

**ATKINSON PLANNING BOARD WORKSHOP
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2026**

Members Present:

Sue Killam, Chair
John Ottow, Vice Chair
Mike Turell
Deborah Cornish
Paul Cardone, Alternate
Karen McFadden, Alternate
Kate Rochford, Alternate
Paul Wainwright, Selectman Ex Officio

Others Present

Jenn Rowden, RCPC

Call to Order:

Chair Killam called July 15, 2026 meeting of the Atkinson Planning Board to order at 6:32 p.m.

New Business:

1. Potential Zoning Amendments to Encourage Housing Opportunities

Ms. Rowden said there are a few legislative changes that will require some moderate amendments to make the Town compliant with state law.

Ms. Rowden said multifamily uses must now be allowed in Commercial Zones, but it is not required in Industrial Zones. She said Atkinson has a few Commercial Zones that allow light Industrial Uses. She suggested the Town allow multifamily uses in a couple of zones including Commercial-Professional Zones. She said the Town does need to allow multi-family uses in Town Center and Commercial Districts. She said it is an easy amendment to make. Chair Killam asked about the definition of multi-family in Town. Ms. Rowden said three or more units. She said normal approval still apply for such projects.

Ms. Rowden asked about split zones in Town. She said the Town can still limit on the properties that are split between Zones. Chair Killam asked about maintaining setbacks and frontage requirements. Ms. Rowden said those requirements could be required for multi-family uses but could also be amended or a variance could be sought.

Ms. Rowden asked the Board if they were interested in allowing multi-family uses in the Commercial-Professional Zone. Chair Killam said the Board has discussed it several times and agree on this. Ms. Rowden said it is a simple change.

Ms. Rowden said there is another change to the accessory dwelling unit state law which provides clarity on a nonconforming structure and whether it can be used as a detached ADU. She said the law says it now can be used as a detached ADU if it existed before July 1, 2025, but if it has not been used in a long time it cannot be used as an ADU. She said it depends on the amount of work that needs to be done on the structure. Alternate

Cardone asked about parking requirements. Ms. Rowden said the same parking requirements of one parking spot remains in place.

Alternate McFadden asked about elderly services being allowed in zones, such as hospice care or assisted living and whether this an opportunity to allow those services. Ms. Rowden said multi-family could be age-restricted but not necessarily elder services. She said that would require a separate use. She said many of the parcels in these zones are smaller and make it more difficult for this type of use unless there was combining of lots or the like. Alternate McFadden asked whether this could be added to the permitted uses in Zoning. Chair Killam said it was tried in the past and was not approved by voters. Ms. Rowden said adult day cares are smaller, and parking requirements are less. Chair Killam said this discussion should be a full board discussion in the future.

Ms. Rowden said another state law that will require an amendment to allow group and family day care in homes by right without site plan review or special exception.

Ms. Rowden said the state legislature removed the requirement that communities regulate road length. She said Atkinson already does not regulate road length.

Ms. Rowden said she wanted to talk about changing frontage requirements as a means to increase housing opportunities. She said the RR3 is 250 ft and in other zones its 200 ft. The Zoning Board can only reduce frontage by 33 percent. She said those are large frontage requirements. She said 75 ft to 150 ft is not unusual in other rural communities. Chair Killam said that should be a discussion when they discuss the RR3 Zone. She said the Board has discussed doing away with the RR3 Zone as there is so little land left in that area. She said there are options for the RR2 Zone. Ms. Rowden said that some communities allow back lot building with more frontage, certain acreage or distance from other structures. Chair Killam said most land in Atkinson is already built on, how much work does the Board want to do on a change that will not amount to much gain. Alternate McFadden said it makes it easier on a homeowner wanting to make a change. The Board agreed they were in favor of looking at a possible change for porkchop lots. Ms. Rowden said they are referred to as back lots.

Ms. Rowden said the Town's building code requires every residence have minimum ground floor 800 sq ft and additional 600 sq ft for every additional story. She said ADUs are not subject to the requirement but it would make restrictions on allowing tiny homes. She recommended striking this requirement. She said it would be a Selectboard's public hearing and decision because it's a life-safety issue.

Ms. Rowden said changing zoning districts would require more direction from the Planning Board and will take some time. She said the Town could create a separate district for the lake area to make structures less nonconforming. Chair Killam said it would make sense for the Board to have a larger discussion on this issue. Alternate McFadden asked if it could go on the 2028 ballot. Ms. Rowden said it will be a lengthy process. Selectman Wainwright suggested including Derry and Hampstead in the discussion.

Alternate McFadden raised the issue of Town Center Zone. Chair Killam said the way it is described does not make a lot of sense. Alternate McFadden suggested the Board look at the Zones for the 2028 ballot.

Chair Killam said another issue to be discussed is the spec sheet and reducing the 100 ft wetland setback be changed. Alternate McFadden said the Conservation Commission will be coming to the Board next month to discuss whether the 100 ft is adequate or too much. Ms. Rowden said 100 ft is the gold standard for wetland protection. She said the science shows 35 ft is the most critical for flood waters, temperature control and nutrient reduction. At 66 ft, get more control of flood water reduction and storage. She said when you get to 100 ft getting good water quality filtration. She said no one in the region has greater than 100 ft unless it's a major water system. She said many have 75 ft or 100 ft standard setback. She said many are judged on the impact of the size of the project. She said functions and values is a good tool but complicated. Chair Killam said the Town does not have good definitions for its wetlands. Selectman Wainwright said using functions and values usually requires a professional. Alternate McFadden said people are constantly getting within 50 ft of the wetland because of the Zoning Board. Chair Killam said there may be coming a spreadsheet of all relief that has been granted by the Zoning Board for comparison purposes. Ms. Rowden said without a professional survey, maps of wetlands can vary be off by as much as 200 ft. She said after 10 years, wetlands can move.

Chair Killam asked would the Board request that Sue Coppeta take on a project of changing school impact fee ordinance in the Town. She said there is no impact fee for ADUs and believes it should be looked at. Chair Killam said the Town has a methodology to use to base it on. The Board agreed.

Chair Killam adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

The minutes were prepared by Gretchen Grosky.

The next meeting of the Planning Board will be Wednesday, August 5, 2026.