



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH PLANNING BOARD

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June 17, 2019

Planning Board Minutes from Joint Meeting with Board of Selectmen

Planning Board members present: Kerri Martinek, Chair; Michelle Gillespie, Amy Poretsky, Anthony Ziton

7:15 p.m. - JOINT MEETING WITH THE PLANNING BOARD

- Interviews for vacancy on Planning Board.
- Appointment to fill vacancy on Planning Board

Planning Board Chair Kerri Martinek called the meeting of the Planning Board to order.

Ms. Martinek acknowledged the resignation of Planning Board member Theresa Capobianco and thanked her for her years of service. Pursuant to the Town Charter, the vacancy shall be filled for the remainder of the term by a majority vote of the remaining members of the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen. The vacancy was advertised in the local newspapers, on the Town website and on cable. Applications were accepted through June 12, 2019. Of the four applications that were received, one applicant has withdrawn.

Ms. Martinek explained the selection procedure. Chairman Perreault explained the interview procedure.

Members of the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen had the opportunity to review the applications prior to tonight's meeting. The following applicants were interviewed for the Planning Board vacancy:

- Fran Bakstran
- Millie Milton
- Brad Blanchette

Each of the applicants were asked the same set of questions, which mainly focused on their involvement and knowledge of the Planning Board and why they were interested in serving on this particular board versus any other. Ms. Martinek asked common questions of each applicant on behalf of the Planning Board. Chairman Perreault asked common questions of each applicant on behalf of the Board of Selectmen. Other Board members were invited to ask a follow-up question and the applicants were giving the opportunity to ask questions of their own.

7:20 p.m. - Fran Bakstran

Ms. Bakstran introduced herself and reviewed her background, qualifications, and interest in serving on the Planning Board. The interview is summarized as follows:

- Resident for 32 years.
- Member of the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for 7 years.
- Served on the Board of Selectmen for 6 years. During this time, served on the Revision Committee that worked on improving the zoning bylaws over an 18-month period and was active with the Historical District Commission in developing and presenting at an Annual Town Meeting the Demolition Bylaw.
- Interested in serving on the Planning Board to share her experience and knowledge with both the seasoned and newest members of the Planning Board.
- Has working knowledge of the zoning bylaws and procedures.
- Understands the balance between development of the Town versus the rights of property owners.
- Has attended most Town Meetings during residency with the exception of 5 or 6.
- Because of her experience, would have less of a learning curve and could get to work right away.
- Familiar with the Master Plan and the efforts of the Master Plan Steering Committee.
- Understands Roberts Rules of Order.
- Would serve on the Planning Board for just this initial term. No intention at this time to run for the seat in the 2020 Election. During this one-year period, does not anticipate resigning from the ZBA.
- Understands that serving on ZBA and the Planning Board would require a heavy time commitment and affirmed willingness and ability to meet it.
- Believes that WRTA transportation would benefit Northborough.

7:35 p.m. - Millie Milton

Ms. Milton introduced herself and reviewed her background, qualifications, and interest in serving on the Planning Board. The interview is summarized as follows:

- Resident for 27 years.
- Has attended several Planning Board meetings over the last six months and is interested in serving on the Planning Board to help make a positive difference in shaping the development of the Town and its future.
- Has first-hand experience and has learned to navigate the permitting processes of several Town departments as a downtown business owner.
- Since her business is hospitality based, she feels she would be a good liaison between Town boards and the community by communicating the needs of the community while balancing the town processes.
- Familiar with the Master Plan and the efforts of the Master Plan Steering Committee.

- Understands the balance between Town development versus the rights of property owners.
- Has attended 3 or 4 Town Meetings since residency.
- Understands the heavy time commitment and the deep learning curve. She would have the time to take advantage of training opportunities.
- Would like to see the Town have more vibrancy in the downtown aspect. Talks to other towns about how they revitalize their downtowns. Things to be considered are parking, re-use of older buildings by giving them new life. Use of under-utilized space.
- As a business owner, is familiar with the building codes and the processes regarding health, fire and safety inspections. Has the opportunity to listen to people that have different expectations of what Town processes should be.
- Wants to make a positive impact from a decision-making standpoint on the growth and development in Town.
- Expressed interest in serving on the Planning Board until the May 2020 Town Election. Unsure at this time if she would run for the seat in the 2020 Election.

8:05 p.m. - Brad Blanchette

Mr. Blanchette introduced himself and reviewed his background, qualifications, and interest in serving on the Planning Board. The interview is summarized as follows:

- Resident for 32 years, with the exception of leaving for college.
- Member of the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for 8 years. Currently serving as Chair.
- Would like to serve on the Planning Board to make a difference in more of a pro-active role versus the reactive role of the ZBA. Wants to help keep the small town feel while progressing forward.
- Has working knowledge of the zoning bylaws and procedures.
- Has had little direct involvement to date with the Master Plan or the efforts of the Master Plan Steering Committee, but receives regular updates from the ZBA liaison to the Master Planning Steering Committee.
- Would like to see a more business friendly downtown with more walkable options.
- Has working knowledge and experience in interpreting and balancing the needs of the applicant versus property owners via the zoning bylaws.
- A concern for him personally (not expressed by other members of the ZBA) is the need for better communication between the Planning Board and ZBA.
- As ZBA Chair, understands the importance of running an organized meeting by laying out the ground rules and making sure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard.
- Because of his experience, he would have less of a learning curve and would be able to get to work right away.
- Understands the heavy time commitment.
- His intent would be to resign from the ZBA and serve on the Planning Board for the one year. He would run for the Planning Board seat in the 2020 Election.

DELIBERATION - FRAN BAKSTRAN

Planning Board

Michelle Gillespie noted that she has worked with Ms. Bakstran over the years and recognized that she has a great deal of knowledge and experience. She stated that she has reflected on some of the comments previously made about the Planning Board being “young” as it pertains to tenure, and voiced her opinion that having a mix of experienced and new board members can work in the board’s favor as it provides both historical knowledge and new perspectives and she does not see it as a detriment. She reiterated that Ms. Bakstran brings much to the table but expressed concern about Ms. Bakstran’s intent to remain on the ZBA and only serve on the Planning Board for the year. She expressed a preference to have someone that is more committed who might continue for the long term.

Amy Poretsky noted that, while she believes that all three candidates would bring value to the board, she sees benefit in having someone new who can commit to the board and bring new ideas. She reiterated her appreciation for all that Ms. Bakstran has done for the town but, given the input that Ms. Joubert and Mr. Litchfield provide to the board members, she believes that someone new will be beneficial.

Anthony Ziton also expressed his appreciation for Ms. Bakstran’s efforts on behalf of the town. He commented that, though he recognizes that Ms. Bakstran runs efficient meetings and is very knowledgeable, he also believes that having “new blood” could prove useful by bringing new perspectives and new ideas.

Kerri Martinek agreed that Ms. Bakstran offers a great deal of experience and is very committed but voiced concern about her intent to serve on both the ZBA and the Planning Board. She reiterated that Ms. Bakstran is well qualified, but also stated that she does not believe that prior board experience is critical. She noted that she and Mr. Ziton are both new to the Planning Board and have found resources to enable them to learn quickly.

Board of Selectmen

All members of the Board of Selectmen agreed that Ms. Bakstran has plenty of experience and working knowledge with the zoning bylaws and is a premier citizen as far as her commitment to the Town. A majority of the Board members expressed concern with her intent to only commit for the one year; and whether or not it would be in the best interest of the Town for her to serve on both the Planning Board and ZBA considering the expected time commitment. Selectman Perreault did not share the same concern regarding her intent to only commit for the one year, as there is no guarantee that the appointed person would get re-elected even if he or she did run for the seat in 2020. Selectman Rutan expressed her confidence in Ms. Bakstran being fully capable of handling the time commitment while serving on both boards.

DELIBERATION - MILLIE MILTON

Planning Board

Michelle Gillespie noted that Ms. Milton will bring diversity and unique experiences as a business owner who owns her building and went through the process of opening a business in town. Ms. Gillespie also commented that, as a member of the Master Plan Steering Committee (MPSC) where the downtown area has been a primary focus, she believes that having a downtown business owner who has daily interactions with the public will be beneficial. She also mentioned that she does not put a lot of emphasis on experience as she believes Ms. Joubert and Mr. Litchfield provide excellent guidance with regards to the Planning Board process and there are many opportunities for training. She also noted that Planning is a more proactive experience where the work of the ZBA is more reactionary, dealing with applicants who are seeking relief from the bylaws.

Ms. Gillespie emphasized a desire to have more residents get involved and to encourage more people to serve on town boards. She reiterated that, as the owner of a downtown business, Ms. Milton brings a unique perspective that will be of value to the board. She noted that Ms. Milton has attended several meetings of the Planning Board and the MPSC, and reiterated that the input and guidance provided by town staff would outweigh any concerns about lack of experience. She also suggested that there will be some degree of a learning curve for anyone who joins the Planning Board.

Amy Poretsky voiced agreement with Ms. Gillespie's comments, and reiterated a desire to see more new people get involved. She indicated that she has discussed the time commitment with Ms. Milton, who seems amenable and excited about getting involved. She also discussed the focus on the downtown area in the Master Plan, and she looks forward to moving those efforts forward.

Anthony Ziton echoed the sentiments expressed by both Ms. Gillespie and Ms. Poretsky. He noted that Ms. Milton recently established a business in town and brings real-life experience with that process, the obstacles she faced, and how she navigated them. He suggested that, given that experience, Ms. Milton could provide valuable input about how to develop the rest of Main Street and how we might better mold the bylaws to better shape the downtown. He recognized that there will be a learning curve, but noted that Ms. Milton has attended many meetings over the past 6 months so she is already devoting the time and commitment.

Kerri Martinek recalled that Ms. Milton had used the term "hospitality" that she strongly supports, especially given her awareness of comments and feedback about the Planning Board being difficult to work with and hard on business. She stated that she does not necessarily agree but does appreciate Ms. Milton's ability and desire to

bring a hospitality-type approach. She noted that, in the course of operating her business, Ms. Milton is in the position to hear what residents have to say.

Board of Selectmen

Members of the Board of Selectmen agreed that Ms. Milton would be able to offer a good downtown perspective as a business owner and appreciates her effort to be informed. A majority of the members expressed their concern with her lack of knowledge with the zoning bylaws and because there is no guaranty of the outcome at the 2020 Election, it's important to choose the applicant that has the most experience and can start working right away. Selectman Hirsh stressed the importance of improving communication between the Planning Board and the community and that Ms. Milton would be beneficial in this regard.

Following comments by the Board of Selectmen, Ms. Martinek asked if any of the Planning Board members have concerns about the lack of experience and learning curve. Mr. Ziton reiterated that there are many resources available. Selectman Tim Kaelin clarified his comments about experience. He agreed that there are resources available to gain the knowledge but noted that mere knowledge is vastly different than actually being on the board and working with the other board members and the town. He emphasized that experience is more relevant to him than mere knowledge of the bylaws. Ms. Gillespie discussed the Planning Board's interest in a candidate who has experience as a business owner and is more well-rounded, which is why she finds this candidate to be so valuable.

DELIBERATION - BRAD BLANCHETTE

Planning Board

Michelle Gillespie agreed that Mr. Blanchette does have experience as a member of the ZBA. She noted that she found it interesting that she had not previously met Mr. Blanchette, given that she has been so involved with the Master Plan process and did not recall seeing him at any of those meetings. Ms. Gillespie also recalled Mr. Blanchette's comment about loopholes in the bylaws and wondered why he had not spoken up during his tenure on the ZBA. She recognized that he will bring his ZBA experience to the Planning Board but voiced her opinion that his experience would not be as well rounded as that of a private business owner.

Amy Poretsky noted that she has attended many ZBA meetings and agrees that Mr. Blanchette does run a good meeting. She also recognized that either he or Ms. Bakstran would be able to jump into the role easily and commented that, no matter who is selected, she is hopeful that the two boards can work together in the future and have joint meetings to discuss ways to improve our bylaws. She voiced her

opinion that all three candidates bring much to the table, and noted that this is not an easy decision.

Anthony Ziton stated that he has found Mr. Blanchette to be an effective leader. He recognized that the ZBA has been faced with a few difficult decisions recently in which the board has performed well, and Mr. Blanchette clearly has a working knowledge of the bylaws.

Kerri Martinek agreed with the sentiments expressed by the other Planning Board members. She voiced her opinion that Mr. Blanchette offers great leadership, is a strong candidate, had provided specific examples of some of his experiences during the interview process, and seemed to have some good ideas. She agreed that he has been an asset as a ZBA member and is obviously a qualified candidate.

Board of Selectmen

The members of the Board of Selectmen agreed that Mr. Blanchette has plenty of experience with the zoning bylaws and has experience in running a difficult meeting given how well spoken and conscientious he is. Although all Board members agreed with the benefit of appointing someone with a business perspective, the majority would prefer someone with more direct experience with the zoning bylaws. Selectman Hirsh would rather appoint someone who has experience with the broader picture versus someone with a detailed focus on the zoning bylaws.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. Ziton moved the Planning Board vote to nominate Millie Milton to fill the vacancy on the Planning Board until the 2020 Annual Town Election, Ms. Gillespie seconded the motion. There were no other nominations by the Planning Board.

Selectman Kaelin moved the Selectmen vote to nominate Brad Blanchette to fill the vacancy on the Planning Board until the 2020 Annual Town Election, Selectman Rutan seconded the motion. There were no other nominations by the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Gillespie asked that members of the Board of Selectmen consider the importance of appointing someone who can bring a business perspective. Selectman Kaelin responded that it is the responsibility of both the Planning Board and the Board of Selectmen to appoint someone who can add the most value during this one year and then it's up to the residents to decide at the 2020 Election.

VOTE TO APPOINT

Planning Board members Kerri Martinek, Michelle Gillespie, Amy Poretsky, Anthony Ziton and Board of Selectmen member Julianne Hirsh voted in favor of the

appointment of Millie Milton to fill the vacancy on the Planning Board until the 2020 Annual Town Election.

Board of Selectmen members Jason Perreault, Dawn Rand, Timothy Kaelin and Leslie Rutan voted in favor of the appointment of Brad Blanchette to fill the vacancy on the Planning Board until the 2020 Annual Town Election.

Millie Milton received five votes; Brad Blanchette received four votes. Millie Milton is appointed to fill the vacancy on the Planning Board until the 2020 Annual Town Election.

Chairman Perreault congratulated Ms. Milton on her appointment and thanked all the applicants for their willingness to serve and for meeting with the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen this evening.

At 9:05pm. Ms. Gillespie moved the Planning Board vote to adjourn; Mr. Ziton seconded; all members voted in favor.