Town of Litchfield, NH
Planning Board Meeting
Litchfield Town Hall
September 1, 2026

Date Approved: _09_/_15_/2026

In Attendance:

Chair:	Jared O'Connell
Vice-Chair:	Travis Tucker
Members:	Leitha Reilly; Russ Blanchette; Jessie Ngo; and Dianne Plansky
Planning Board Administrator:	Joan McKibben
Circuit Rider:	Jay Minkarah
Absent:	None
Also, In Attendance:	Sean Flynn

I. Public Session

A. Call to Order:

a. 7:02 p.m. – Chair Jared O'Connell called the meeting to order, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

B. Roll Call:

a. Jared O'Connell (Chair)
b. Travis Tucker (Vice-Chair)
c. Russell Blanchette (Member)
d. Jessie Ngo (Member)
e. Leitha Reilly (Member)
f. Dianne Plansky (Selectmen's Representative)

C. Public Input Related to Non-Agenda Items 7:04 p.m.

a. No one came forward.

Public Input closed at 7:05 p.m.

II. Business

A. Interview of Applicant to the Planning Board

Planning Board Application – Sean Flynn

Sean Flynn, a resident of Litchfield, discussed his application for appointment to the Planning Board. Mr. Flynn stated that he wanted to become more involved in the community. He previously served for approximately two years on the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Committee but left due to changes in his work schedule. With his schedule having changed again, he sought an opportunity to contribute to the Town.

Mr. Flynn reported that he has worked for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for 15 years in operations. His responsibilities include coordinating and planning work between air traffic operations and technical staff, including equipment outages, contracts, regulations, standards, risk assessments, and mitigation measures. He explained that his work frequently requires coordination among airports, military installations, air traffic control centers, and other agencies. He began his career on the technical and maintenance side, including power systems, before transitioning to his current role approximately eight years ago.

Mr. Flynn stated that he has a longstanding interest in municipal planning, zoning, development projections, and conservation. He said he has reviewed Planning Board materials and minutes and is familiar with the New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) website and available planning resources. He acknowledged that he does not have formal education specifically in planning but expressed an interest in the planning process and a willingness to research applicable regulations and requirements.

Board members discussed the value of Mr. Flynn's technical background, project coordination experience, familiarity with regulations and standards, and willingness to review extensive planning materials. Mr. Flynn confirmed that he understood the time commitment involved and was comfortable attending meetings twice a month at 7:00 p.m. He confirmed that he was seeking appointment as a full member of the Planning Board.

The Board then discussed the next steps in the appointment process.

Motion: **(L. Reilly / R. Blanchette)** Moved to approve Mr. Flynn and present him to the Select Board for review and appoint him to the Planning Board as a full member.
Discussion: None
Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

B. <u>Public Hearing on the Acceptance of the Master Plan Chapter III – Natural Resources @ 7:19 p.m.</u>

Mr. Minkarah reviewed the updated Conservation and Natural Resources chapter, which was identified as one of the most outdated chapters in the plan. The Board prioritized the chapter because the Conservation Commission had recently updated its conservation plan, providing a logical basis for the chapter revision. The chapter is approximately 87 pages and contains extensive data, maps, tables, and regulatory information covering soils, water resources, wetlands, floodplains, surface waters, watersheds, groundwater, agriculture, forests, invasive species, wildlife habitat, and endangered species.

Mr. Minkarah discussed the water resources sections, including wetlands, floodplains, rivers, streams, and ponds. The section on Darrah Pond was highlighted because of ongoing water-quality challenges and recommendations to address them. Groundwater was also discussed extensively, with particular attention to PFAS contamination, which represents a significant change since the previous plan.

Agriculture received substantial attention because of its importance to the community, as did forests and invasive species. The invasive species section addresses both invasive insects and plants, including species identified on NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) watch and prohibited lists. The wildlife section addresses wildlife habitat areas and corridors, endangered species, and various animal, bird, and reptile species.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed the chapter’s conservation recommendations, which focused on both regulatory changes and establishing priorities for conservation and land acquisition. A significant portion of the discussion addressed potential acquisition of privately owned land, particularly parcels enrolled in the current-use program that overlap with high-priority habitat areas. One map identifies the highest-ranked habitat areas in the State and overlays current-use parcels to identify potential conservation opportunities. The chapter also examines land-use changes since 2001, existing federal, State, and local regulations, and additional measures that could provide natural-resource protection. He noted that the community has a strong regulatory framework but could consider additional measures, including designating areas for special protection. The Town also reviewed available conservation funding sources, including programs it has used in the past.

Mr. Minkarah then reviewed revisions to the invasive insect section. Additional language and images had been incorporated, and Mr. O'Connell mentioned a need to correct the description associated with Figure 10 and replace or update an image. Mr. Minkarah noted that he had updated the images.

Mr. O'Connell opened the floor for public comment at 7:27 p.m.; no one came forward, and he closed public comment at 7:28 p.m.

The Board reviewed the section on ash tree loss and its impacts on forests and wetlands. The discussion noted that ash tree loss can affect stream temperatures, increase erosion, alter wildlife habitat, and reduce the scenic character of forests and conservation areas. The Board determined that certain paragraphs did not sufficiently contribute to the section and discussed removing or revising them.

The Board reviewed language on treatments to protect valuable landscape trees, historic trees, and trees in parks and public spaces. Systemic insecticides can protect individual ash trees from emerald ash borer (EAB) and hemlock trees from hemlock woolly adelgid and elongate hemlock scale when applied by trained professionals.

The Board emphasized that insecticides could harm bees and other pollinators when applied near flowering plants and that users must carefully read and follow product labels and application requirements. The Board agreed that such treatments are generally impractical or economically infeasible for large forested areas and preferred language referring to professional application rather than recommending specific products.

Mr. Minkarah agreed to revise the applicable language and the Figure 10 description. The revised chapter will incorporate these changes.

Motion: **(T. Tucker / J. Ngo)** Moved to adopt the amended Chapter 3, Natural Resources section of the Master Plan.
Discussion: None
Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

Mr. Minkarah discussed updating the Economic Development chapter of the Master Plan, which was last updated in 2002. The Economic Development Committee has completed its work and provided a report that can be incorporated into the chapter. He noted that the update should also address recent zoning changes and other significant developments since the chapter was last revised. Members agreed that the existing chapter contains little current information and that the Committee's report and other recent information should form the basis for the update.

The Board discussed scheduling the Economic Development Chapter update and agreed that additional time would be needed to compile the relevant information. Members suggested recirculating the Economic Development Committee's report and the existing chapter before the discussion. The Board also discussed a potential workshop regarding land use and related issues. Ms. Plansky noted that a previous community survey generated approximately 2,500 responses, making it one of the largest surveys conducted in the community. She agreed that the results would be valuable in developing future recommendations.

Ms. McKibben discussed the upcoming schedule, including the September 15 meeting concerning the sidewalk project and the October 6 meeting concerning solar. Members considered using an upcoming meeting to continue the Master Plan update and agreed that the Economic Development chapter would be a timely priority given the significant development activity that has occurred in recent years.

C. Regulation Changes for Low Impact Development Required

The Board then proceeded to the public hearing on Low-Impact Development (LID). Mr. Minkarah reviewed the regulatory requirements applicable to Litchfield because portions of the community are considered an urban area under EPA and federal definitions and are therefore subject to MS4 municipal stormwater requirements. The Town has elected to apply a consistent set of regulations throughout the community. To assist with compliance, the Town contracted with CEI, an engineering firm, to review the Town's regulations and provide recommendations.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed the requirements for assessing local land-use regulations concerning low-impact development, green infrastructure, and impervious areas. The required assessment includes evaluating the feasibility of practices such as green roofs, infiltration practices, and rain gardens, as well as reviewing street design and other local requirements that affect impervious cover. The purpose of the assessment is to determine whether regulatory changes could support additional low-impact development practices and to document the Town's efforts for submission to the EPA.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed CEI's recommendations, which address provisions throughout the Town's regulations, including site-plan and subdivision regulations. Staff reviewed the recommendations and modified proposed language where appropriate. He noted that the Town is expected to make a good-faith effort toward addressing the recommendations but is not necessarily required to adopt every recommendation. The final determination will be documented in a report to the EPA identifying the changes the Town has adopted and those it has not adopted.

Mr. Minkarah first discussed proposed language concerning underground utilities. The amendment would allow underground utilities to be located beneath the paved portion of a right-of-way when necessary to permit the use of drainage swales, subject to approval by the appropriate authority. He characterized the change as relatively minor and noted that it would likely have limited application.

Mr. Minkarah then discussed proposed amendments to the subdivision regulations governing street layout. The proposed language would require street-layout considerations to include reducing street length and minimizing total paved area, including cul-de-sacs, where practical, to protect site hydrology, reduce cut and fill, and protect slopes and important natural resources consistent with low-impact development principles.

Mr. O'Connell asked whether the proposed language would give the Planning Board greater authority to require or encourage reductions in the impacts associated with proposed developments. It was explained that the language would establish a policy and signal that the Town encourages these practices. The Planning Board and its consulting engineer could then evaluate proposed plans to determine whether applicants had made reasonable efforts to reduce road length, paved areas, and related impacts where practical.

The Planning Board reviewed proposed amendments to the Town's development regulations, including changes to street design, low-impact development, stormwater management, parking, and buffer-yard requirements.

Mr. Minkarah discussed a proposed reduction in the minimum required road width from 24 feet to 20 feet, which was identified as the most significant proposed change. The reduction would affect several sections of the regulations, including the applicable table and diagrams depicting alternative cul-de-sac configurations. He discussed whether a 20-foot-wide road was appropriate for the Town, particularly given differences between urban and rural settings, the lack of sidewalks on many residential streets, roadside parking, and the prevalence of larger vehicles. Ms. Reilly expressed concern that reducing the minimum width could create roads that are inconsistent with the character and practical needs of the Town.

Mr. Minkarah then discussed whether 22 feet might represent a reasonable compromise between the existing 24-foot standard and the proposed 20-foot standard. He noted that the proposed width would establish a minimum and would not prevent a developer from constructing a wider road; however, they also recognized that developers would generally be expected to construct to the minimum standard. The Board discussed the need to balance environmental objectives with roadway safety, convenience, existing development patterns, and the Town's overall character.

The Board also discussed pedestrian safety and the potential use of sidewalks on narrower roads. Members noted that many subdivisions do not have sidewalks, and residents frequently walk along residential streets and walk their dogs. The Board considered whether a narrower roadway combined with a sidewalk could provide a safer alternative while potentially reducing impervious surface. Members agreed that sidewalks could be an option in appropriate

circumstances but did not indicate that sidewalks should necessarily be required in all developments.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed additional proposed amendments to the low-impact development and stormwater provisions. Appendix D would include language requiring clearing to be limited to the minimum necessary to construct buildings, parking areas, roadways, sidewalks, drainage systems, and other required development components. The low-impact development provisions would recognize techniques such as vegetated roofs and the repurposing of stormwater as acceptable site-design practices. Proposed amendments concerning street edges would encourage open drainage systems along residential streets and recognize alternative roadway-edge designs that facilitate bioretention treatment swales and similar stormwater-management practices.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed proposed changes allowing certain low-impact stormwater structures, including bioretention areas, infiltration trenches, and grass areas, within required buffer areas. He noted that this provision was consistent with a recent change in state law. He also discussed buffer-yard provisions that would permit low-impact stormwater-management practices such as tree box filters, rain gardens, vegetated swales, and similar treatment areas.

Ms. Reilly discussed a proposed reduction in office parking requirements from four spaces per 1,000 square feet to three spaces per 1,000 square feet. During the review, the Board identified and corrected a typographical error in the square-footage requirement to 1,000 square feet.

Mr. Minkarah summarized the proposed amendments. If the road-width reduction is pursued, the 20-foot reference would affect Section 730.01 of the Subdivision Regulations, including the applicable table and cul-de-sac diagrams. Other potential amendments would address underground utilities in Section 414, lower-impact street layouts in Section 730.01, and permeable pavement in Section 730.05.01. Additional amendments would address minimizing clearing, low-impact development techniques, open drainage, the placement of bioretention areas within buffers, office parking standards, and stormwater-management practices within buffer-yard areas. The Board continued its discussion regarding the appropriate minimum road width and the remaining proposed regulatory amendments.

The Board discussed the proposed reduction of minimum road width from 24 feet to 20 feet, particularly as it would apply to cul-de-sac designs. Members considered whether the other proposed regulatory changes adequately addressed the recommendations concerning low-impact development and impervious surfaces. The discussion identified provisions addressing green roofs, fire-retention trails, impervious pavement, minimizing road lengths, and reducing clearing and roadway impacts as measures that would address many of the recommendations.

The Board then focused on whether a 20-foot pavement width would be appropriate within cul-de-sac circles. Members noted that cul-de-sacs contain substantial areas of asphalt and discussed allowing a narrower lane within the circle while retaining a 24-foot width on the connecting roadway. Members also considered the practical use of cul-de-sacs as one-lane areas, the ability of emergency and delivery vehicles to maneuver through a reduced-width lane, and the importance of retaining the 75-foot radius.

Mr. Tucker expressed concern that narrowing the roadway could create safety issues, particularly where children use cul-de-sac areas for recreation. He discussed the potential for vegetation and tree canopies to encroach on the roadway and emphasized that roadway design should account for actual conditions within residential neighborhoods. The Board also questioned the practical consequences of adopting the proposed changes and whether sufficient consultation had occurred with Road Agent Kevin Brown and emergency response officials, as the consultant's report recommended.

The Board discussed whether reducing the roadway width would provide a meaningful reduction in impervious surface. Mr. O’Connell provided calculations showing that, with a 75-foot right-of-way and an 11-foot area between the right-of-way and the road, comparison of roadway widths resulted in approximately 1,546 square feet of impervious area versus 1,351 square feet, a difference of less than 200 square feet.

Mr. Minkarah concluded that the Board had made good-faith efforts over approximately six months to evaluate the consultant's recommendations and determine which measures were appropriate and feasible for the community. The

discussion recognized the importance of considering the Town's character, roadway conditions, emergency access, safety, and the potential effects on future residents.

Mr. Minkarah then discussed proceeding with the proposed regulatory amendments while excluding the provision that would reduce the minimum road width from 24 feet to 20 feet. The proposed approach was to retain the other amendments while reverting the minimum road width to 24 feet, as reflected in the proposed changes to Appendix A, Table 3.2; the associated provisions of Appendix A; Exhibits F, G, and H; and subdivision regulation Section 730.01.

Motion: **(J. O'Connell / T. Tucker)** Moved as proposed. (8:33 p.m.)
Discussion: Mr. O'Connell stated that the motion was to adopt the proposed changes, minus the sections that updated the road width.
Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

III. <u>Committee Reports:</u>

A. Capital Improvement Committee

Mr. Tucker reviewed the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) process following the previous evening's meeting. The meeting included presentations from the Library and Recreation Committee regarding their respective requests. The presentations provided useful information before the Committee begins categorizing requests and incorporating them into the CIP. The next CIP meeting is scheduled for September 9, when the Committee will continue receiving municipal department presentations, including those from the Police and Fire Departments. School presentations are scheduled for September 14, which will also include a Select Board meeting. The Committee expects to hold its wrap-up meeting on October 5 and will coordinate with the Planning Board before then. Members noted that the CIP process provides insight into current municipal needs and helps the Planning Board understand how CIP requests are developed and utilized.

The Board discussed the use of impact fees and the importance of ensuring that funds are used within the applicable requirements and timeframes. Ms. Plansky provided an example involving the library, in which an existing septic system would be replaced with a larger system to accommodate increased use resulting from population growth and increased Library traffic. The methodology involved crediting the prior system's cost against the cost of the new system, consistent with the intent of the applicable impact-fee provisions. Ms. Plansky confirmed that the proposal had been approved.

B. Select Board

Ms. Plansky discussed several other municipal matters, including sidewalks and the use of the shared-use path. She noted that the community has expressed strong opinions regarding whether certain activities, including use by children and adults, should be permitted on the bike path. The Board expects additional discussion on the matter.

Ms. Plansky provided an update on the municipal budget. The Town is currently over the tax cap, although increased revenues have provided some relief. Members identified several significant contractual and budgetary pressures, including the ambulance service contract. The previous ambulance provider, Hudson, had maintained its contract for several years without significant changes; the new contract was believed to be approximately **200% higher**, which contributed substantially to the Town exceeding the tax cap.

The Town subsequently considered another provider, although the resulting cost would still be significantly higher than in prior years. Members also discussed changes concerning ambulance billing and collections, as well as increased Police Department contracts and other expenditures. Ms. Plansky noted that the upcoming budget season will be challenging and that work on the budget remains ongoing.

C. Heritage Commission

Ms. Plansky provided an update regarding the Heritage Committee's efforts to establish a roadside memorial honoring Chief Passaconaway. The Commission is currently seeking an appropriate location for the memorial. Ms. Plansky noted that several potential locations had been considered.

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes:

A. July 21, 2026

Motion: **(T. Tucker / R. Blanchette)** Moved to cancel the July 21 Planning Board meeting.
Discussion: None
Vote: (5-0-1) The motion carried. (Mr. Ngo abstained)

B. August 4, 2026

Motion: **(R. Blanchette / T. Tucker)** Moved to cancel the August 4 Planning Board meeting, as amended.
Discussion: None
Vote: (5-0-1) The motion carried. (Ms. Plansky abstained)

V. Other Business:

A. Town Engineer

Ms. Plansky reported that the Select Board had interviewed two engineering firms and planned to meet on Thursday to discuss the firms and determine which one to select as the town engineer. The Board anticipated selecting a town engineer shortly, which would benefit upcoming Planning Board matters.

B. Sidewalk Discussion

The Board briefly discussed proposed minor sidewalk changes associated with an upcoming application. Members discussed whether the changes would require engineering review and noted that the proposed sidewalk would be located outside the right-of-way. If the work were located within the right-of-way, the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT) would likely require approval.

Mr. O'Connell noted that the applicant, Mr. Moreau, had discovered additional space between the fence and the right-of-way that could accommodate the sidewalk.

VI. Upcoming Meetings:

A. Tuesday, September 15, 2026 @ 7:00 p.m. - Town Hall Conference Room

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VII. Adjournment:

Motion: **(T. Tucker / J. Ngo**) A motion was made to adjourn at 8:53 p.m.
Discussion: None
Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,
Matthew Sullivan
Planning Board Recording Secretary