

Minutes

PLANNING BOARD AND BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Special joint meeting

7 p.m. August 21, 2025

Town Hall Annex Board Meeting Room, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present

Town Board: Mayor Mark Bell and commissioners Robb English, Kathleen Ferguson, and Matt Hughes

Planning Board: Vice Chair Hooper Schultz and members Jeanette Benjey, Sean Kehoe, Robert Iglesias, Sherra Lawrence, and Tiffney Marley

Absent: Board of Commissioners: Evelyn Lloyd and Meaghun Darab; Planning Board: Chair Frank Casadonte

Staff: Town Manager Eric Peterson, Assistant Town Manager Matt Efird, Town Attorney Robert Hornik, Senior Planner Tom King, Senior Planner Molly Boyle

1. Call to order and confirmation of quorum

Mayor Mark Bell called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and confirmed the presence of a quorum. He welcomed the attendees and passed the gavel to Vice Chair Hooper Schultz, who would act as Planning Board Chair in Casadonte's absence.

2. Agenda changes and approval

Schultz called for a motion to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion: Bell moved to approve the agenda as presented. Commissioner Kathleen Ferguson seconded.
Vote: 11-0. Motion passed.

3. Approval of minutes

A. Minutes for joint public hearing on May 15, 2025

Motion: Ferguson moved to approve the minutes. Planning Board member Robert Iglesias seconded.
Vote: 11-0. Motion passed.

B. Minutes for Planning Board regular meeting on June 26, 2025

Since these minutes were for a regular meeting and not a joint meeting, only Planning Board members voted.

Motion: Iglesias moved to approve the minutes. Planning Board member Sherra Lawrence seconded.
Vote: 7-0. Motion passed.

4. Discussion items

A. Discussion of draft Unified Development Ordinance framework with rewrite consultant, Inspire Placemaking Collective

Senior Planner Tom King introduced Jay McLeod with Inspire Placemaking Collective to present the draft Unified Development Ordinance framework.

McLeod explained the goal of the project was to better align the Unified Development Ordinance with the Comprehensive Sustainability Plan and current best practices. He explained that the meeting would focus on the framework and annotated outline. McLeod said another public meeting for the project was scheduled for the following week.

Erin Anderson, also with Inspire Placemaking Collective, presented information on public engagement conducted to date. She then presented the proposed reorganization of the Unified Development Ordinance, explaining that the first half would contain development standards, with administration in the latter half, making it easier for developers, property owners, and town staff to use.

Anderson shared key recommendations from the comprehensive plan that would be implemented through the UDO update, including the following: increasing connectivity through revised regulations for sidewalks, bike infrastructure, greenways, and pedestrian infrastructure; exploring ways to incentivize housing affordability and green development; incorporating missing middle housing in the permitted use table; and modernizing street and parking standards.

She discussed ways to make the UDO more user-friendly, including: simplifying approval and application processes; clarifying technical terms and review procedures; allowing flexibility in design standards while maintaining quality; and including graphics to explain technical standards.

Lastly, Anderson said Inspire was discussing potential zoning district changes with staff, including consolidating repetitive districts and removing outdated ones like special use districts.

Ferguson inquired about items recommended for removal, particularly air quality provisions and adequate public schools requirements. King explained that the air quality provision rarely comes up and when it does, getting clear answers from state agencies has been difficult. Regarding adequate public schools, he noted that the process has become cumbersome and ineffective.

Ferguson also raised concerns about Homeowners' Associations, noting their requirements are sometimes burdensome and can make housing even more unaffordable. Town Attorney Robert Hornik said HOAs have their issues but they are also the primary instrument for maintaining residential infrastructure like stormwater control measures, which the town does not want to maintain. There was discussion about whether the UDO update could incorporate ways to make HOAs less restrictive while still ensuring maintenance of common facilities.

Schultz expressed interest in enhancing flexibility for multi-use zoning that incorporates both retail and residential spaces in the same structure. He also asked about addressing upzoning and how to educate the public on why this might be important.

Commissioner Matt Hughes shared his desire for the UDO to reflect a business-friendly environment, make housing easier and more affordable to build, and create a streamlined review process.

Ferguson and Lawrence discussed incorporating incentives for environmentally friendly building materials and climate solutions, such as 3D printing, adobe construction, rain gardens, and other green infrastructure.

Planning Board member Tiffney Marley emphasized the importance of reducing administrative burden, particularly for individual residents, and asked about provisions to assist low-income homeowners. She also raised concerns about tree preservation in new developments and promoting the use of native plants.

Ferguson left at 8:00 p.m.

Hughes concurred with Marley's comments. He also raised the issue of accessory dwelling units, saying those regulations needed to be simplified. English concurred, saying density and infill are very important for Hillsborough to grow.

Marley left at 8:06 p.m.

Bell noted that language will be very important with the Unified Development Ordinance since the UDO has a broad audience. McLeod confirmed that Inspire uses plain English in its code writing wherever possible.

Hughes also mentioned the need to consolidate zoning districts, noting the town has too many for its size, and to increase flexibility for non-conforming lots, particularly in historic areas like West Hillsborough.

Schultz asked about page 19 of the annotated outline, which suggested adding the Historic District Commission to the UDO text amendment review process. Schultz asked what the goal of this would be, noting that it would add more steps to the administrative process. Hughes said he was not interested in involving the Historic District Commission in text amendment review.

Bell explained that involving the Historic District Commission could help ensure compatibility with best practices and Department of Interior standards, which impact tax credits and district designation. Schultz acknowledged the importance of history in Hillsborough but said he still had concerns about regulations in the Historic District, noting that those regulations can burden property owners, particularly low-income families.

Senior Planner Molly Boyle discussed opportunities for improvement, such as reducing the size of the Historic District to remove non-historic structures. She said this could help with administrative burden and provide greater development flexibility, particularly in West Hillsborough. She said she would speak with the planner who oversees the district and invite him to a future Planning Board meeting to discuss.

The boards generally discussed administrative procedures and public engagement. After confirming there were no further comments or questions, McLeod informed everyone about an upcoming public meeting on the Unified Development Ordinance project on Wednesday from 5-7 PM.

Mayor Bell and the Commissioners were excused at 8:31 p.m. Planning Board members remained for general updates.

5. Updates

A. Board of Adjustment

Iglesias reported the Board of Adjustment did not meet in July or August. He said a meeting was scheduled for September.

B. Parks and Recreation Board

Schultz reported that the Parks and Recreation Board did not meet in August. He noted that Stephanie Trueblood had been very busy dealing with Tropical Storm Chantal clean-up.

C. Staff and board members

Boyle introduced Sean Kehoe as the newest Planning Board member, who had previously served on the Board of Adjustment. She also informed the Planning Board that the October meeting would need to be rescheduled due to a conflict with the North Carolina American Planning Association conference. She proposed moving it to either October 23 or 30, saying she would follow up via email to determine availability.

6. Adjournment

Motion: Sean Kehoe moved to adjourn the meeting. Lawrence seconded.

Vote: 5-0. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Boyle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Molly Boyle, AICP, CZO

Senior Planner

Staff support to the Planning Board

Approved: September 18, 2025