

Minutes

PLANNING BOARD

Regular meeting

6:30 p.m. September 18, 2025

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



Present

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

Absent: Chair Frank Casadonte and member Tiffney Marley

Staff: Senior Planner Tom King and Senior Planner Molly Boyle

1. Call to order and confirmation of quorum

The meeting was called to order at 6:39 PM by Senior Planner Molly Boyle. She confirmed the presence of a quorum. In the absence of both the chair and vice chair, Boyle requested a motion to appoint a board member as chair for the meeting.

Motion: Member Sean Kehoe motioned to appoint Sherra Lawrence as chair for the meeting. Member Robert Iglesias seconded.

Vote: 4-0. Motion passed.

2. Agenda changes and approval

Lawrence asked if there were any agenda changes. Boyle recommended changing item 5A to 5C, explaining this would put the UDO rewrite discussion last since it would likely generate the most discussion.

Motion: Iglesias motioned to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Member Jeanette Benjey.

Vote: 4-0. Motion passed.

3. Approval of minutes

A. Minutes for Special Joint Meeting on August 21, 2025

Motion: Kehoe motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Benjey seconded.

Vote: 4-0. Motion passed.

4. Calendar changes and approval

A. Calendar change for October 2025

Boyle explained she would be attending a conference on October 16th. She had emailed the Planning Board in advance of the meeting about alternative dates, and October 23rd was the one that worked best for most members.

Motion: Benjey motioned to amend the calendar as proposed. Kehoe seconded.

Vote: 4-0. Motion passed.

5. Discussion items

A. Historic District Overlay and Historic District Commission

Boyle noted that, at the joint meeting in September, the boards discussed potential changes to the Historic District. She wanted to talk more about the district and those potential changes, since not all Planning Board members were familiar with the district.

Boyle said the Historic District was established in 1973 and is regulated as a zoning overlay district. Development in the district is subject to base zoning regulations. In addition, it is also subject to the town's Historic District Design Standards.

Boyle explained that the Historic District Commission reviews major works proposed in the district. The Historic District Commission is a quasi-judicial board with seven volunteer members serving three-year terms. Ideally, board members have expertise in relevant fields, like history, archaeology, historic preservation, or architecture.

Boyle shared images showing the proposed district boundary from 1973 versus the current boundary. She noted the current boundary excludes Gold Park, the Riverwalk, and the quarry property, which is mostly in floodplain. Senior Planner Tom King also noted that some local landmarks, such as Bellevue Mill, are outside the historic district boundary. However, they are still subject to Historic District Commission review because of their landmark status.

Iglesias noted that at the last meeting, some concerns were raised about the Historic District Commission and the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) rewrite. He asked for clarification about those concerns.

Boyle said the UDO consultant's annotated outline suggested involving the Historic District Commission in the UDO text amendment process. Some board members objected to this, saying it would add more time to the review process and was beyond the scope of the commission. Boyle noted the Historic District Commission was not currently involved in the UDO text amendment process, dealing only with amendments to the Historic District Design Standards.

King asked if Boyle could show the Historic District Design Standards to the board. Boyle shared the standards on the screen, briefly going over standards on exterior lighting, windows, doors, and roofs.

Vice-Chair Hooper Schultz arrived at 6:52 pm. Lawrence passed the gavel, and Schultz took over as acting chair.

Boyle briefly recapped the discussion. Schultz expressed concerns about the Historic District. He asked if property owners received benefits from being in the district and if those benefits justify the restrictions.

The board discussed potential tax benefits, with Schultz reading from the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office guidelines, which stated that landmark designation allows owners to apply for a 50% annual property tax deferral. Boyle and King noted the designation has no effect on local property taxes.

Sean Kehoe, who owns a historic property downtown, described the challenges of the regulations. He explained that to replace single-pane windows, he must use wood windows at a much higher cost, even though energy-efficient alternatives would better align with the town's sustainability goals.

Schultz expressed his opinion that the Historic District had become more of a burden on property owners than a public good since it was overly restrictive. He was also concerned that involving the Historic District Commission in legislative decisions was beyond its scope.

The board discussed the possibility of changing the Historic District boundaries, with Schultz asking whether such changes would require recertification from the state. King said the town would need to consult with the state to begin that process. The board also considered whether it might make more sense to designate specific properties rather than maintaining a larger, contiguous district. Boyle said staff would investigate the process for amending the boundary and follow up.

B. Orange County Land Use Plan update

Boyle said Orange County Planning Director Cy Stober would attend the meeting on October 23rd. He would discuss county planning and Orange County's Land Use Plan update project. Boyle noted the discussion was intended only for the Planning Board's benefit; the Planning Board would not be making a recommendation on the county's Land Use Plan in the future.

She explained the presentation would give board members the opportunity to think about planning rather than just zoning, which had been their primary focus for the past two years. It would also be informative as the board begins work on the UDO rewrite. For instance, understanding the vision for the unincorporated parts of the county could help inform the town's decisions on density regulations. Kehoe asked if the meeting could be recorded for those unable to attend. Boyle said she would investigate.

C. Unified Development Ordinance rewrite

King presented a "primer" on the UDO rewrite. He showed historical zoning maps of Hillsborough from 1947, 1968, 1972, 1979, 1986, and 2025. He explained how the town's zoning had evolved:

- In 1968: 9 base districts (3 residential, 3 commercial, 2 industrial, and a mobile home park)
- In 1979: 12 districts and 1 overlay district, with ETJ established
- In 1986: 12 base districts, 2 overlays, with additions including office institutional/multifamily districts
- In 2011: 19 base districts, 5 overlays, and 4 special use districts
- In 2025: 21 base districts, 1 conditional district (planned development), 3 overlays, and 7 special use districts (which can no longer be applied but still exist)

King focused on residential district consolidation possibilities, showing the similarities between different zoning districts:

- AR and R-40 districts have similar lot sizes (40,000 sq ft) with only minor differences
- R-20, R-15, and R-10 have similar uses with only 1 of 24 uses not allowed in R-20 and R-15
- R-15 and R-10 have the same setback requirements despite different minimum lot sizes

Schultz asked whether these residential zoning districts currently allow only single-family detached housing. King explained that duplexes and multi-family housing are allowed in most of the residential districts. However, the minimum lot size requirements effectively make it impractical to build multifamily housing in many of them.

The board discussed how the UDO rewrite might address these issues while ensuring compliance with Senate Bill 382 (Session Law 2024-57), which prohibits down zoning. King presented other topics for discussion:

- Should moderate density districts be combined?
- How should existing neighborhoods be addressed?
- How will expanded uses be accommodated?
- Should density be regulated by minimum lot size or by units per acre?
- How will increased density impact public services (water, sewer, schools)?
- Will allowing higher residential density in the historic district provide affordable housing or just encourage speculative development?

Boyle shared the UDO consultant's project timeline, which projected adoption by August 2026. She noted the project may take longer. She said staff would bring pieces of the UDO to the board throughout the process rather than presenting a complete draft all at once in April or May 2026.

6. Updates

A. Board of Adjustment

Robert Iglesias reported that at its last meeting, the Board of Adjustment considered a floodplain variance for the Orange County Board of Elections building on South Cameron Street. The County was seeking to build a loading ramp in the floodplain. The Board of Adjustment granted the variance.

B. Parks and Recreation Board

Hooper Schultz reported that the Parks and Recreation Board met on Tuesday and discussed the final draft for the Riverwalk master plan.

C. Staff and board members

Boyle announced that Carrie Winkler, who previously prepared minutes for the Planning Board, would be joining the board starting in October.

Boyle noted there was still one vacant extra-territorial jurisdiction seat. Also, Frank Casadonte would be rotating off the Planning Board in January after serving two full terms.

7. Adjournment

Motion: Kehoe motioned to adjourn the meeting. Sherra Lawrence seconded.

Vote: 5-0. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Molly Boyle, AICP, CZO
Senior Planner
Staff support to the Planning Board

Approved: October 23, 2025