

Planning Board Meeting
7:00 p.m. January 27, 2026 at the Meeting House

Members Present: Rich Marcou (Vice-Chair), Greg Meeh, Logan Snyder, Megan Portnoy, Joshua Gordon, Scott Doherty (Selectboard Rep), Clifton Mathieu (Alternate)

Members Absent: Brendan O'Donnell (Chair), Hillary Nelson (Alternate)

Others Present: Kal McKay (Admin Assistant), Edgar Rivera (Libertad Press NH), Rob Riley, Linda Bliss, David Booth (via Zoom), Calvin Todd, Matt McKerley, Steve Cochrane, Mark Sargent, Bryan Bailey

Call to Order

The Planning Board meeting was called to order at 7 p.m.

Rich asked how many people are in attendance because they got a notice in the mail. Most people in the room raised their hands, so Rich decided to do the public hearing for the proposed zoning amendments first.

Proposed Zoning Amendments

Rich opened the public hearing on the proposed zoning amendments at 7:01 p.m.

Rich and Kal explained that the Town sent out letters to property owners who own property in districts with 100 or fewer properties in order to notify them about this hearing per RSA 675:7, I-a. Canterbury has 5 such districts: Commercial, Industrial, Natural Resource, Center Historic, and Shaker Village Museum Preservation. This notice must be sent when a zoning amendment is proposed that would change a boundary of a zoning district, change the minimum lot sizes, or change the “permitted uses”. This includes changes that affect the entire town, not just ones that target the small district. “Permitted uses” is a very general term, so we will likely need to send these out every year.

Rich reviewed the proposed zoning amendments and opened the hearing to public comment.

Rob Riley of Old Tilton Road asked if any of the proposed articles disproportionately impact any of the districts that were notified. Rich confirmed that the proposed changes were for all districts and did not disproportionately affect the notified property owners.

Linda Bliss of Baptist Road asked where she could get more information about the warrant articles since she won't be able to attend Town Meeting. Rich explained these are the ones that will be on the ballot on voting day (March 10), not the ones that will be discussed at Town Meeting (March 13). The Board had detailed discussion of them at the 1/13/26 meeting, so reading those minutes/watching that video might be helpful.

David Booth of Baptist Road (via Zoom) spoke against the proposed cluster subdivision changes (Article 6). By changing the allowed density to 50% of what a regular subdivision would allow, it disincentivizes using this article and could result in more urban sprawl.

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Joshua explained that the Board is doing this on purpose as a way to decrease the chances of it being used in 2026. The cluster subdivision ordinance is flawed and the Board didn't have time to fix it before the deadlines for preparing the 2026 warrant articles. Rather than removing the article completely and trying to reinstate a fixed version next year, the Board is reducing the density for 2026 and will introduce a fixed version for 2027.

Mr. Booth explained his opinion that zoning changes should be encouraging growth in town centers to discourage sprawl. He expressed concern that this amendment would worsen sprawl.

Calvin Todd of Barnett Road asked if the Board will also be changing the density bonuses or just changing the baseline density to 50%. Rich confirmed this year would just be changing the baseline density.

Logan and Calvin discussed whether or not reducing the baseline would actually leave room for the density bonus to be an attractive incentive for developers. Calvin felt the number of lots this would provide was too small compared to what could be done with a regular subdivision. Logan explained that almost all lots in Canterbury couldn't actually be developed as a normal subdivision due to not meeting frontage requirements.

Joshua agreed with David Booth's concerns. He believes that 50% was too low and would prefer 75%.

Rich and Greg made the point that the Board will be looking closely at the density bonuses this coming year, but that this is a complicated topic and the Board would have had to have final language prepared weeks ago to meet the deadlines.

Several Board members responded directly to Mr. Todd's comments regarding bonus density. Megan began to respond to Mr. Todd, at which time Rich directed Megan to address all questions to the Chair to avoid direct back-and-forth with members of the public. Megan asked whether this directive applied equally to all Board members when responding to public questions, after which she continued her response to Mr. Todd that the Board had found the current density bonus incentives limited in prior applications and that it intended to explore more effective incentives going forward. She cited a lack of time as the primary reason such work had not been completed before the proposed warrant article.

Matt McKerley of Old Boyce Road asked how the 50% division of commercial vs residential is calculated, by acres or units. Rich explained that the 50% of baseline density would be based on the number of lots allowed in the district in question rounded to the nearest whole unit. (Note: Mr. McKerley's original question was not answered.)

Steve Cochrane of Old Tilton Road asked if the Board was looking for more commercial land around Exit 18. He believes that his property on the western side of Exit 18 was changed to commercial from agricultural by a previous Planning Board. Kal asked Steve to come to the office to discuss. They had paperwork for him regarding his questions.

Rich closed the hearing to public comment at 7:24 p.m.

Greg moved to submit the proposed warrant article to define and ban data centers. Joshua seconded.

Clifton reiterated his concerns from the last meeting. The language doesn't differentiate between traditional data centers and AI data centers. Traditional ones don't use as much energy/water and he doesn't want to discourage those from coming to town.

Rich reiterated his concerns from the last meeting. He doesn't think the Merrimack River provides enough water for a data center at its low point in the summer. He also thinks the electricity prices in NH are too high to make data centers feasible here.

Logan reiterated their reasons for supporting this article. Even if it is unlikely that a data center would come to town, we can't assume that today's technical limits will continue to exist in the future. The legislation needs to be in place before a data center application arrives or it will end up in court. Logan doesn't want any data centers, so they aren't concerned about differentiating between traditional and AI.

Joshua seconded Logan's points.

The Board voted on the motion to submit the proposed warrant article to define and ban data centers. Scott, Megan, Joshua, Greg, and Logan voted aye. Clifton and Rich voted nay. Motion carried.

Greg moved to submit the proposed warrant article to define gross living area for ADUs. Logan seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Joshua moved to submit the proposed warrant article to bring the zoning ordinance into compliance with legislative changes. Greg seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Greg moved to submit the proposed warrant article to create a wetland setback ordinance. Megan seconded.

Clifton reiterated his concern from the previous meeting that 25 ft is not enough and the setback should be 50 ft.

This ordinance was created by a joint subcommittee with the Conservation Commission. Brendan and Megan were the Planning Board reps on the subcommittee. They wrote the ordinance with a smallish setback of 25 ft so the townspeople could vote on if they wanted this ordinance at all. If this is passed and the Board gets feedback that the townspeople would like a stronger ordinance, edits can be proposed in the future. Megan recommended not changing the proposal tonight.

The Board voted on the motion to submit the proposed warrant article to create a wetland setback ordinance. Scott, Megan, Joshua, Greg, Rich, and Logan voted aye. Clifton voted nay. Motion carried.

Greg moved to submit the proposed warrant article to edit the cluster subdivision ordinance section 6.4.C. Joshua seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Greg commented that even though he wasn't able to attend the previous meeting, he read the minutes and thought the Board had a very thoughtful and productive discussion on the proposed articles.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Clifton moved to approve the minutes for the Planning Board meeting on January 13, 2026. Rich seconded.

Kal read aloud the proposed changes.

On line 76, clarify that Joshua said the Merrimack River "could" be a sufficient source of water, not that it was definitely a sufficient source. On line 77, clarify that Rich said the Merrimack wouldn't be a sufficient source of water "at its low point in the summer".

The Board voted on the motion to approve the minutes for the Planning Board meeting on January 13, 2026 as amended. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Subdivision Application for Map 258 Lot 26

This hearing was continued from the 1/13/2026 Planning Board meeting.

Mark Sargent of the Richard D. Bartlett & Associates, LLC surveying group attended to represent the applicant, Amy Fifield.

Mr. Sargent explained that the proposed subdivision is for 129 Pickard Road and would divide the property into 3 parcels (Lots 26, 26-1, 26-2). All 3 meet the minimum lot size requirement (3 acres). Lot 26-2 would only have frontage on Old Schoolhouse Road which is Class VI, so it would be designated as an open space parcel.

Rich asked that a wetland scientist stamp the plan since there are wetland delineations on it. Mr. Sargent agreed to do that.

Rich asked why Mr. Sargent put in a waiver request for marking wells and septic systems. Mr. Sargent explained that he did mark them for the property in question, but he wasn't able to do so for a neighboring parcel because he wasn't granted permission to enter that property. Many towns require that the neighboring wells/septics be marked, so he requested a waiver. He believes the well/septic on that neighboring property is greater than 75 ft away from the property line.

Joshua asked how far the well on Lot 26 is from the edge of the property. Mr. Sargent estimated about 200 ft.

Rich asked if there was an intention to move the driveway on Lot 26-1 so it goes directly to Pickard Road instead of out to Old Schoolhouse Road. Mr. Sargent said he didn't think so.

Rich asked that the dimensions of the existing structures be labeled on the plan since the Land Development Regulations require it. Mr. Sargent agreed.

Rich requested that it be documented on the plan that Lot 26-2 is for open space uses only.

Rich recapped the three things the Board would like added to the plan: wetland stamp, dimensions of the existing structures, and the open spaces designation for Lot 26-2.

There was some discussion about if the hearing should be continued so those items could be added or if the application could be approved with those items as conditions of approval. The Board decided to set them as conditions of approval, because the additional information wouldn't substantively alter the facts of the case and the Board Chair will check for them before signing the mylar.

Rich opened the hearing to public comment. No one spoke.

Joshua moved to approve the application on the conditions that the plan is stamped by a certified wetland scientist, verbiage is added to the plan to indicate that Lot 26-2 is for "open space uses only", and the dimensions of the existing buildings are shown on the plan. Clifton seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Subdivision Application for Map 208 Lot 8

This hearing was continued from the 1/13/2026 Planning Board meeting.

Surveyor Bryan Bailey attended to represent the applicants Mark and Sharon Akerstrom.

At the last meeting, the Board decided that the application wasn't complete and asked for modifications to the plan.

Mr. Bailey explained the new maps. Potential building sites and driveways have been added on all three proposed lots to prove they can be placed to avoid wetlands and setbacks.

Joshua asked about visibility and line of site for the driveways. Scott confirmed that Road Agent John O'Connor looked at the proposed driveways and okayed the site lines.

Rich asked what the units were in the Parcel Line Table. Mr. Bailey clarified that they are in feet and confirmed he will indicate that on the plan.

Rich opened the hearing to public comment. No one spoke.

Logan moved to determine the application complete. Greg seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Joshua moved to approve the application. Megan seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

Lot Merger for Map 264 Lot 25

The Board didn't sign the paperwork for this application after they approved it at the 1/13/26 meeting. Four Board members who were present at the vote signed the paperwork.

Building Permit Data

Joshua asked if there was any movement on getting the building permit data he requested last time.

Scott said he talked to Town Administrator Ken Folsom but hadn't heard back yet. He requested quarterly reports that splits the data between primary residences and ADUs.

Warrant Article Communication

Megan asked for the Board to confirm their reasoning behind each of the proposed zoning amendments so that she could write up a draft public communication for the Board to review at the next meeting.

The Board members discussed their reasons for voting for/against the wetland setback ordinance. Greg noted a proposal like this has been in the works for at least 10 years.

Logan noted that a number of people felt the setback should be larger, but the Board decided to go with a more moderate ordinance since something similar had been proposed many years ago and was voted down.

Clifton noted that this setback is a lot less than other towns.

The Board noted that the legislative compliance amendment is due to new laws being passed in 2025 by the NH State Legislature.

The Board noted that the gross living area definition is just for clarification.

The Board members discussed their reasons for voting for the cluster subdivision amendment. Joshua noted that the ordinance is intended to incentivize putting aside open space when developing, but the Exit 18 application showed there were flaws.

Logan noted that the 50% number wasn't really chosen specifically, but the reduction in general was to put more emphasis on the density bonuses.

Greg noted that the change is meant to put the brakes on the process so the Board has time to fix the ordinance.

There was some discussion on how to word the idea that this change gives the Board more control over what developers do.

The Board will focus their revisions this year on the bonus structure.

Megan will write up a draft of the communication and have Kal distribute it to the Board for the next meeting.

Clifton asked if the ballot could show how many Board members voted for/against each amendment. Kal will check with Town Clerk Sam Papps if it can legally go on the ballot. It could at least be included in the communication Megan is writing up.

Adjournment

Logan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m. Greg seconded. All in favor by roll call, motion carried.

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Next Meeting: 2026 February 10, 7:00 p.m. at the Meeting House
Minutes submitted by Kathleen McKay, Administrative Assistant