

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Planning Board

January 22, 2020

**APPROVED-AMENDED**

In attendance: Michael Dell Orfano- Chair, Arnie Rosenblatt, John D'Angelo-Selectman Ex-Officio, Marilyn Peterman, Sally Wilkins, Rich Hart, Brian Coogan (Alternate), and Lisa Eastland (Alternate).

Staff present: Nic Strong, Community Development Director, and Kristan Patenaude, Minute Taker.

Michael Dell Orfano called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm at the Amherst Town Hall.

**1. CASE #: PZ12172-121819 – Arboleda Realty LLC (Owner & Applicant) – The Farmhouse Marketplace, 340 Route 101, PIN #: 008-052-000 – Submission of Application/Public Hearing/Non-Residential Site Plan. Proposed multi-use commercial building. Zoned Northern Transitional.**

*Brian Coogan sat for Arnie Rosenblatt with respect to this application because Arnie Rosenblatt recused himself with respect to this application.*

Ken Clinton, of Meridian Land Services, stated that he represents Amy LaBelle, of LaBelle Winery, and Cesar Arboleda, of Arboleda Realty. He thanked the Board for the opportunity to present this after some scheduling issues. This proposal is for a multi-use commercial building. The original variance approval was granted in 2016 and confirmed by the courts in August 2019.

Amy LaBelle, 109 Mack Hill Road, explained that LaBelle Winery was built seven years ago. She is very proud of the work done at LaBelle and believes it to be a wonderful place for the community to gather and engage with one another. She is excited to expand with a new opportunity to the town that she and her family reside in, send their children to school in, and hope to retire in someday. This expansion will allow for more community and charitable events, as well as more community space. She hopes the expansion will become an Amherst destination and something for the town to be proud of.

**Sally Wilkins moved to accept the application as complete. Marilyn Peterman seconded.  
All in favor.**

Sally Wilkins noted that the Board voted that there was no regional impact on this application at their last meeting.

Ken Clinton explained that an original variance was granted and then affirmed for use and building height. The majority of the functional space will be dedicated to office space, a tavern, a marketplace, a distillery, a tasting room, and a 3-4 bedroom cottage to be placed in the existing, original farmhouse for bridal party use, for example. The original variance made mention of a possible Planned Residential Development (PRD) on the site, however, while still a slight possibility, this is not being included in the current application.

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Ken Clinton explained that he hopes, after this discussion, that the application could be continued to the Board's March meeting, in order to submit another application for a CUP for wetland buffer impacts. He has met with the Amherst Conservation Commission (ACC) twice already regarding this application and believes he will meet with them a third time. The ACC, so far, has been fairly favorable to the overall project. Ken Clinton also noted the need for third party engineering review of the site plans, legal review, and possibly a site walk.

Ken Clinton explained the existing conditions. The preliminary designs show a site of approximately 45.9 acres, off Route 101, directly across from LaBelle Winery. This is one of five Bragdon family parcels; three of which were given to the town, one of which is where LaBelle was built, and this being the last one. There was some level of agriculture on this land for years. There is an old, existing farmhouse on the property. The land was all cleared at one point, but was not planted and instead used for paddocks and grazing. The most usable area of the land is the southwest corner. There is a large hill on the property that slopes up to the town-owned land. Stormwater runs down the slope into wetland pockets that have been flagged and evaluated. Two of these areas were originally created as borrow pits for the Route 101 construction. American K-9 is directly to the west of the property, and the back of the property connects to the Holly Hill Road and Winterberry Drive residential lots. To the east is conservation restricted land, and across the street from that is the sledding hill.

Ken Clinton explained that the area being developed is very small compared to the relative size of the entire property. This small area is the most developable. Part of this proposal includes 25 acres of land to be set aside as conservation restricted, or otherwise undevelopable. This will also allow for a buffer of land between the development and the adjacent residential neighborhoods. Due to the volume of fill required in these wetlands, DES agreed that the 25 acres could be used as compensatory mitigation. This land will be given as an easement to the Town, and administered by the ACC. Ken Clinton pointed out that the 25 acre conservation easement was required by the previous variance and DES agreed it could be mitigation.

Ken Clinton explained the design plans. The proposed structure will be of a similar footprint to the original proposal, without the initially proposed inn. NHDOT has stated that the access to the property must be directly opposite from the winery. There may eventually be a secondary entrance point proposed.

In response to a question from Mike Dell Orfano, Ken Clinton stated that there was consideration given to accessing the property through the American K-9 entry way, but this is not believed to be able to support traffic as needed.

In response to a question from Marilyn Peterman, Ken Clinton explained that a traffic engineer has been engaged to discuss long term plans for turning lanes in this area.

*Lisa Eastland sat for Cliff Harris.*

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Ken Clinton stated that DES has agreed that it is acceptable for the project to fill all or parts of the borrow pits on the property. ACC has also generally endorsed this plan. When entering the property, there will be overflow/auxiliary/employee parking, then leading to primary and secondary parking lots. This then extends to the possible secondary entrance and a tertiary parking area. The existing farmhouse on the property will be refurbished with 3-4 rooms, which can be rented in association with the use of the facility. The main building will contain the tavern, market, function room, and tasting room. The distillery will be separate due to its use and fire code. A final building will be used as a barrel barn to store the distilled spirits. This will be a Morton style building with appropriate façade.

Ken Clinton explained that the original proposal included a large stormwater chamber system under the parking lot. This was found to be very expensive and did not meet NH Alteration of Terrain Bureau (AoT) requirements. In this version, the stormwater system will be basin based. The plan is still pending third party review, but may include some chambers under the parking lot or some of the stormwater may be moved back across the street, to be treated at LaBelle Winery. This part of the application is not yet certain.

In response to a question from Rich Hart, Ken Clinton explained that the overflow from this property currently flows to the LaBelle side of the road, under the highway. The overflow travels through three different culverts and, eventually, into Beaver Brook. The overflow can't just be discharged through the culverts for this proposal; it will need to be slowed down, treated, and released.

Ken Clinton explained that there is one other wetland impact, right next to the cottage. There is a shallow depression there that currently acts as a stormwater pond. DES is okay with the project impacting part of this.

Ken Clinton stated that the site was not balanced in terms of cuts and fills, and more material would be leaving the site. He stated that Amherst does not have sewer or town water in this area. The plan is to treat all effluent in leach fields on site, and to create wells for water. The current proposal is for a well adjacent to the wetland buffer and barrel barn. This will probably have a 175ft. well radius, given use regulations.

In response to a question from Mike Dell Orfano, Ken Clinton explained that the parking lots will be pitched to keep any runoff out of the wetlands. He mentioned that American K-9 has an outstanding well on their property and this project hopes for something similar.

In response to a question from Mike Dell Orfano, Ken Clinton stated that he suspects a cistern will be needed, but is still in preliminary conversations about this with the Fire Department.

Ken Clinton explained that multiple leach fields will be needed on site, primarily because of the distillery. Distillery use is not well known in the state, and so DES is being extra cautious with the design on the property. The wash from the distillery will need to be handled separately from the other leach fields. The leach fields want to be in the low corner of the property as well, and

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so the most cost-effective thing to do is to pump it to a different spot on site, in order to move it from the area where all of the other items of interest are already located.

In response to a question from Marilyn Peterman, Ken Clinton explained that the leach field for the distillery will be different in its number of tanks and the type of tanks it uses.

Amy LaBelle explained that there will probably be a bathroom required in the distillery building by code. The wash from the distillery will actually have very little septic influence because she plans to contract with local farmers to take the wash for compost/feed material for their animals. This spent grain is happily taken by farmers and is a great secondary purpose for it.

In response to a question from Brian Coogan, Ken Clinton explained that both leach fields will be in the same area. All of the water will be treated before being pumped up the hill. It is unclear if this will be done using separate piping. Some of the septic design details may not be ready until the construction phase of the proposal.

Ken Clinton stated that there are a few landscape waivers being requested. He requested that the Board consider tonight the waiver for the requirement that a Professional Landscape Architect prepare, sign and endorse the landscape design. Amy LaBelle has a designer and grower that has submitted thorough and detailed plans, but this person is not a licensed landscape architect. Ken Clinton added that the lighting had been embedded in the landscape plan but would be added to the utility plan for next time.

Jeff Kabriel and Robert Buckley, of Niemitz Design Group, were the designers and architects for LaBelle Winery and presented some of the building and façade plans. Jeff Kabriel stated that the main proposed building is 11,000sf with a 2,500sf separate distillery building. The primary building will have a tavern in the front, a meeting room to the side, a kitchen, marketplace, and event space. All of the areas will be connected through covered porches, which should make them feel as one. The building will aim to keep the New England vernacular, by looking mainly like a farmhouse. To enter the building, one will go through a cultivated garden area. The building will be turned slightly to the side, so as to not make a huge impact when viewed from Route 101. The integrity of the building will be priority, with clapboard and windows that are 2-over-1. The entrance will be humble, simple and inviting. The roofs will be gabled, with a mixture of rooflines, with standing seam roofs as well as asphalt shingles. The plan is to reuse the barn boards and other materials from the existing barn on the property, along with a Hardie board type of siding.

Jeff Kabriel explained that the existing cottage will be remade into a 4-5 bedroom unit for bridal showers, bridal parties, etc. This building will have a private entrance off the porch. The barrel storage facility will also be constructed with as much New England/New Hampshire material as possible. There will be good, quality lighting inside the buildings and uplighting on the outside of the buildings from the landscape areas.

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In response to a question from Marilyn Peterman, Jeff Kabriel stated that the design intention is that the building will be almost unseen from Route 101 until upon it.

Ken Clinton explained that there was initial interest from the Heritage Commission for the existing barn on the property to be converted into the distillery. This is, unfortunately, not feasible due to the condition of the structure. Instead the materials from the barn will be used throughout the property.

Jeff Kabriel stated that the signage on the property will all be wood cut and very understated. There will be some up-lighting toward the buildings, but this will all be concealed. There will also be safety lighting in areas as required.

In response to a question from John D'Angelo, Ken Clinton explained that the intent is to place a generator next to the dumpster on the west side of the building.

In response to a question from Marilyn Peterman, Amy LaBelle explained that the Town has been asking for a tavern, so she will give it one. The tavern/restaurant will be cozy, welcoming and warm, with a fireplace and televisions at the bar. The plan is to downplay the Bistro restaurant across the street at LaBelle, and move the business across the street to the tavern.

In response to a question from Sally Wilkins, Jeff Kabriel explained that the lowest level of the building to the top floor is 47'8", due to elevation differences.

In response to a question from Mike Dell Orfano, Jeff Kabriel stated that the building will be handicap accessible and that there will be an elevator in the building.

Will Ludt, Chairman of the Heritage Commission, stated that the Commission would have preferred the barn to be moved and used as originally intended, but if that isn't viable, the Commission is happy to know that the materials will be used elsewhere on the property. He requested the opportunity to photograph the barn as it currently exists during the site walk.

Ken Clinton explained that documenting the existing buildings is a requirement of the wetland permit. An architectural historian will be brought in to inventory the structures.

Ken Clinton explained that there are many steps of the process still to come. He noted the need for the site plan approval, CUP, NHDOT driveway permit, NHDES wetlands, and AoT permits, septic approvals, and water supply approval. Tonight he is asking the Board for their response to the landscape waiver and to schedule a site walk.

**Public Comment:**

Jake Macedo, 9 Winterberry Drive, expressed concerns regarding the odor from the distillery mash being left out to dry and a concern with fungus from distilleries.

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218 Amy LaBelle explained that the farmers will be picking up the mash liquid while it's still wet.  
219 This wet mash will be sealed in storage totes until that time.  
220

221 In response to a question from Jake Macedo, Ken Clinton explained that a planned residential  
222 development was originally in the project plans for this site. It is not currently, but he cannot say  
223 that it will never be an option again in the future. If a PRD was to be explored on this property,  
224 another application process would need to be approved by the Planning Board.  
225

226 In response to a question from Jake Macedo, Amy LaBelle stated that the fungus issue he  
227 referenced is one usually seen with much larger distilleries (million gallons) that are in warm  
228 weather climates. This will not be an issue at this distillery, which will be batch produced at 250  
229 to 500 gallons at a time.  
230

231 Rob Carson, 7 Winterberry Drive, expressed concerns regarding the water usage on this  
232 property.  
233

234 Mike Dell Orfano suggested that, as a property owner, Mr. Carson should get his well tested  
235 prior to any construction in order to get a baseline reading. If there ends up being a material  
236 change to the water at his property, this will be a civil matter.  
237

238 Ken Clinton stated that the project will have to estimate water usage to comply with the septic  
239 design. He does not have that number tonight. There are detailed formulae for all usages that will  
240 be on site.  
241

242 Joseph Mahoney, 5 Winterberry Drive, expressed his appreciation for the original concept plan  
243 that included an inn and his hope that this may again be part of the site concept in the future.

244 Amy LaBelle noted that an inn would have to be part of another phase and still could be.  
245

246 Ken Clinton read the non-residential site plan review waiver request 8.11: We request a waiver  
247 for the requirement that a Professional Landscape Architect prepare, sign and endorse the  
248 landscape design. The landscape plans are clearly 'prepared in sufficient detail to indicate  
249 compliance with the regulations' by a professional company, even if the designer is not a  
250 licensed landscape architect.  
251

252 Sally Wilkins stated that she has mixed concerns regarding the waiver. The plan states the  
253 intention to plant Bradford pear trees on site, which should probably be considered to be invasive  
254 species in the state. She is concerned if the fact that the landscape architect doesn't have a license  
255 and also didn't know that fact.  
256

257 Rich Hart also expressed this as a concern.  
258

259 Ken Clinton stated that licensed landscape architects are few and far between. If necessary, the  
260 applicant is willing to have the plan reviewed and commented on by a secondary landscape  
261 designer, in order to vet the plan.

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Marilyn Peterman suggested that there is a landscape architect in town who could be used as a possible consultant.

Brian Coogan stated that LaBelle Winery has a track record of being thoughtful in their design and approach. He believes they would have a vested interest in planting non-invasive plants. He thinks they will make thoughtful choices in regards to this perspective.

Ken Clinton stated that, if the waiver is granted, the plantings list will be reviewed by a secondary person.

John D'Angelo stated that he believes the ACC will look up all of the plants on a landscape list the next time an application like this comes before them. He also doesn't believe that having a "licensed" person is necessarily better than a "non-licensed." He's more impressed with competence than the title.

Lisa Eastland commented that she was happy to see many native, easy-growing plants on the list, such as day lilies, which will be great filter plants and not require much extra work.

**Sally Wilkins moved to approve the three requested landscape waivers [8.7a – a reduction from the required 10' landscape width adjacent to the distillery building, to 8' wide; 8.8 a – although the landscape island where the entrance sign is located is only 4' wide, it's length more than makes up for the overall landscape mass as intended by the required "minimum 4 foot area around freestanding sign;" 8.11 – a waiver for the requirement that a Professional Landscape Architect prepare, sign, and endorse the landscape design.] as requested, with the provision that the plantings recommended on the landscape plan be double checked. John D'Angelo seconded.  
All in favor.**

The Board discussed waiting to schedule a site walk until the spring.

**John D'Angelo moved to table this application to the March 4, 2020, meeting. Lisa Eastland seconded.  
All in favor.**

## OTHER BUSINESS

### **2. Master Plan Session Dates**

Sally Wilkins explained that Christy Houppis, not in attendance, the point person for the Communications subgroup, has concerns regarding getting started with the working groups without having more meat on the bones of the plan for the groups.

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Mike Dell Orfano stated that Mike Akillian expressed concerns over the Board losing momentum on the Master Plan process.

Sally Wilkins stated that Mike Akillian suggested that he, Christy Houpis, Lisa Eastland and Sally herself meet to coordinate and plan the outreach/communications campaign.

Mike Dell Orfano suggested incorporating NRPC into the mix as well. He stated that he would email the breakdown of NRPC's participation in the update to all Board members.

Arnie Rosenblatt expressed concern with Christy Houpis leading the efforts for this subgroup. He stated that Christy Houpis has made personal attacks on other Board members; he doesn't feel comfortable ceding any level of leadership to him or to allow Christy Houpis to speak for him. While he is willing to have this subgroup go forward, he is not comfortable with Christy Houpis making up 50% of the group. He is okay with Sally Wilkins leading the group.

Brian Coogan suggested that Christy Houpis wanted to be a part of the subgroup due to his professional background. Arnie Rosenblatt and Marilyn Peterman articulated their antipathy to this.

Mike Dell Orfano stated that, in Christy Houpis' absence, he would neither speak for him nor attack him, but that there needs to be a plan to supplement the work of this subgroup to keep moving forward.

Sally Wilkins read through Christy Houpis' email. It expressed concern with setting up an outreach/communications campaign without knowing the detailed themes and process for the Master Plan subcommittees. It stated that certain key logistics are needed before moving forward.

Sally Wilkins explained that Terri Behm requested that the schools be involved in the process. She then went and recruited school representatives to be on each of the subcommittees, but these people need to know the days and times for these meetings. Sally Wilkins volunteered to create a questionnaire, which contains about four questions to determine some of these details. She was hoping Christy Houpis would be the point person for creating the copy for the public education campaign.

John D'Angelo stated that he was appalled by the attacks on Board members by Christy Houpis. He has spoken with many people who had wanted to volunteer to be on these subcommittees for the Master Plan process but now don't want to work with Christy Houpis.

Mike Dell Orfano stated that the Board needed to find the expertise to get the necessary copy to be distributed.

Brian Coogan stated that the subgroup should look at start/end dates for this process in order to inform people as they volunteer for these subcommittees and content for them.



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The Board determined that Lisa Eastland, Sally Wilkins, and Mike Dell Orfano meet to come up with a game plan.

### **3. Staff Reports**

Mike Dell Orfano stated that the purpose of this discussion is to make sure that the work Nic Strong, Community Development Director, is doing is the most useful for the Board's deliberations. He believes the amount of information in the staff reports is overwhelming and he would like the Board to discuss what information they'd most like to see, in order to make the process more manageable and efficient.

Marilyn Peterman stated that she doesn't need all of the detail that the staff reports currently provide. If there is additional information for some items, a reference to the statute or RSA could be included, instead of the full wording. She would like the staff report to note if any items are missing and any necessary comments.

In response to a question from Arnie Rosenblatt, Mike Dell Orfano stated that this discussion could not be in non-public session and is not meant to be personally about Nic Strong, but to help her to know exactly what the Board needs from her in these reports.

Sally Wilkins agreed that it would be helpful for the supporting materials from an RSA, regulation, or ordinance to be referenced, but not spelled out in full. It is difficult to wade through the sheer volume of information in the reports.

John D'Angelo suggested that the staff report need not note the plan sheet numbers and titles on the first page. He would like it to include a note of how much of the acreage for a property is actually developable. He would also like to know if there is a difference between the IIHO net tract area and the non-IIHO net tract area. He believes the background and history sections of the report are helpful for the applications that have a detailed history. He would like to know which submission items are missing from the list. He would like to see less work being done on itemizing the things that have already been submitted, and more work listing what is still needed.

Rich Hart noted that, if items are missing from the application, it should possibly not be heard yet. Sally Wilkins explained that Nic Strong does not have the authority to not put an applicant on the agenda, even if the Planning Board is thusly going to turn them away. Mike Dell Orfano agreed that Nic Strong is not to prescribe the Board's action. He explained that Nic Strong provides the information for the Board to then make its decision.

Mike Dell Orfano thanked Nic Strong for her very detailed reports. He would like to see the facts and items necessary for the hearings, and believes that the rest will come substantively through the process.

John D'Angelo stated that he did not need the regional impact statute included in full but referenced by statute number. He thought the waivers section was fine. He did not need details of

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landscaping and lighting. John D'Angelo went on to say that he was not expecting the Community Development Director to be making any decisions, but to point out missing pieces.

Mike Dell Orfano noted that he found the checklist very helpful. He would like to have Department comments referenced earlier in the staff report with the substance of what the Board needed to accomplish in the hearing.

In response to a question from Lisa Eastland, Nic Strong stated that she created the current format of the report to follow the order of the process and regulations.

Lisa Eastland stated that she likes the checklist, as it helps her to compartmentalize all that she's read in the report. She actually likes all of the detail because she's new to the Board, but can understand that it might seem like too much for other Board members.

Brian Coogan stated that he initially liked all of the information at a more granular level because they had not received this information before, but he also really likes the approach as outlined by John D'Angelo. It is probably better to trim down some of the boilerplate language in the reports in order to make it easier to quickly process the information, although he said so begrudgingly.

Lisa Eastland noted that it was nice to be spoon-fed so much information, but suggested the reports could be more manageable, so that each Board member is not flipping through a large report at each hearing. It would be important to know what the application does not yet have, in addition to what it does have.

Sally Wilkins suggested that, if the staffing was available, she would like to receive both the detailed report, as an email, and a boiled down format for the hearing itself, that way Board members could prep with the detailed report and use the checklist at the meetings.

Marilyn Peterman stated that the Board members need to rely on their manual. It is their responsibility and job to have the information from the manual and understand it.

Sally Wilkins stated that while Nic Strong likes the format of the report because it flows as the ordinances do, the presentations are not actually organically structured in this way. She noted that as the plans are presented, questions come up. She also stated that, with regard to parking calculations, for example, either the plan meets parking requirements or it doesn't. The Board shouldn't have to discuss it and, preferably, this would be resolved before the meeting.

Mike Dell Orfano stated that, if there are questions regarding a truncated version of the report, there should be the ability to have an open dialogue between the Board members and Nic Strong during a hearing.

Sally Wilkins also mentioned turning radii and Fire Department requirements. She noted that if the Board was supposed to discuss each of these questions, what was the point of asking for

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review by others. Marilyn Peterman stated that the applicants walk through the application point-by-point and provided what was needed.

Arnie Rosenblatt stated that he is content with the currently diligent report created by Nic Strong. He is also comfortable with whatever he gets and can work with anything.

John D'Angelo suggested that all of the supporting details be sent via DropBox, with one copy printed out for possible review during the hearing, if needed.

The Board discussed the possibility of having individual laptops/tablets for each member. Most agreed that they did not find this to be necessary and would bring their own electronic devices if they wanted to.

Sally Wilkins noted that she would like to see a set of full size plans available during meetings for each application.

The Board discussed having a mylar overlay available for as-built plans in order to show they are consistent with what was approved. Nic Strong noted that no plans with such requirements had come in since she'd started.

Mike Dell Orfano stated he would find it easier to keep his papers organized if he could have each application in a different manila folder. Nic Strong stated that was doable but the office would need to reuse the folders. It was determined that Board members were responsible for bringing back materials for continued applications so no further printing would be required.

**4. Any other business**

In response to a question from Lisa Eastland, Mike Dell Orfano stated that Town Administrator, Dean Shankle, organized the housing needs assessment with NRPC. He believes that NRPC will survey the existing housing stock in town, survey the allowed amount of affordable housing in town, come to a reconciliation of how much of this stock is still considered affordable, and look at the calculation of Fair Share for Amherst. This should give the Board a sense of what kind of housing is needed in town.

In response to a question from John D'Angelo, Nic Strong stated that she is currently on round two of recruiting a Town Planner. The outcome doesn't currently look good, but the deadline for applications is Friday.

In response to a question from John D'Angelo, Nic Strong stated it is possible to post some of the information for the Planning Board meetings under a tab on the town website, so the public can see information for the hearings.

The Board reviewed a list of upcoming legislative actions. Arnie Rosenblatt suggested that the Board meet with Town Counsel to ask his advice regarding the suggested changes.

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John D'Angelo stated that there was quite a lot of public input on the IIHO and a number of topics during the public hearing at the last Board meeting. He noted that he listened to all of the input and would like the Board to spend some time processing it.

Sally Wilkins noted that the ordinance would need to be talked about generally, and not in regards to any specific application. This discussion would have to happen during a public meeting.

The Board discussed the agenda of their upcoming meeting to try to determine the best way to move through the volume of applications they currently have. Also, to try to find time to discuss the public input heard during the public hearing. No decisions were reached and no additional meetings set, although February 26, 2020, was suggested as a possibility, if the ACC would give up the room to the Planning Board. It was also discussed that the Planning Board used to meet once a week and may need to see about getting every Wednesday back from the ACC.

**Arnold Rosenblatt moved to adjourn the meeting 10:41pm. Brian Coogan seconded. All in favor.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Kristan Patenaude

Minutes approved: February 19, 2020