



Town of Hopkinton **Planning/Building Department**

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HOPKINTON PLANNING BOARD MINUTES – WORK SESSION JANUARY 20, 2026

Members Present Chair Michael Wilkey, Ex-Officio Jeff Donohoe, Rob Dapice, Emily Bouchard, Jane Bradstreet, and Alternates Molly Hardenbergh, and Dean Owens. Members Absent: Vice Chair James Fredyma and Alternate Sam Durfee. Staff Present: Planning Director Karen Robertson.

I. Call to Order.

Chair Wilkey opened the Work Session and explained that its purpose was to review, discuss, and identify priorities for the Planning Board's 2026 Work Plan, including planning initiatives, Zoning Ordinance amendments, and amendments to the Subdivision Regulations and Site Plan Review Regulations.

II. Work Session.

Master Plan Natural Resources Chapter

The Planning Director noted two items under the category of Master Plan. First, development of the Natural Resources Chapter, noting that the Board previously agreed that Planning staff would work with the Conservation Commission and the Regional Planning Commission on this effort. Discussions have already begun with the Conservation Commission Chair with Ms. Robertson intending to schedule a meeting with the Commission to discuss how the work may proceed, including whether the effort would be handled by the full Commission, a subcommittee, or with an initial draft prepared by the Regional Planning Commission.

It was noted that the Conservation Commission had previously agreed to contribute funding toward the cost of this chapter, though the exact amount needs to be confirmed. The Board discussed establishing a target completion timeframe, with December 2026 identified as a reasonable deadline for the Natural Resources Chapter.

Master Plan Implementation Chapter

The Board discussed ongoing work related to the Master Plan Implementation Chapter. Planning staff will continue quarterly outreach to relevant boards, committees, and departments to request updates on progress, changes, or new information related to Master Plan goals and objectives. These updates are intended to ensure the Implementation Chapter remains current and reflective of ongoing initiatives.

Zoning Ordinance Amendments (2027)

A) Legislative Updates/Changes

Approved: 02/10/2026.

The Board discussed anticipated Zoning Ordinance amendments and the need to reserve time in the Work Plan for legislative updates or changes involving land use.

B) Housing Committee Recommendations

The Board discussed zoning amendments to be recommended by the Housing Committee as indicated in the December Housing Committee meeting minutes.

Table of Uses:

- Dwelling Multi-Family with a maximum of 4 dwelling units per building (not reflected in minutes, but per Planning Board/Housing Committee member Dean Owens – in 3.6 Table of Uses)
- Dwelling Single Family Attached with a maximum of 4 attached units on a lot (per Housing Committee 12/4/2025 Minutes - recommendation #6 in 3.6 Table of Uses)
- Conversion of an existing Single-Family Detached Dwelling to a Two-Family Dwelling (per 12/4/2025 Housing Committee Minutes - recommendation #9 in 3.6 Table of Uses)
- Conversion of an existing Single-Family Detached Dwelling to a Multi-Family Dwelling with a maximum of 4 units per building. (per Housing Committee 12/4/2025 Minutes - recommendation #10 in 3.6 Table of Uses)

It is understood that four potential amendments were identified. Ms. Robertson noted that one amendment (two-family dwelling) may be redundant or already referenced in the ordinance, though clearer language may be needed to ensure that new development and/or conversions are adequately addressed. It is anticipated that the Housing Committee will submit a formal recommendation, likely in January or early February, with March identified as the latest practical timeframe to allow the Planning Board sufficient time to review, draft, and process amendments for the 2027 Town Meeting.

The Board reiterated that the Planning Board will be responsible for drafting ordinance language and noted that the role of the Housing Committee is to identify issues, priorities, and rationale rather than prepare draft ordinance text. Chair Wilkey emphasized the importance of focusing on amendments that are meaningful and impactful, particularly those that could increase housing opportunities.

The discussion clarified that the Housing Committee's current recommendations are limited to specific items in the Table of Uses and do not extend to broader ordinance sections, such as Affordable Housing. It was understood that any changes to those sections would be initiated by the Planning Board.

C) Affordable Housing Provisions

The Board discussed prior conversations regarding the Affordable Housing provisions in the Zoning Ordinance, including whether the section should be rewritten or revised. It was noted that this could be a significant policy decision requiring time, careful consideration, and possibly outside planning assistance. The

Board agreed to include Affordable Housing as a potential item for 2026 review within the Work Plan.

D) Conservation Subdivision Ordinance

Some Board members expressed concern that recent conservation subdivision applications are not producing the development outcomes originally intended by the ordinance. Discussion focused on the lack of sufficient incentives for developers to pursue conservation-style designs, resulting instead in frontage-based layouts that still technically comply with the ordinance.

The Board discussed road construction costs, developer incentives, frontage requirements, and the balance between open space preservation and development yield. It was agreed that the conservation subdivision provisions should be added to the Work Plan for further review to assess whether amendments are needed to better align outcomes with intended goals.

Members briefly referenced recent site visits to conservation subdivision proposals, including observations related to driveway access, traffic, and an existing roadway intersection. Shortly after the discussion began, the Board acknowledged that this was neither the appropriate time nor the appropriate meeting to consider or discuss an application, and the discussion was promptly concluded.

E) Solar Energy Ordinance

The Board identified the Solar Ordinance as a potential “light lift” amendment that could be reviewed and updated, noting that certain provisions may be outdated or in need of clarification. Note: Recommendations of SolSmart Audit – whether roof-mounted solar should be exempt from height restrictions; removal of the requirement of a glare study, and reconsideration of visual barrier requirements.

F) Manufactured Housing Ordinance

The Board discussed recent changes in state law related to manufactured housing and the obligation to provide reasonable opportunities for expansion or development of Manufactured Housing. Members agreed that this area should be reviewed to ensure Hopkinton’s Zoning Ordinance remains compliant and up to date.

G) Wetlands Buffer Amendments

The Board discussed the importance of monitoring recently proposed, and if adopted, wetlands buffer changes. The Board agreed that the ordinance concerning wetlands buffers should be evaluated over time to assess effectiveness and implementation.

H) Conditional Use and Special Use Permit Consistency

The Planning Director noted that certain provisions of the ordinance require Special Use Permits where Conditional Use Permits may be more appropriate, citing telecommunications facilities as an example. The Board agreed that internal consistency between permitting mechanisms should be reviewed as part of future ordinance updates.

I) Industrial District – Residential Uses (Fougere/Resilience Report)

The Board discussed the potential conflict between residential uses and industrial districts, noting examples where residential development near industrial operations has resulted in complaints and land use conflicts. While no immediate action was identified, the topic was raised as a potential future policy discussion due to its complexity and potential debate.

Subdivision/Site Plan Review Regulations

- A)** The Board discussed the need to update **road construction standards** reflected in the Subdivision Regulations, with Ms. Robertson noting that the provisions appear to be outdated and inconsistent with the recommendations of the Director of Public Works. Topics identified for review include gravel depth standards, cul-de-sac versus hammerhead designs to accommodate plowing and emergency vehicles. Additionally, Ms. Robertson identified the **financial security provisions** as needing to be revised. These provisions require updating to reflect current practices. It was noted that these changes can be handled through the Planning Board's regulatory process rather than Town Meeting.

Additional Discussion**A) Private Roads**

The possibility of allowing private roads was discussed as part of a broader conversation on subdivision design and cost reduction. It was noted that some communities allow private roads subject to specific construction, maintenance, and liability standards, often requiring homeowners' associations.

Concerns were discussed about long-term maintenance, emergency access, plowing, homeowner associations, and potential future pressure for the Town to accept private roads as public ways. It was agreed that any exploration of this topic would include discussions with the Department of Public Works and emergency services. The Board agreed to list private roads as a topic for evaluation in 2026.

B) Class VI Road Policy

The Planning Director reviewed prior discussions regarding a Class VI Road policy, noting that many communities have adopted formal policies through their Select Boards. It was agreed that this topic is not a zoning matter but could be explored further, with the understanding that any policy would ultimately be considered by the Select Board.

III. Adjournment.

The Work Session concluded after all members were given the opportunity to raise topics for consideration.

MOTION made by Jane Bradstreet, seconded by Jeff Donohoe to adjourn the Work Session at 6:15 PM. Motion carried unanimously in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Robertson
Planning Director