



BRISTOL PLANNING BOARD JUNE 12, 2025 MINUTES

TOWN HALL
10 COURT ST.
BRISTOL, RI 02809
401-253-7000

Held: June 12, 2025 in person

Location: Bristol Town Hall, 10 Court Street, Bristol, RI

Present: Charles Millard, Chairman; Anthony D. Murgo, Vice Chairman; Steve Katz, Secretary; First Alternate Member Michael Sousa; and Second Alternate Member Jessalyn Jarest

Also Present: Ed Tanner, Principal Planner; Andy Teitz, Esquire, Solicitor

Not Present: Member Brian W. Clark; Member Richard Ruggiero, Diane Williamson, Director of Community Development, Amy Goins, Esq., Assistant Town Solicitor

Chairman Millard called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Member Katz proposed the minutes of the April 10, 2025 meeting stating there were some minor typos in the minutes and asked if there were any other corrections or questions.

Vice Chairman Murgo stated that his name had been omitted in the voting on C1, D, and D2 and the Stenographer Maynard stated that she would correct those pages and send them to Ed Tanner to be inserted into the signed meeting minutes.

A motion was made by (Murgo/Sousa) accept the April 10, 2025 meeting

In favor: Millard, Murgo, Katz, Sousa, Jarest

Refrained: None

Opposed: None

C. Old Business

C1. *Applicant has requested a continuance until July 10th, 2025 Planning Board Meeting.*

Preliminary Plan Phase review for Major Land Development proposal (continued from April 10, 2025) to construct a new Mt. Hope High School, including new tennis courts and athletic fields, at **199 Chestnut Street** and to demolish the existing high school building. Owner: Town of Bristol/Applicant: Bristol Warren Regional School District/Lisa Pecora, Perkins Eastman, applicant representative. Zoned: Public Institutional. Assessor's Plat 117 Lots 3-7.

Applicant has agreed that the public hearing on the Preliminary Plan shall remain open until receipt of the necessary permits from the RIDEM.

A motion was made by (Katz/Murgo)

In favor: Millard, Murgo, Katz, Sousa, Jarest

Refrained: None

Opposed: None

- C2. **Housing Element Update:** Board to schedule public hearing on draft housing element for adoption. Board to make recommendation to Town Council on Affordable Housing Trust Fund Policy.

Ed Tanner stated that he and Diane Williamson had gone over this matter the day before and she stated that she would like the Planning Board to close the loop on the housing element as the Board had done a lot of work on it a few months ago. He said that the issue is that the Robin Rug project was moving forward and in the not too distant future Robin Rug will be asking for building permits to get in there and start doing the work and Robing Rug will be giving the Town the money for the affordable housing trust fund money. So, the Board is being asked to make a recommendation in that chapter to put it into an interest-bearing account for the Town for when a big project comes up. Mr. Tanner stated that the other item was the chapter for the housing element itself, which is its own chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that they are just about to embark on having meetings and start working on the new Comprehensive Plan that will be adopted for next year. Mr. Tanner stated that the Planning Board has a choice that they could either vote to adopt that housing element as a chapter of the Comprehensive Plan now and send to the Town Council or they could wait and blend in with rest of the Update that is upcoming.

Member Katz asked Mr. Tanner if those were the only choices. Solicitor Teitz stated that those were the choices, but the recommendation that Ms. Williamson had was to get it done now and not wait until and to have this part done now and that it was just a matter of scheduling a public hearing for it. Mr. Tanner stated that he believed that Ms. Williamson's recommendation was to wait and the chapter would be adopted with the rest of the update and his and Ms. Williamson's thought on that when they were speaking was: 1.) the public may have other input and they may tweak the chapter, or 2.) there may be items in there that cross reference other chapters that haven't been written yet that it might flow better and blend better if they wait. Chairman Millard said that the Board should wait. Mr. Tanner stated that if the Board wanted to adopt it now then they would need to schedule a public hearing with the Town Council but then they would have to adopt the entire update in a year.

Vice Chairman Murgo stated that either way, the money for the affordable housing trust fund would go into an interest-bearing account for the Town. Mr. Tanner said that in each packet that was given to them by Ms. Williamson they had a memo from Camoin & Associates dated February 13, 2025 containing a recommendation for the Town Council to create an interest-bearing account and hold that money for the next big project that comes along, for example, if Almeida apartments comes along or another big project comes along where the Town needs to do some funding for affordable housing, the Town will have the money. He said that all of the other options that were gone through and all of the calculations that were done didn't seem to make sense. Chairman Millard suggested the Board wait. Alternate Member Sousa recalled that they didn't make a decision on the memo and how the money should be spent. Alternate Member Sousa felt that it shouldn't be in the record that the Board was going to wait for a big project to come and then spend the money. He agrees that the money should be transferred to an interest-bearing account that the Town Council cannot touch and then talk some more about how that money best be spent in the future. Mr. Tanner said that was correct.

Mr. Tanner said that this was just a recommendation from the Planning Board to the Town Council that they believe what should be done with the funds that are coming from Robin Rug. Alternate Member Sousa said that to let them know that there are several options that are being considered on how that money gets spent for low to moderate income housing in Bristol and that the Board is going to make a recommendation in the future. Alternate Member Jarest said that they also talked about opportunities for possibly loaning money to people and feels that it should be discussed further and not discount that as an option because it could possibly work.

Member Katz said that a lot of things were discussed during that presentation, and it was a bit confusing. Member Katz stated that the Consultant's presentation was confusing because it wasn't made clear if the presentation was directed towards affordable housing or just housing in general. He asked what was the Board's recommendation to be, to take the presentation as is and then just let the Town Council look at it or was the Board making a recommendation that they were accepting the presentation because he was against it. Mr. Tanner said that all Ms. Williamson wanted the Board to look at was the Camoin & Associates memo dated February 13, 2025. Mr. Tanner asked the Board members to look at the memorandum and to focus on the portion under conclusions and recommendations and in Ms. Williamson's memo she stated that the Board should forward the Consultant's recommended option to set up a Housing Trust Fund to the Town Council that the money would go into to be used for affordable housing.

Chairman Millard asked if they could make the recommendation now and then move on to the other issues. Member Katz made a motion to accept the recommendation as presented and to forward it to the Town Council for their consideration.

A motion was made by (Katz/Sousa)
In favor: Millard, Murgo, Katz, Sousa, Jarest
Refrained: None
Opposed: None

Mr. Tanner then went on to discuss the next issue regarding the housing element which is a chapter of the Comprehensive Plan which has been completed. Mr. Tanner stated that it was up to the Planning Board to send it to the Town Council and schedule a public hearing to adopt it now or if the Board would rather wait and do it with the whole Comprehensive Plan update which would happen over the course of the next year. Chairman Millard asked Mr. Tanner if the latter was Ms. Williamson's choice. Mr. Tanner stated that Ms. Williamson recommended that the Board should wait although they could do it either way, but it makes sense to wait. Member Katz stated that her point is well taken to wait because if the Comprehensive Plan is going to be redone anyway it just makes more sense to do so. Mr. Tanner said that even though the Board had gone through a lot of public meetings there was going to be a more robust Comprehensive Plan update that will have multiple chapters, and the Board may get some tidbits or input that tweaks a few things, and he feels that it is good to hold and then slide it into the main update.

Alternate Member Sousa had some concerns. He said that the first sentence in Ms. Williamson's recommendation stated that the Consultant was completing the draft update to the housing element meaning that the Consultant hasn't finished. Alternate Member Sousa agreed with Member Katz that the presentation was very confusing, it didn't seem to hit the mark, there were some ideas that appear to be good, and some not so good. Alternate Member Sousa stated that the Consultant was talking more about housing in general versus affordable housing which was confusing and he feels that before the Board moves ahead they need to see the final draft. Alternate Member Sousa does not feel that the Planning Board can ask the Town Council for a public

hearing until they can at least review the draft and then talk about it, get some clarity, and agree to it. Mr. Tanner said that it is truly a housing element and not just affordable housing. He agreed with Alternate Member Sousa that the Board needs to see the final draft of the chapter as he was under the impression that the Board had approved the final edits already and the Consultant was making those edits. He did not realize that the Board did not have it physically in their hands.

Vice Chairman Murgo asked what if a deal came up, for example, if Roger Williams University all of a sudden wanted to sell the Almeida apartments, does the Town still have access to money to purchase that property? Solicitor Teitz stated that it was two separate issues and that yes, the Town would have access to money to do so as that would be the idea to put it towards a larger project as opposed to a bunch of smaller projects. Solicitor Teitz stated that the money would be kept in a separate account apart from any other funds because it was not subject to the inclusionary zoning rules that the State has set where the money has to be spent within two years or it gets turned over to the State because this isn't coming from inclusionary zoning this is coming from something 20 years before inclusionary zoning so it needs to be kept as a totally separate fund and then the affordable housing trust fund might have more than one fund in it. Chairman Millard stated that they should make sure that it starts out as a separate fund. Solicitor Teitz stated that he would direct them to do so.

Alternate Member Sousa said that because the money would be a fee in lieu for affordable housing and Solicitor Teitz said that it was but their argument is that it's not subject to the current rules on fee in lieu because it dates back so far it goes before the current rules. Solicitor Teitz stated that if it just only like every other fee in lieu of affordable housing the requirement is that it be obligated within two years or you have to turn it over to the State and let them decide how to spend it. Alternate Member Sousa stated that the point he was trying to make was that it couldn't be spent for anything other than low to moderate income housing. Solicitor Teitz said that was correct.

Chairman Millard asked for a motion to hold off on scheduling a public hearing on the housing element. Member Katz made the motion and was seconded by Alternate Member Jarest.

A motion was made by (Katz/Jarest)

In favor: Millard, Murgo, Katz, Sousa, Jarest

Refrained: None

Opposed: None

D. New Business

- D1. Mt. Hope Community Forest** – Presentation of Draft Mt. Hope Community Forest Management Plan, as required by grant agencies. Board to review and provide any comments.

Solicitor Teitz stated that this was a requirement of the grant so that the Town could get their money back from the federal government. He stated that this was the last thing that needed to be done on the list to submit for reimbursement. Solicitor Teitz said that there was still at least one employee at the forest service who knows who the Town is and is taking care of it, so the Town is in a hurry to get it done. He said that it does require a public component and there was an advertisement in the newspaper and that Diane Williamson had sent it to various entities like the Mount Hope Trust and the Tribe. Mr. Tanner stated that Ms. Williamson wanted the Board to know that she had received a few comments and that it wasn't a public hearing where the comments would be on the record, that it was more like the comments would be passed on to the

Department of Community Development and the comments would be taken into account. Mr. Tanner said that the plan that was in front of the Board had maps that were not great. He said that the people at DEM who had helped the Town with some of the funding are doing the maps. Mr. Tanner said that the maps that were in front of the Board tonight had the elements that needed to be there but the ones that will be final will have the legend and will look a lot better. He stated that the final version of the maps will be added in and then Ms. Williamson will edit the document to incorporate any comments. He said that the Conservation Commission has it along with many other agencies.

Chairman Millard asked what was needed from the Board. Solicitor Teitz stated that he needed comments, if any, from the Board, and then a motion from the Board approving the plan.

Chairman Millard asked the Board if there were any comments. Vice Chairman Murgo stated that the stated time frame for hunting was incorrectly stated as May through October and that it needed to be changed from October to May. Alternate Member Jarest stated that it was located on page 6 in the second paragraph. Mr. Tanner said that he would get it fixed. Solicitor Teitz stated that they would determine what the correct time frame is and fix it. Vice Chairman Murgo asked how much was this costing the Town? Solicitor Teitz said \$1.7million - \$800,000 - \$541,000 = \$349,000. He said it is for 120 acres. Mr. Tanner said that it is Town open space, but it was subject to conservation easements from DEM and the forest service. He stated that the Town will manage and maintain it.

Vice Chairman Murgo asked if there were any kind of streams that run through it or ponds. Mr. Tanner stated that there were a couple of streams that run north to south toward Mt. Hope farm. He said there's a stream that ends up in the big pond that works up to Tower Road, and another one by King Phillips and by Cove Cabin. Mr. Tanner said that it was mostly wetlands, but there were some flowing streams in there as well. Vice Chairman Murgo asked if they were going to create some walking trails. Mr. Tanner said that they were going to have trails as well, but not right away as it was still pretty rough. He said that they were going to evaluate where to put the trails properly and walk the property with people from DEM. Mr. Tanner said that it would be a public process to determine where the trails should go. He said there are some light walking paths through there. Vice Chairman Murgo asked if it was for sure that they were going to get the money from Washington. Solicitor Teitz stated that they were 99% sure as the grant has been approved and the money has been spent and that it was 24 funds, not 25 funds, so it was below people's radar, and the grant stated that once it was approved if for any reason the grant was recalled they would reimburse the Town for out-of-pocket expenses. He stated that now the Town's out-of-pocket expenses was the entire cost of the grant since they had already given the money to Brown. Solicitor Teitz stated that legally the federal government is 100% responsible for reimbursing the Town. He stated that as a practical matter, the man they worked with for over a whole year at the forest service did retire this past spring rather suddenly as they had found out on Wednesday that he was retiring by the end of the day on Friday, but that man had passed the Town over to someone else who has been very receptive and they have sent him a few things and that person responded the same day and Solicitor Teitz believes that there is still someone there who will pass it on and the Town will get a check for it.

Member Katz asked what was the shelf life of the money? Solicitor Teitz stated that he did not know, but that they had a time limit to apply for the reimbursement which was something like 180 days. Mr. Tanner stated that from the date of closing the Town had 180 days. Solicitor Teitz stated they had 180 days from May 7th to get all of the paperwork in to get the reimbursement, but they weren't going to wait until the last minute to do so. He stated that it was held up for approximately 45 days this past spring because of what was going on in Washington and

supposedly after that review it was approved, and he said that the Town has no reason to think that they won't get the money back. Member Katz stated that at some point it will expire and cancel and once that happens the money is gone. Solicitor Teitz said that the Town was not going to wait.

Chairman Millard asked for a motion. Solicitor Teitz recommended a motion to approve the draft Mt. Hope Community Forest Plan with the amendments as noted.

Alternate Member Sousa asked if the management plan should include deforestation in case of wildfire in case the Town has a very dry period of time. He stated that he read through the plan but did not see anything regarding that deforestation. Mr. Tanner stated there was a recommendation that the Town had to create a forest stewardship plan which goes to that which is to be completed by a licensed forester or DEM. He said that the people at DEM would help the Town with that, and it would be called a forest stewardship plan and they would go in and look at different areas and look at the species of trees and the Town might not have to do much active management but there may be some invasive things or insects coming through. Alternate Member Sousa said that he was concerned about the dead stuff on the floor of the forest that could ignite and become a fire problem which is what is causing such a problem around other parts of the country and Canada. Mr. Tanner said that's what the forester would do.

Chairman Millard asked for a motion.

A motion was made by (Jarest/Katz)

In favor: Millard, Murgo, Katz, Sousa, Jarest

Refrained: None

Opposed: None

E. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 7:26 pm by Sousa

Respectfully submitted by Kathleen M. Maynard, Recording Secretary

Date Approved: 10 July 2025

Planning Board: 