

Hardwick Planning Commission
May 18, 2021
Via Zoom
Minutes

HPC Members Present: Joyce Mandeville; Ken Davis; Jim Lewis; Michael Haveson; Shari Cornish; and Dave Gross, Chair

Also Present: Kristen Leahy, Hardwick Zoning Administrator (ZA); Ran Lahav; Jan Bodendorf; Jennifer Royer; Jim Kelty; Daphne and Bridget Kalmar; Judith Ruskin; Brenda Bolieu; and Stephanie and Mathew Best.

Absent: None

Chair Dave Gross opened the meeting at 6:30 pm.

Kristen Leahy requested an amendment to the agenda. The inclusion of a discussion about speed reducing bumps was incorporated into the update segment of the meeting (7:15 pm). Ken Davis moved to approve the agenda with the amendment. Shari Cornish seconded. All members were in favor.

Ken Davis moved to approve the April 13, 2021 meeting minutes as written. Shari Cornish seconded. All members were in favor.

No new information regarding the proposal on Hopkins Hill (AT&T expansion) was received prior to the meeting. Chair Gross invited the attending neighbors, abutters, and Hardwick citizens to convey their concerns and comments to the Hardwick Planning Commission.

Ran Lahav – neighbor – stated that he was concerned about the sale of the Mayo property to the Best family without the disclosure of the tower expansion proposal. Mr. Lahav finds this aspect to be “morally disturbing.”

Stephanie Best – neighbor – confirmed that the tower expansion was not disclosed to them as buyers of the abutting property. There is a utility pole which is located on their property and they will be impacted by the proposal. The Bests stated that they were blindsided by the proposal. They believe that the timing was either very coincidental or was meant to obscure the intent. They will be submitting a letter to the PUC.

Daphne Kalmar – neighbor – provided a historical perspective on the existing Hopkins Hill tower. The tower was (is) owned by Cloud Alliance. They were a small group of local owners who promised that the tower would not become larger or more intrusive to the neighboring properties. The owners of the land (Mayo) have now heavily logged the property and this has made tower more visible.

Jan Bodendorf – neighbor – stated that a 2017 Map from AT&T (available on-line) does not cite Caledonia County as needing more towers for the First Responder program. She also informed the Planning Commission that AT&T is advertising that 5G will be available to First Responders as of April 1, 2021. She wanted to know if the Bridgman Hill tower had been converted to 5G.

Chair Dave Gross requested that the Zoning Administrator research as to whether 5G was being installed (or had been installed) at the Bridgman Hill Tower.

Daphne Kalmar – neighbor – alerted the Commission to the abundant wildlife in the Hopkins Hill neighborhood. She believes that the Mayo property is within a wildlife corridor block. There are hunting locations and deer yards and this tower expansion will disturb the wildlife. The construction and the proposed generator will negatively impact the wildlife by increasing the noise pollution. The tower will become both taller and wider and will bulk up the top of the structure. This will be especially true if 5G is installed. She stated that the additional 10 feet will result in future expansions. She conveyed to the Commission that anything the members could do to stop the expansion would be critical to the neighborhood.

Stephanie Best – neighbor – asked if other cell providers will be seeking space on the expanded tower.

Jan Bodendorf – neighbor – stated that the proposal from AT&T includes a statement citing the fact that there will be room for more providers in the future.

Jim Kelty – neighbor – sought verification from the Commission that there are 4 antennas currently on the tower and 6 panels would be added. Chair Dave Gross responded that that assessment appeared to be true. Mr. Kelty inquired as to what the radio frequency would be and whether the proposal will meet the FCC regulations.

Chair Dave Gross responded that the Public Utility Commission has the jurisdiction over whether the AT&T proposal will meet FCC regulations.

Ran Lahav – neighbor – stated that he believes that this tower expansion would open the door to a “nightmare.” The expansion may be incremental but will have immense impact on the neighborhood. He views the expansion as a mechanism for reducing his property valuation.

Stephanie Best – neighbor – informed the Commission that Mr. Dodge had said that the survey would reflect her property but it did not. The Bests were given only 24 hour notice before the surveyor arrived. Her experience with the AT&T representative was not beneficial in this aspect.

Jennifer Royer – neighbor – reiterated that this area is a wildlife corridor. She strongly felt that AT&T was not being forthright in their interactions with the neighborhood.

Ken Davis – Commission member – asked about the original decision for the tower. The tower was permitted previously. Ken believed that the permit was obtained 10 years ago. The zoning administrator will research the previous decision and the surrounding information to that decision.

Michael Haveson – Commission member – asked if the approval of the expansion could be bound from future development.

Kristen Leahy – Zoning Administrator – suggested having Annette Smith review any correspondence with the PUC prior to submittal.

Chair Dave Gross indicated to the Zoom call that the Planning Commission would be proceeding to other business for the remainder of the meeting. Neighbors were invited to remain on the call.

Michal Haveson – Commission member – made an additional statement about the AT&T proposal. As a member of the emergency services in Hardwick, he has personally experienced the need for additional coverage in the area. Better communications are necessary in Woodbury, Walden and Wolcott. The emergency providers have times when their coverage from their radios does not work and they must rely on cell coverage. He understands the concerns of the neighbors but the first responders do need better coverage for emergency services.

The Planning Commission did not make a formal motion regarding the request to extend the 60-day advance notice. The stated preference was to wait for the additional information (survey, etc) and to request an extension of the 30 day comment period after the submittal of the petition for a certificate of public good. This was requested and granted in the Buffalo Mountain AT&T tower proposal.

The Planning Commission has also received multiple letters from neighbors which were emailed to the members prior to the meeting. These letters can be found in pdf form on the Planning Commission page of the Town of Hardwick website.

Shari reported that the Designated Downtown Commission was created by the Select Board. The Select Board will be appointing members to the Commission in June. Letters of interest have been received from multiple individuals. The first task will be to complete the application for the designation. Shari hopes to have this completed by this fall.

Kristen reported that the Inn by the River has been issued a Certificate of Public Good for their proposed solar array. Additionally, there will be a meeting at the end of May with VTRANS to discuss the paving project in downtown Hardwick. The Planning Commission would like to participate in this discussion. Kristen will let Shaun Fielder know of the request to participate. *(Shaun will be departing on May 24, the request will be forwarded to interim town manager Jon Jewett).*

The HPC received a copy of the proposed Greensboro Zoning Bylaw update (as per state statute). Kristen reviewed the proposal and does not find any aspect to be detrimental to the Town of Hardwick. Commission members were offered the opportunity to review. No one requested a copy at this time.

The Conservation Commission will be working on the creation of a Natural Resources Inventory. They asked if the HPC had any particular concerns or if the HPC had any additional resource maps. Chair Dave Gross suggested that they review the 2016 Tactical Basin Plan for the Lamoille Basin *(ZA – I attached the plan for their review)*. Any information about wetlands would be helpful for the town planning process. The Planning Commission heartily supports the Conservation Commission in this endeavor.

Prior to the meeting, Kristen checked with Geoff Sewake and no new requests for review or support were necessary for any upcoming grants. The HPC did not receive the Better Connections Grant and they would like to pursue this grant in future funding cycles. The Zoning Administrator was instructed to communicate with Geoff regarding what could boost the likelihood of success in the future.

Michael Haveson provided the Commission with photographs of speed humps that he found in another state. The speed humps reduced speed and had a very gradual incline on both sides. The humps looked like they could easily be plowed and were identified to vehicular traffic by lines and by signs.

The Commission wondered if there were any examples in Vermont. Michael believes that they are used in Burlington. *(On the day after the meeting, the ZA found many examples of these “speeding reducing bumps” on side residential streets in Barre, Vermont)*

Ken Davis wondered if this approach would work on West Church Street. Residents of that street were told that the town’s insurance would not cover installation of speed bumps but perhaps this “gentler” approach would be acceptable.

The possibility of the speed reducing bumps will be added to Phase II of the Pedestrian and Traffic Safety proposals.

Shari Cornish participated in a Northern Borders tourism event for the Northeast Kingdom and Northern NH. She asked in the Town Plan included any reference to creating a campground in Hardwick.

The next meeting will be conducted by Zoom due to the potential for additional information on the AT&T tower. The date will be June 8, 2021 at 6:30 pm. Future meetings (July, August, and September) may be held at Atkins Field.

Jim Lewis moved to close the meeting at 8:07. Joyce Mandeville seconded. All members were in favor.

The next HPC meeting will be on June 8, 2021 by Zoom.

~ Respectfully submitted, Kristen Leahy, ZA