forward and like others have said we need to wait until we can have an in-person meeting. If we wait even five, maybe ten or twenty years this will be a much different place and I don't think any of us want that. So as we move forward we need to do so in-person.

Brad – To Don: Is Rumney a different place?

Don – Yes. Rumney was a lot more rural and there was a lot more manufacturing in town. But there is always going to be change. My thing with the questions and people who have asked, they have no idea what zoning is and what it will do. But if we have in-person meetings a lot of them will show up and ask questions.

Judi – I don't think we did a good enough job explaining what we were after with the survey. I think we thought we did but we didn't explain enough. We needed to explain our reasons and what we were aiming for in a way to be understood without the background we were working from.

Brad – Is there a way to tell how many hits we get on the webpage?

Isaac – We can't on our current webpage but should be able to on our new one.

Brad – We can't do much else besides use the webpage right now but it would be nice to get an idea of how many hits we get.

Isaac – Described our new website and explained it would be easier to use and will be a good tool once we have it in place.

Judi – Joe Chivell does get calls about the website, especially when I do something wrong! We think that as the new site comes online, we will increase traffic to the site.

Isaac – We are close to getting this online. But we need to back this up with an in-person meeting.

Tara – You can announce new content on social media.

Brad – Asked for specifics about setting up the site

Isaac – It's a package deal and the company will set up the site and then train a few people including Judi to use the site. Facebook will be included on the site.

Brad – Does everyone feel we should continue with this?

Armand – We have more than enough response with people who want us to move forward with something.

Brian – It seems a lot of people have strong opinions about zoning or no zoning so we need to move forward with this. We have a clear path to move forward.

Judi – More encouraged by the results. Like Armand and Brian stated there is a large percentage of people who support some sort of planning.

Brad – Favorite comment – The threat of putting up neon signs saying no zoning if we go forward with this.

Tara – Note consistency of priorities with Master Plan.

Armand – Master Plan recommended having some sort of planning or zoning ordinance.

Tara – Master Plan was ambiguous. It recommended looking into or exploring zoning which is what you are doing with this survey.

Armand – Is everyone on board with getting more information out to the public?

Don – I agree but I think we need to educate people.

Sarah – I agree that we need to get information out to keep the momentum going until we can all get together and have a discussion.

Tara – We can continue to use Survey Monkey to get more input – pose questions and have link on website to Survey Monkey to get input.

David – Is the issue of not having an in-person meeting due to not having a suitable venue? Other town meetings are being held in-person. Such as the school board.

Don, Brad, Armand and Brian all replied that they would not feel comfortable with in-person meetings right now. Tara said that of 8 towns she is working only one has in-person meetings and she Zooms into that meeting.

Armand – I would be uncomfortable with a large in-person meeting at this time under current conditions

David – Yes, I understand that a large meeting would not be good now but the eight of us could meet in a large gymnasium. Brian said he felt like he is in a box but now says he is extremely comfortable with this. Armand, Brad and Don said they all feel an in-person meeting is important but now say they don't want to have an in-person meeting.

Brad – It's a timing issue. Now is not the time to do this but we should definitely be prepared to do that in the future. I'm not stating we shouldn't have in-person meetings. We definitely need to do that.

Judi – I think we are talking about two different meetings. Dave, I think you are talking about a Planning Board meeting and Brad and Armand are talking about a community meeting. I do not want to have a community meeting right now. I don't feel we have had a lot of difficulties using Zoom right now for Planning Board meetings and some of us are more at risk than others and if this working for us right now I'd like to stay with this for now.

Brian – I do still feel like I'm in a box but it's okay for now. If we were to meet in a larger space it's still a public meeting and a hundred people could show up if there was an issue they were interested in. I don't know how we could do that and all still feel safe. It's not possible to do that right now.

Tara - The Planning Board could meet in person and public could be required to join by Zoom

Brad – I noticed that Plymouth has a hybrid meeting. A few people are in the office with the Planner and everyone else is on Zoom

Brian – At meetings I go to for work every one has to list everyone they meet that day so that there is a contact list in case someone gets COVID. We would probably have to do something like this, and I don't think we want to get involved with all that.

Judi – David, as a younger person you are probably not as at risk, less of a worry for you than us old guys.

David – If anything more of a worry. I see a ton of people all day every day. Playing Devil's advocate because we are all here on Zoom and have come to the conclusion that we need an in-person meeting. More to spark the conversation that to give an opinion.

Brad – We are all going to get there eventually. It will just take a little longer.

Armand – We should talk about the next step going forward

Brian – Do we have to accept the report?

Armand – I am going to make a motion that we are all in agreement and to move forward and accept the report.

Brian seconded the report. Brad asked for any further discussion. Then called for a roll call vote.

Brian – aye

Armand – aye

Judi – aye

Don – aye

Isaac – aye

Sarah – aye

David – aye

Brad – aye

The report was accepted.

Brad asked for how we were going to move forward.

Don – I thought we were going to post the survey results on the website

Brad – We agreed to post pieces of information points. We need to take some information and make it clear.

Tara – You did tell them you would post the Survey Report.

Brad – Oh yeah, but we need to post pieces of information points.

Tara – My question is whether you want to post the PowerPoint also.

Judi – I think we should include that.

Brian – It's an easy quick way to get through the report.

Judi – Do we want to put this on our existing website or wait for the new one? I can ask Joe how soon we get the new site.

Armand – I think it is important to get it up fairly quickly unless the new site will be up in a week or two.

Brian – I agree with that.

Judi – It is a busy time for Joe. I will get these up on the website right away.

Brad questioned Tara about a page he thought she asked if we wanted included. Tara didn't think there was such a page. Brad said he wanted to see the whole PowerPoint included. Tara thought maybe Brad was referring to the answers to "Depends" on the question about smaller lots in the village area. Brad questioned whether Tara's opinions to answers are okay on the report. Tara said my report, my opinions, my name on the report.

Brad - Any other comments? Are we all set? Can we move on?

Brad asked about filing deadlines for Planning Board positions. Judi said January 20 – January 29. Brad asked if Brian was still planning on signing up. Brian said yes. Sarah said she could not commit at this point. With a two-year-old at home she did not feel that she could commit to being a full member but would stay on as an alternate. Brad will not stay on the Board as a full member but would like be an alternate. Jesse Harris has been mentioned as a possible Board Member.

Brad told David about our meeting two weeks ago but that we could not discuss it until our next meeting. Sarah has taken the voting role with this. All information that we have has been sent out. This application is being followed very closely. We would like to hire an attorney to help us with this. However, we will need to discuss this at the public meeting.

Don asked if we could accept the application without receiving permit info. Tara said we can accept with pending applications. Judi said we do have the information, it just came from other landowners, not Carter. Tara said in this case we should ask counsel for an opinion.

Judi gave an update on the Glampground. They are cutting back on what they plan to get done for next summer. Right now, it will be just a residence and two or three yurts. No explanation as to why the drawback. Last time we spoke with them they were going to explore what permits they needed and look into financial backing. They are under no obligation to report their plans to us but we appreciate the opportunity to kept apprised of what their plans are.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53.