

**ATKINSON PLANNING BOARD MEETING
MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6, 2024**

Members Present:

Sue Killam, Chair
Mike Turell, Vice Chair
Paul Wainwright
Ted Stewart

Sue Coppeta, Alternate
Hannah Rizzo, Alternate

Others Present

Ken Grant
Jenn Rowden, Rockingham Planning
Commission (via Zoom)

Call to Order:

Chair Killam called the March 6, 2024 workshop meeting of the Atkinson Planning Board to order at 6:30 PM and requested to review minutes.

Minutes:

February 7, 2024 Workshop Meeting

Comments from Member Wainwright:

- Member Wainwright was present
- Line 59 should be March 6, 2024
- Global search on “Jen” – should be “Jenn”
- Line 142 - western border should be eastern border
- Line 273 and 278 – should be “SELT”
- Line 279 – should state “...; there is access”.

Vice Chair Turell made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 7, 2024 Atkinson Planning Board workshop meeting as amended. Alternate Rizzo seconded the motion. Vote: 6/0/0. All present voting.

Workshop Topics:

Member Wainwright congratulated Chair Killam on her recognition from the Board of Selectman at their Monday, March 4, 2024 meeting. He stated that he admired her synopsis of the current bills in the legislature regarding zoning and her thoughtful analysis of how they might or might not impact Atkinson.

- **SB 538**

Chair Killam explained that she wanted people to be aware that Atkinson is unique. She believes the legislature is not to the point of forcing any changes. She also agrees

that there is not a way the State can force a small town that is almost completely built out to invest in a sewer system.

Alternate Coppeta stated that she went to a seminar about creating more housing. Mr. Keach and a representative from DES pointed out at that meeting that creating more housing without a sewer system would be very difficult.

Chair Killam stated that one issue in SB 538 that could have ramifications to Atkinson, if it is passed, would be allowing two houses on a lot. Now, residents can have an accessory dwelling unit, but not a full second residence. It would be very difficult to adjust zoning to create the opportunity for two houses on the lot. There would be issues with septic and soils. It could not be done on older, half acre lots. Chair Killam does not understand how the Town can allow two houses on one lot and still be equitable.

Alternate Rizzo pointed out what is happening in Massachusetts, allowing residents close to transit stations.

Member Wainwright is concerned about the part of SB 538 that states that no ordinance shall require lot sizes for single family residential use which is larger than the lot size required by DES for individual sewage disposal systems.

Chair Killam stated that this part relates to the soils chart that has been in the Atkinson Zoning Ordinance for years.

Alternate Coppeta remarked that the Board has been allowing seasonal conversions at the lake because septic systems have been designed and added to very small lots. When the lot size math was done for Atkinson, a two acre lot was the minimum because of the soil types and wetlands.

Chair Killam recommended asking the Town Engineer to explain how the new technologies are utilized and what is the regulatory oversight. The supporting documentation for the administrative rules and regulations is hundreds of pages and it is difficult to find a specific detail. Alternate Coppeta stated that there is a continuation hearing at the next meeting if the Board would like to invite Mr. Keach.

Member Wainwright stated that there is a lot of excavation being done on the property scheduled for the hearing. He also stated that there are some tent structures on property at the end of Industrial Way. Chair Killam thanked Member Wainwright and informed him that everything he mentioned has been reported to Code Enforcement.

Alternate Coppeta asked to discuss the section in SB538 stating that the annual adoption of zoning amendments at Town Meeting was not efficient enough and perhaps the Board of Selectmen should adopt them. She wondered if a warrant article giving them the authority should be made. Member Wainwright pointed out that SB538 states that having the Board of Selectmen adopt zoning amendments would be upon adoption.

Alternate Rizzo asked for explanation. Chair Killam explained that usually zoning amendments are brought to the voters once a year at Town elections and decided on

then. The proposed amendments can come from the Planning Board or by Citizen's Petition. The legislature wants to give the Board of Selectmen the power to amend zoning rather than have a public hearing and a vote. Alternate Coppeta pointed out that the zoning amendments could come from the Planning Board and then be brought to the Board of Selectmen for approval.

Chair Killam recommended waiting until the Legislature is through. The Bill is still in Committee and months away from being voted on. She stated that the new legislation is geared to broaden opportunities and could work in larger communities with more infrastructure.

Next, the Board discussed what eliminating parking requirements in would accomplish. Again, this is a large town or city issue.

Chair Killam informed the Board that State legislative activities are posted on the State website. Alternate Coppeta stated that she would forward emails that she receives from Plan Link to the Board members.

- **Master Plan**

Alternate Coppeta informed the Board that it should receive the final copy of the Master Plan by Friday and asked if the Planning Board would be available on Thursday, March 21, 2024 for Resilient to present it. The Board agreed to meet with Resilient on Thursday, March 21, 2024 at 6:30 PM. Alternate Coppeta will inform Resilient.

Chair Killam requested to discuss Rules of Procedure.

- **Rules of Procedure**

The Board discussed why the Rules of Procedure were not adopted previously. Member Wainwright explained that in the Conservation Commission, alternates are fully participating whether they are designated to vote or not because they may be designated to vote at the next meeting. The only thing alternates cannot do is make motions or vote on them. The Conservation Commission has another category, the Emeritus Advisor. People who have served on the Commission for a long time previously are always welcome at the table. They are allowed to speak but not vote. The power of allowing people to speak, in his case, is in the seat of the chair. Valuable input could be missed by not allowing people to speak. Concerning alternates, the purpose is to make a quorum if there is not one. If five members and two alternates are present it is not necessary to designate which alternate will vote, although Member Wainwright usually does as Chair of the Conservation Commission.

Member Wainwright recommends writing a rule that alternates are always invited to speak whether or not they have been designated to vote. Alternates should be full participating except for motions.

The Board decided to put changes to Rules and Procedures in writing to be voted on at the next meeting.

Alternate Coppeta informed the Board that she made some changes and wanted the Board to review them.

The time of the meeting was changed from 7:30 PM to 6:30 PM. The hearing will be at 7:00 PM.

The rules currently state that the officers of the Board should be elected at the first regular meeting in April. She asked why it was not March, the regular meeting in March is always a week and a day following Town voting. She believes it was April because previously appointments had to be made by the Board of Selectmen and they had to be seated first. The Board agreed to change the rule to state that the officers of the Board shall be elected at the first regular meeting in March.

Member Wainwright had a question on Section 6, Public Hearings Procedures. It states that the Board shall discuss whether to vote whether to take the application under jurisdiction in Section 6. The Board discussed where the phrase should be put and decided it was in the right place. Chair Killam stated that the Board receives the application, listens to a presentation, clarifies some points and then decides if it should be taken under jurisdiction. The Engineer's letter and a decision are made much later.

Alternate Coppeta asked the Board if it wanted a statement that the Findings of Fact should be read before an application is approved. Chair Killam agreed.

Chair Turell pointed out that there could be a final decision in Section 6, a subsequent meeting may not be necessary. Alternate Coppeta suggested it go in Section 7, under decisions.

Chair Killam stated that where Section 7 states that the Board shall render a decision within 65 days from the date of acceptance of a completed application should state 65 days from when the application is taken under jurisdiction.

The Board agreed on the changes. Ms. Rowden arrived via Zoom to give her presentation.

7:30 PM Housing Needs Assessment (Jenn Rowden, RPC by ZOOM)

Ms. Rowden informed the Board that she is continuing to work on the Housing Needs Assessment and the Regulatory Audit. She would like to show the Board what has been done for the survey and shared her screen.

First, is some updated language for the web site. There is also a one page fact sheet for a handout. The primary tasks will include:

- Developing a series of surveys
- Developing a housing needs assessment
- Conducting the land use regulatory audit
- Holding a public input event

The language is on the website so that when the email about the survey goes out, hopefully tomorrow, they will be able to point people towards the Town website if they

want more information. The survey is at www.publicinput.com/AtkinsonHousing2024. Ms. Rowen drafted an introductory letter to go to the major employers in Town giving some background on what the survey is referencing, why Atkinson is doing the survey, and what they are asking the employees to do. The letter notes that it is a very quick survey which goes through March 30, 2024, all the feedback is completely anonymous.

There is another survey that will go to Town volunteers, other board members and employees. Alternate Coppeta will check to see if they are allowed to distribute this survey to the school.

The surveys are slightly different. Alternate Coppeta will make sure that the link is correct. There are two surveys. One is going to the major private employees in Town. The other is going to Town employees, Board members, volunteers and so on. Hopefully, it will include school employees as well. Potentially 100 people could complete the survey. Ms. Rowen explained that the survey is very short. Ms. Rowen reviewed the survey for Town employees for the Board. It asks:

- how long the person has worked for or been involved with the Town,
- what town or city the person lives in,
- do they rent or own their home,
- if you live in Atkinson, do you want to continue and if you do not, do you want to,
- what concerns them about the future of housing in Atkinson
- what is your age
- what is your income

Ms. Rowen stated that even if not all questions are answered, the Board can get a sense of their opinions. Ms. Coppeta asked how this survey would be distributed. Ms. Rowen explained that Mr. Apple will get copies and give them to the department heads to give to their employees. The one exception is the school. The survey can be accessed with a QR code and by the website.

Ms. Rowen explained that the survey would be distributed to the person responsible for the email list for their Boards and volunteers. Ms. Rowen explained that this survey is targeted to people who give to the community. All the boards and committees listed on the Town website would be included. It is a big net for a targeted audience. She stated that she can filter to see if someone took the survey more than once. Chair Killam requested adding a disclaimer asking people to vote only once. Chair Killam stated that there are other people elected who are not on the list. Ms. Rowen reiterated that the survey should be sent to all people on the list as well as a few additional volunteers and employees.

The last thing Ms. Rowen discussed was setting some dates for formal public outreach and the next steps. She would like to give the Board an update on the housing needs assessment at the next meeting. It is still in draft form until the outreach is completed. She was scheduled to appear at the April 17, 2024 meeting but she will not be available and is hoping to meet on another date.

Alternate Coppeta asked if Wednesday, April 10, 2024 at 6:00 PM would be good. The Zoning Board meets that day. She will know by March 26, 2024 if there are any applications for the Zoning Board. Their meeting usually starts at 7:00 PM. Ms. Rowen asked if April 8, 2024 or April 11, 2024 is available. The Board discussed whether the Board of Selectmen will meet April 8, 2024. The Board agreed to decide on the dates at the March 20, 2024 meeting. Ms. Rowen would like to present the Housing Needs Assessment in April and the Land Use Regulatory Audit in May, hopefully at the May 8th or the May 15th meeting. She hopes to have everything completed by June 1, 2024.

Alternate Coppeta stated that there will be a regular Planning Board meeting with a public hearing on March 20th and asked how long the presentation would take. Ms. Rowen informed her that the presentation should take 15 to 20 minutes and would prefer to meet on Zoom. The Board agreed to have Ms. Rowen appear on Zoom at 6:30 PM.

Ms. Rowen completed her presentation and left the meeting.

The Board returned to discussing the Rules of Procedure and when to vote on them. They decided to wait until the next meeting after Alternate Coppeta had a chance to make the changes.

Other Business:

Chair Killam requested to discuss the elections. Ms. Mahoney did not appear but this would have been her last meeting with the Planning Board. Chair Killam thanked her for serving. There are two candidates for two positions running unopposed. Chair Killam stated that the Planning Board always has room for alternates and invited people from the audience to apply. After the election, there will only be one alternate on the Board. Ideally, there should be two to three. The Board appoints alternates.

Alternate Coppeta stated that she is the representative to the CIP Committee for the Planning Board and she missed the meeting in February because she was away. Her departments are Public Works, Cemetery and Conservation. She has started with her departments and wants to put out a thorough document. She suspects every department will have different ideas on what needs to be replaced. She would also like to add something about capital reserves. There is a history of starting capital reserve funds and not funding them.

Alternate Coppeta also attended hazard mitigation training. She asked Member Wainwright about any conservation land that could be at risk for forest fires. Member Wainwright stated he had FEMA flood data in a couple of places. He also stated that there is one open field that gets mowed but could be a fire hazard. Member Stewart stated that the risk of a woods fire has increased because of all the wind damage. The Conservation Commission owns a lot of land and there is a lot of woods. Alternate Coppeta stated that fire hazard areas should be captured in a plan and named with an address. Chair Killam asked if all the entrances and exits had been mapped. Member Stewart stated that he is meeting with the Fire Wardens in a week and it is a timely

topic. He stated that the Fire Department needs to know all the entrances, where they can park equipment without getting stuck and where the water is for conservation land.

Alternate Coppeta stated that the State no longer has the authority to approve local hazard mitigation plans. They are reviewed at the Federal level. The criteria for having a plan pass the review has gotten more difficult. There are some plans in process, but none have passed. Alternate Coppeta, Assistant Fire Chief Schafer, Chief Crowley, Fire Chief Thomas, Mr. Apple, Brian Boyle and Bob Worden were also present. Ms. Yoshido-Travers was requested to attend as Director of Elder Services for several reasons, one because the elderly are a vulnerable population in need of warming or cooling centers and as Recreation Director in charge of all recreation areas and fields.

There was no more discussion. Chair Killam requested a motion to adjourn.

Adjournment:

Member Wainwright made a motion to adjourn. Vice Chair Turell seconded the motion. Vote: 6/0/0. All present in favor.

Chair Killam adjourned the March 6, 2024 meeting of the Atkinson Planning Board at 7:50 PM.

The next Planning Board meeting will be March 20, 2024 at Atkinson Town Hall.