

STRATFORD PLANNING BOARD

2019-01-15: Public Hearing on Petition to Eliminate the Planning Board

1. MEMBERS PRESENT: Rachel O'Meara, Denis Corbeil, Wayne Labatte, Vikki DeLalla, Clayton Macdonald, Harry Juergens, Bruce Blodgett
2. PUBLIC PRESENT: Otto Whelen, Jamie Sayen, Kathy Labatte, Josiah Barnes, Brian Homer, Virginia Routier, Wendy McMann, Bona Ladd, Larry Ladd, Mark McCullock, Chelsea Petereit, Marcel Goulet, Suzanne Goulet, Chris Caron, Jennifer Caron, Gregory Lamm, Charles Goulet, Jack Dunlap, Joyce Dunlap
3. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: 18:31
4. Ms. O'Meara made introductory remarks covering the work of the planning board and some of the consequences of eliminating the board.
5. Mr. Ladd asked how the question would appear on the ballot and if it would be clear to the voters what a yes or no vote meant. Rachel responded that the petition language will appear verbatim on the ballot, but that there may be an added note stating the Board's recommendation. Mr. Barnes said he would do what he can to make sure the ballot is as clear as possible.
6. Mr. McCullock asked if the question would be raised during the town meeting and suggested it would help inform the voters. Mr. Sayen explained that according to town meeting procedures, the only place the petition can be discussed during the meeting is at the end, under the article to discuss any other business that may come before the meeting.
7. Mr. Barnes asked if the Board can pass ordinances or regulations without bringing it to the town meeting for a vote. Rachel said that the Board could not, but it could change its procedures and the subdivision regulations on its own authority after suitable hearings, and that all its authority stems from the Town. She noted that all Board meetings are open to the public.
8. Mr. Lamm commented that he can't understand why the proposal is being made and asked if there was anyone at the meeting who could explain to him why anyone would think it a good idea.
9. Mr. McCullock asked if there were sufficient signatures and Mr. Barnes said that there were.
10. Mr. Ladd announced his complete support for the Board and called for thanking it and its members for their hard volunteer work.
11. Ms. Routier asked if there was anyone present to explain and defend the proposal. Mr. Whelen said that it was pretty clear that it was time to abolish the Board. Mr. Barnes said he wanted the services of the Board and felt that he had a right to know why Mr. Whelen advocated abolishing it. Mr. Whelen declined to expand on his previous statement.
12. Ms. DeLalla commented that some corporations seek towns that do not have competent government and suggested that the best defense against such corporate activity is to build town government authority and competence.
13. Mr. Lamm commented that, in the absence of any reason why the Board should be abolished, he can only consider why he thinks it is vital for the community. He said

he has experience across the country of what happens in towns that do not have good planning with especial consequences at multiple levels to families and children in communities with poor planning and called for strong support of the planning board.

14. Mr. Blodgett commented that there have been a lot of rumors and misinformation about the Board, but he has found that many of those issues have been laid to rest and although he doesn't like everything about it, he can live with it.
15. Mr. Lamm appreciated Mr. Blodgett's comment and noted the value and importance of free and open speech in developing a strong community and the greatness of allowing people to vote on issues.
16. Ms. Corbeil noted that without a planning board the town is very open outsiders coming into the town and destroying the community that the town has built. She expressed fear that that is what will happen if the town decides to abolish the Board. She noted that the Board exists not to hurt the community, but to help it, to help us.
17. Mr. Ladd noted the problems Pittsburg has faced since it abolished its planning board and warned that the same would be faced in Stratford if the town follows suit.
18. Mr. Barnes, quoting John Locke, noted that government and laws are vital to maintaining freedom and an orderly, safe society.
19. Mr. Labatte noted that the one zoning ordinance Stratford now has limits hazardous waste, odors, and noise and that the loss of that ordinance would result in opening the town to such development without restriction. He noted that regulations are for the benefit of everyone in the town.
20. Mr. Macdonald added that the state regulations serve as a background basis for protecting communities, but that the the towns, through zoning and planning boards, can expand on those regulations according to local need and that, in fact, it is one of the few areas in which towns can exercise extensive local control for their own protection. He noted that to not take that opportunity for local control was to turn control over to Concord and Washington and giving up our authority to determine for ourselves how we wish to live.
21. Ms. McMann voiced her support and appreciation for the Board and of being in favor of the Board.
22. Mr. Caron said that some people may have had a belief that abolishing the Board would increase freedom, but explained that the Board actually adds to our freedom by giving residents a voice, and the power to exercise their authority to manage the town as they see fit through the Board.
23. Ms. Routier noted that signatories to petitions often sign for the sake of getting a question heard. Ms. O'Meara noted it was a legitimate part of the democratic process. Mr. Barnes asked if the petition to abolish the Board was approved by the Town, could someone then petition to recreate the Board. Mr. Macdonald answered yes.
24. Mr. Goulet asked what can be done to advance understand of the question. Ms. O'Meara said to talk to your neighbors, either for or against, and to try and dispel misinformation and speak factually.
25. Ms. Caron proposed producing a press release describing the boards role, and suggested that it might help voters to make an informed decision.
26. Mr. Lamm thanked the petitioners for opening the question so that the issues concerning and about the board were achieving more salience and and a more general airing. He suggested that the process was something that would strengthen the community.

27. Ms. DeLalla called for people to come out and vote and said that is the best way for people to get the results they may hope for.
28. Mr. Sayen spoke to the value of community and the tendency today for people to focus on individual rights rather than on the community as a whole, while noting that the Declaration of Independence specifically calls for the exercise of individual rights within the context of community responsibility.
29. Mr. Barnes asked if any other signer of the petition was present. Mr. Blodgett noted that some of his earlier ire related to the fact that no one on the board were born in Stratford natives. Mr. Lamm noted that his family has been involved with the town for 50 years and has always paid their taxes, and that he has now lived here full time for over 10 years working intimately with the problems of local residents. He noted that in his experience, the real outsiders to fear are the business interests. He stated that they don't care about the Town or the hardships its residents face and have a history of coming and leaving garbage behind them. He told of how much he and his family loves the town and of how he appreciates Mr Blodgett's perspective.
30. Ms. O'Meara adjourned the meeting at 19:13