Town of Litchfield, NH
Planning Board Meeting
Litchfield Town Hall
September 15, 2026

Date Approved:____/____/2026

In Attendance:

Chair: Jared O'Connell

Vice-Chair: Travis Tucker

Members: Leitha Reilly; Russ Blanchette; Jessie Ngo; and John Brunelle

Planning Board Administrator: Joan McKibben

Circuit Rider: Jay Minkarah

Absent: None

Also, In Attendance: Ralph Boehm; Josh and Emily Pelletier; and Reggie Moreau

---

I. Public Session

A. Call to Order:

a. 7:01 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. John Brunelle (Selectmen's Representative)

C. Public Input Related to Non-Agenda Items 7:02 p.m.

a. No one came forward.

Public Input closed at 7:03 p.m.

II. Business

A. Interview of Applicant to the Planning Board

Planning Board Application – Ralph Boehm

The Board interviewed Ralph Boehm regarding his application for appointment to the Planning Board. Mr. Boehm stated that he currently serves on the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) and sought additional involvement in town government after no longer serving as a State Representative. He noted prior service on the

Select Board, Budget Committee, School Board, and other town committees, as well as 18 years as a State Representative. He has lived in town

for approximately 50 years. He served on the Budget Committee beginning in 1988; as a Selectman beginning in 1989 for six years; on the Budget Committee through 2004; and on the School Board from 2004 to 2010.

Mr. Tucker asked whether Mr. Boehm would consider serving as an alternate because the Board currently has a full set of members. Mr. Boehm said he would consider serving as an alternate to stay informed about matters relevant to his work with the NRPC. Mr. O'Connell explained that an alternate could participate but would not vote unless serving in place of an absent member.

Mr. Boehm discussed his experience with the Town and recent growth. He stated that the Town's population had remained relatively stable over the previous 20 to 25 years, while the school population had declined from approximately 1,500 students to 1,000 students over the previous decade, primarily because fewer families with children were moving into the community. He identified development and the lack of a municipal septic or sewer system as concerns, noting that continued development could create infrastructure challenges. He also discussed housing costs, identifying housing availability primarily as a supply-and-demand issue, and noted that increased migration into New Hampshire during the COVID-19 period contributed to higher housing prices and rents.

Regarding his service as a State Representative, Mr. Boehm identified local control as an important issue. He said he opposed state efforts to assume greater control over local zoning and supported maintaining local authority. He also noted that legislation he sponsored during the previous year established that the Budget Committee would be accountable for the default budget. Mr. Boehm served on the House Education Committee for 12 years, advocating greater local control over education and other municipal matters. He also served on the Public Works and Highways Committee during his final two years in the Legislature, contributing to his appointment to the NRPC.

Mr. Tucker asked about residents' priorities and how to balance current needs, future development, and differing community interests. Mr. Boehm stated that residents were concerned about growth, new construction, and property taxes, particularly School District taxes. He discussed the state's role in funding local government and opposed establishing a state income or sales tax to address property-tax concerns.

The Board and Mr. Boehm discussed the importance of varied backgrounds and perspectives among members. Mr. Boehm stated that boards and legislative committees benefit from members with different experiences. The Board noted that its members have varied backgrounds and share an interest in the community's long-term health and success. Members emphasized managing development and change while considering the Town's future needs and character.

Ms. Reilly discussed development opportunities and zoning concerns in the southern end of town, including property zoned for commercial or industrial use. Mr. Boehm said transportation infrastructure would be a major consideration for future commercial or industrial development because businesses depend on adequate road access. He also noted that the northern end of town could experience additional industrial development because of its proximity to the airport.

The Board discussed potential changes to multifamily and commercial zoning requirements and the limited timeframe for addressing zoning changes before the March election. Members noted that the state was considering changes affecting the area and that the Town had limited financial resources to acquire and resell the property. The Board discussed determining whether zoning changes could produce an outcome consistent with community interests.

Mr. Brunelle asked whether Mr. Boehm had reviewed the Economic Development Committee's report regarding the property and its future use. Mr. Minkarah explained that the Committee had spent approximately 18 months developing an economic development strategy based on resident and community input. The Board noted that the Committee's work could inform the Master Plan process. Mr. Boehm said he had not reviewed the report but would.

The Planning Board discussed appointing Ralph Boehm as an alternate member. Ms. Reilly noted her service on the Circumferential Highway Exploratory Committee (CHEC), chaired by Selectman Dianne Plansky. She said the Committee's minutes contain extensive information on the southern portion of town, development, and responsible growth.

Mr. O'Connell opened the floor for public comment regarding Mr. Boehm's application. No members of the public commented. The Board then discussed the appointment and made a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen.

Motion: **(T. Tucker / R. Blanchette)** Moved to recommend Ralph Boehm to the Select Board for alternate membership on the Planning Board.
Discussion: None
Vote: (5-0-1) The motion carried. (J. Brunelle abstained)

B. Pelletier Farms Fall Fest, Tax Map 9 Lot 108 - 226 Charles Bancroft Highway

The applicant, Josh Pelletier, owner and operator of Pelletier Farms, appeared before the Board with his wife, Emily. Mr. Pelletier explained that this would be the first large community event hosted at the farm, formerly known as Normanton Farms. He stated that the farm has hosted smaller tours and that the event was intended to introduce the community to the farm's operations, animals, and agricultural practices. The event would include farm tours and live music from a blues band (a local farmer).

Mr. Pelletier explained that the farm operates as a full livestock farm with cattle, pigs, chickens, and turkeys and uses regenerative farming practices. The animals rotate through about nine pastures on the property, along with additional leased land. Cattle are moved between pastures regularly, pigs clear brush, and chickens are raised and moved through the fields in mobile chicken tractors. The farm uses perimeter fencing and temporary electric fencing to manage livestock.

Mr. Tucker asked about parking and traffic management. Mr. Pelletier stated that the farm has sufficient space for event parking and has already begun clearing unused field areas for that purpose. He currently has three full-time employees and expects to ask additional individuals to volunteer to assist with traffic flow. He did not anticipate needing a police detail but said he would welcome police assistance if conditions warranted it.

Mr. Pelletier estimated that approximately 300 people could attend the event. He noted that a previous farm event attracted approximately 200 attendees despite rain and temperatures around 45 degrees. Mr. Tucker discussed the potential for increased attendance because of the band's following and advised the Pelletiers to have a contingency plan for traffic and parking, particularly if vehicles created congestion on Route 3A or if attendees attempted difficult turns onto or off the property.

Mr. Pelletier said he expected about three vendors initially, with additional local farms and vendors being considered. The event was proposed for October 10, from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., with the band scheduled to perform for approximately three hours. Mr. Pelletier also requested a rain date of October 17. The Board agreed to include the rain date in the approval.

Mr. O'Connell encouraged Mr. Pelletier to notify the Police and Fire Departments about the event so they would be aware of the activity and could respond if necessary. He agreed to contact both Departments. The Board also encouraged Mr. Pelletier to communicate with neighboring property owners regarding the event. Members noted that if the event became annual, they could return to the Planning Board to incorporate the use into the site plan and potentially establish a mechanism for holding the event multiple times per year.

The Board discussed the importance of having a backup plan if attendance exceeded expectations, including the possibility that vehicles could exceed available parking capacity or create traffic and safety concerns. Mr. Pelletier acknowledged the concern and agreed to monitor conditions during the event.

Mr. O'Connell requested a motion to approve the Pelletier Farms Fall Fest for October 10, with a rain date of October 17.

Motion: **(L. Reilly / T. Tucker)** So moved.
Discussion: None

Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

C. Corning Farm at River Edge, LLC Tax Map 22 Lot 14

Reggie Moreau appeared before the Planning Board to continue discussions about the sidewalk along Route 3A and the Moore's Falls properties. He explained that an amendment to the site plan for Corning Farm at River's Edge would relocate the previously proposed sidewalk. The original alignment was intended to cross the Moore's Falls property but could not be constructed at the proposed location. The revised sidewalk will run along the property frontage, from the Moore's Falls property to the northernmost entrance of Corning Farm at River's Edge.

The sidewalk will generally follow the existing fence line between the property and the highway. Mr. Moreau identified several existing obstacles, including a tree that can be removed and several utility poles. One utility pole has a guy wire located within the proposed sidewalk alignment. He stated that Eversource has been contacted and will relocate the guy wire. Eversource indicated that it requires a 10-foot standoff from the pole. Mr. Moreau plans to adjust the sidewalk alignment to accommodate the required clearance, with approximately one foot of separation between the sidewalk and the existing obstacles.

Mr. Moreau stated that the goal is to begin construction as soon as possible and complete the work before winter. He also explained that an existing blanket easement across the property should accommodate the utility work, although Eversource confirmation is still pending. If a new easement is required, the additional review and approval process could delay construction until the following year.

Mr. Moreau also discussed work at the southern portion of the property between the entrance and the Moore's Falls property. The water lines are already installed on the property line. He is awaiting permission from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (DOT) to open the roadway and expects the permit shortly. If approved, Mr. Moreau would like to begin that portion of the work immediately and then proceed with the remaining sidewalk construction.

Members noted that the sidewalk will provide a safer pedestrian connection along Route 3A and allow residents and pedestrians to travel between nearby properties without walking on private property or along the highway. Mr. Minkarah also noted that the sidewalk will improve connectivity within the neighborhood and provide pedestrian access to nearby commercial destinations, including the gas station and Moore's Falls properties.

Mr. Moreau expressed support for creating a more walkable community and stated that improved pedestrian connectivity benefits the neighborhood and the broader community.

Ms. McKibben and Mr. Minkarah confirmed that the required fees had been paid and that the application was complete.

Motion: **(L. Reilly / R. Blanchette)** Moved to accept the site plan amendment for Corning Farm at River's Edge, Tax Map 22, Lot 14, as complete.
Discussion: None
Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

Motion: **(J. O'Connell / J. Ngo)** Moved to approve the site plan amendment for Corning Farm at River's Edge, Tax Map 22, Lot 14.

Discussion: None
Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

D. Work Session regarding Economic Development
EDC Final Report - November 7, 2025
2002 Master Plan - Economic Dev. Chapter

The Planning Board began a work session regarding Economic Development and discussed recent changes to state law concerning multifamily housing in commercially zoned areas. Members reviewed guidance from the New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA) and discussed whether the new statutory requirements apply to commercially zoned property within the community.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed the applicable statute and noted that municipalities must allow dwelling units on commercially zoned land when adequate infrastructure is available. The statute also provides that, when determining whether sewer infrastructure is adequate, a Planning Board may require an applicant to obtain permission from the operator of a public sewer system to connect to the system. Because the community does not have a public sewer system, the Board discussed whether that provision applies.

The Board noted that NHMA guidance indicates the statutory requirement applies, while the statutory language could be interpreted more narrowly. Members discussed that multifamily development is currently permitted at a density of four units per acre in certain areas, including a multifamily overlay within a commercial zone and through an exception in the northern commercial zone. Multifamily development has not previously been permitted in the southwestern commercial zone. The Board agreed that applying the new law to that area requires further consideration.

Ms. Reilly discussed the practical implications for property owners, sellers, buyers, and developers. The availability of water and sewer infrastructure was identified as a significant factor. Mr. Minkarah noted that a developer could potentially argue that adequate sewer service can be provided, although the statutory requirements and legal interpretation remain uncertain. Property owners or applicants may need to consult qualified real estate or land-use counsel regarding their rights and development options.

Mr. Minkarah discussed the apparent legislative focus on converting existing commercial or vacant office space to residential use, particularly in areas with existing public infrastructure. He noted that the statute could have broader implications for commercially zoned property and that the Board should consider both the statutory requirements and the types of development appropriate for the area.

The Board also discussed potential infrastructure costs associated with extending public sewer service. A potential sewer connection could require horizontal directional drilling, estimated to cost several million dollars, as well as a pump station, which could also cost several million dollars. Members noted that such infrastructure would require ongoing maintenance, including pump maintenance and cleaning. The Board agreed that the economic development discussion involves considerations beyond the immediate statutory question concerning multifamily development and sewer infrastructure.

Economic Development Discussion
The Planning Board discussed the Economic Development chapter in the 2002 Master Plan and noted that many of its assumptions are outdated. At the time, the Circumferential Highway and a bridge were anticipated, influencing the Town’s economic development strategy. Around 2015, the Town approached residents through a warrant article seeking funding for a septic system connection extending toward Manchester’s north end. Residents rejected the proposal. Members noted that, aside from normal population and housing growth, the Town’s economic development dynamics have changed little since 2002.

Ms. Reilly discussed infrastructure requirements associated with businesses identified through recent surveys. Some uses would require larger septic systems and potentially increased traffic. Mr. O'Connell cited a community septic leach field in Westford, Massachusetts, as an example of infrastructure that can serve multiple businesses, although such systems can be expensive.

The Board agreed that the Economic Development chapter requires substantial updating. Mr. Minkarah discussed reconsidering the zoning framework based on assumptions about the Circumferential Highway, which is no longer expected to be constructed. He also questioned whether the Northern Commercial District, Highway Commercial District, Southwest area, and Industrial area remain appropriate as currently configured.

Mr. Minkarah discussed the primary goals of economic development, including job creation, wealth creation, entrepreneurship, and other objectives. For Litchfield, he identified the tax base as an important consideration because the Town relies heavily on property taxes. The discussion focused on identifying uses that could add tax value while creating minimal impacts and preserving characteristics residents value. Members recognized that major retail, hotels, and other large-scale commercial uses are unlikely to be appropriate for Litchfield.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed a community survey that received 1,153 responses. The survey identified Litchfield’s rural and agricultural atmosphere as the primary factor attracting residents, followed by its convenient location. More than two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they favored economic development. In addition, 82% indicated that they would like to see new businesses in Litchfield.

Survey respondents identified a farmers’ market as the most desired new business or activity, followed by a coffee shop, microbrewery, winery, and restaurants or cafés. These preferences primarily represented amenities and lifestyle-oriented businesses rather than manufacturing, large-scale shopping, or industrial development, which ranked significantly lower. Members discussed whether these preferences could support zoning changes for businesses compatible with the Town’s rural character.

Mr. Minkarah reviewed potential commercial uses, including farmers markets, coffee shops, breweries, wineries, restaurants, destination businesses, bed-and-breakfast establishments, small shopping centers, pharmacies, and multi-tenant retail buildings. Members discussed how building design and location influenced public acceptance. Traditional architectural features, pitched roofs, covered entrances, vertical windows, and adaptive reuse of historic homes received more favorable reactions than large, modern commercial buildings.

The Board discussed differences between Route 102 and Route 3A and noted that residents appeared more receptive to certain commercial uses along Route 102 than along Route 3A. Members agreed that zoning regulations should not necessarily apply a one-size-fits-all approach to both corridors. Examples of businesses operating successfully in rural settings, including Piketty Place and Parker’s Maple Barn in Mason, demonstrated that destination businesses could function outside traditional commercial zones while maintaining a rural character.

The discussion also included wineries, restaurants, inns, bed-and-breakfast establishments, retail centers, and industrial buildings to evaluate the scale and design of potential development. Members discussed the Northern Commercial District’s mixed-use zoning, which had been adopted after the presentation being reviewed was prepared. The presentation had helped inform the EDC’s zoning discussion.

Mr. Minkarah discussed a concept for allowing selected commercial uses, including coffee shops, bakeries, wineries, and breweries, along portions of Route 3A between existing commercial areas. The EDC considered whether existing buildings could be converted to these uses through a conditional use permit or special use permit. The objectives would be to provide amenities and attractions, encourage viable reuse of existing properties, and generate additional tax base, although the direct tax-base impact would likely be limited.

Mr. O'Connell questioned how such uses could be permitted along Route 3A. Mr. Minkarah favored a conditional use permit approach with clearly defined standards addressing architectural and design controls, how far back properties could extend from Route 3A, minimum property sizes, and access requirements. Members discussed whether requiring primary driveway access from Charles Bancroft Highway would be more practical than establishing a specific geographic boundary, noting difficulties encountered when defining boundaries for the Historic District. The Board agreed it needed to consider additional factors to identify appropriate uses, standards, and locations before pursuing that approach.

The Planning Board continued its discussion of the Economic Development Chapter, focusing on future uses, development potential, zoning, and infrastructure in the southern portion of town. The Board noted that areas with development potential would likely require strong architectural controls but agreed that the current stage should focus on broad concepts rather than detailed regulations. Members discussed identifying desired uses in commercial and transitional areas and determining whether those uses should differ from those currently permitted.

Members noted that some residents may prefer these areas to remain largely unchanged while acknowledging that existing zoning has contributed to limited development activity. The Board discussed how different zoning classifications could affect development potential and noted that environmental constraints and floodplain conditions may limit realistic development opportunities.

Mr. Minkarah discussed anticipating future changes, particularly if property is placed on the market. Mr. O'Connell emphasized establishing a clear vision before a developer proposes a use the Town may not support. Ms. Reilly agreed that identifying uses the Town does not want in an area could help define supported uses. Members also discussed site visits to understand better physical characteristics, access points, visibility, and potential development impacts. The Board noted that development decisions should consider traffic, access, infrastructure, and other impacts in addition to visibility.

The Board discussed the relationship between economic development, land use, zoning, and infrastructure. Members referenced a potential road connection from Route 3A to Route 102 and/or Cutler Road that could provide additional access to interior portions of the area. Improved access could affect the development potential of difficult-to-access land, although it would not necessarily make industrial development viable. Members also discussed challenges associated with a narrow area extending through agricultural land.

The Board reviewed the process used to evaluate the northern commercial mixed-use area, which balanced property-owner and developer needs, the Town's interest in increasing the tax base and commercial activity, and the community's desire for additional third places and amenities. Members questioned whether the same Mixed-Use Village Development (MUVD) approach would be appropriate for the southern portion of town but agreed that a similar planning process, with input from committees and stakeholders, could inform future decisions. Mr. Tucker suggested targeted public outreach rather than repeating the extensive survey used for the northern area. Suggestions included an open-ended survey, public work session, and interactive mapping exercise allowing residents to identify locations and provide comments.

The Board discussed the work of the CHEC regarding the Circumferential Highway and the potential future use or disposition of associated property. The Committee had begun discussions during the summer and determined that a site visit was necessary before making recommendations. Members worked to set a date. Conservation Committee members, including Jayson Brennen, documented portions of the property using GoPro cameras, including areas on both sides of Route 3A, to understand the terrain and existing conditions better. Ms. Reilly noted that identifying and controlling access points would be important in determining future development potential.

Members discussed the long-term consequences of changing or relinquishing development rights. Ms. Reilly emphasized considering how the property could appear in the future and whether development would be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods and Town objectives. Asphalt-related operations were discussed as an example of uses that may have economic value to certain businesses but could generate neighborhood concerns and impacts.

Mr. Tucker discussed how the Economic Development Committee's previous survey and report could inform the current process. The northern portion of town and the middle section of Route 3A received substantially more attention during the previous economic development process. In contrast, the southern portion was not examined to the same extent. The Economic Development Committee's report identified the need to address the southern area, but the prior outreach did not produce specific recommendations. Members agreed that additional targeted outreach would likely be necessary.

Mr. Minkarah noted that economic development planning should address issues beyond the southern property, including home occupation regulations, zoning flexibility, tax values, and opportunities to expand the tax base. Members discussed reviewing available data to identify areas where development could realistically increase the tax base without disproportionately impacting municipal services. The Board indicated that it could gather relevant information from existing Town resources and staff.

Mr. Brunelle discussed CHEC's work and said additional community feedback would be necessary. The Board acknowledged that the economic development report contained numerous tasks, including potential ordinance and zoning changes, and that the work would require a deliberate process. Members also discussed increasing the tax base while avoiding development that would create additional demands on municipal services. Residential development could increase service requirements and affect the balance between new revenue and municipal costs.

Mr. Minkarah questioned whether the existing zoning districts should be reconsidered entirely. Mr. Brunelle suggested scrapping the entire southern district and determining the appropriate zoning. The Board agreed that additional data collection, analysis, discussion, and public outreach would be necessary before determining an approach for the Economic Development Chapter.

Mr. Minkarah discussed the current stage of the Master Plan process and potential zoning priorities for the upcoming March election. He noted that the Natural Resources section has been easier to address because it involves data collection and mapping, while the current chapter requires additional public input and discussion.

The Board discussed whether it could bring zoning recommendations forward for March. Mr. Minkarah agreed that larger zoning changes, including those previously considered for the commercial zone, would likely require more time. The Board also discussed potential changes involving conditional-use amenities in residential areas, but members considered those changes potentially premature. The Board identified design guidelines and criteria that would help preserve the community's rural and historic character as a more manageable short-term effort.

Mr. Minkarah discussed focusing this year's work on smaller "housekeeping" zoning changes while allowing additional time for more substantial proposals. The Board considered surveys to gather public input on future zoning priorities. The Board identified a January Resource Fair, along with other public opportunities, as a way to gather community feedback. Mr. Minkarah discussed an online survey and QR code, along with paper copies. Members emphasized keeping surveys brief enough for residents to complete during the event and using images to help residents visualize potential development concepts.

Mr. O'Connell discussed a potential survey regarding restaurants or other amenities along Route 3A, including whether such uses should be permitted with appropriate aesthetic guidelines. Members also discussed obtaining public input on desired uses in other areas of town. The Board agreed that additional time would allow the ongoing work to be completed and provide information needed to develop meaningful questions.

The Board discussed recent changes in state law. Members noted that several minor zoning-related changes resulting from the most recent legislative session would need to be addressed. The Committee will prepare a checklist of those changes for the Board's consideration.

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

A. Capital Improvement Committee

Mr. Tucker reported on the Capital Improvement Committee, which is continuing its work. At the September 9 meeting, the Committee heard presentations from Conservation, Fire, and Police regarding their capital priorities. The

Committee also voted to update the CIP bylaws and received a presentation from Superintendent Brian O'Connell regarding school priorities.

The next meeting is scheduled for October 5, when the Committee expects to begin placing proposed projects into the prioritization matrix and determining their ranking within the plan. The resulting recommendations will help inform the Budget Committee and Board of Selectmen's budget processes.

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes:

A. September 1, 2026

Motion: **(T. Tucker / J. Ngo)** Moved to approve the September 1 meeting minutes, as amended.
Discussion: None
Vote: (5-0-1) The motion carried. (Mr. Brunelle abstained)

V. Other Business:

A. None

VI. Upcoming Meetings:

A. Tuesday, October 6, 2026 @ 7:00 p.m. **-** Town Hall Conference Room

---

VII. Adjournment:

Motion: **(L. Reilly / J. Ngo**) A motion was made to adjourn at 8:42 p.m.
Discussion: None
Vote: (6-0-0) The motion carried.

Respectfully Submitted,
Matthew Sullivan
Planning Board Recording Secretary