

SOUTH HERO PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

April 16, 2025

Members Present: David Roy (Chair); Don Bedard (Vice-Chair); Michele Gammal; Joan Falcao; Brooke Scott.

Others Present: Martha Taylor-Varney, ZA

6:01PM – **D. Roy** called the meeting to order.

Changes to the Agenda

There were no changes.

Public Comment

M. Gammal announced Bike for the Lake, a bike-ride fundraiser for Friends of Northern Lake Champlain, will be held Saturday, June 14.

Continue Discussion on Act 181

The Board felt that participation in the April 2nd public meeting was very good. The ¼ mile radius from the 2 village centers proposed in the maps produced by Northwest Regional Planning Commission represent the area within which development of up to 50 dwellings would be exempt from Act 250. These areas are interim and will expire in 2027, after which the Selectboard can choose to opt in, keeping these areas exempt. Minor additional areas are proposed to be added to the village centers, in addition to “village areas” surrounding the centers. The Commission members felt that there was no downside to adding these properties. Should they make a recommendation to the Selectboard to opt in? **J. Falcao** recommended that the exempt area not be bigger than shown on the interim map.

The Commission felt that the housing projections for South Hero (86-137 by 2030, and 158-311 by 2050) were not realistic because of the number of units created by Bayview Crossing (30). The ability to build more senior or multi housing is limited by a lack of resources and septic. **J. Falcao** said she’d like to see more senior housing with no income restriction but can’t guarantee what will be available in the future. **M. Gammal** expressed a need for starter homes.

D. Bedard moved to recommend to the Selectboard to approve the proposed map for the village center; **J. Falcao** second. All in favor. **D. Roy** will attend the next Selectboard meeting with the Commission’s recommendation.

J. Falcao asked if the exemption for Act 250 would have a long-term advantage for South Hero. Are we losing any environmental protections under Act 181? No, the DRB will review all applications per the Development Regulations and any required environmental reviews will still be handled by ANR/DEC. Additionally, it was noted that the dimensional standards for the Village zoning districts (Table 2.3) include no information about percentage of green space. That will need to be reviewed before the next update to the Regulations.

Old Business

Average Natural Grade/Pre-Construction Elevation: The Commission continued to review the definitions from other Towns, compiled by **M. Gammal**. She asked the group to define “finish Grade” and how to calculate height. **D. Roy** said that “pre-construction” is different from “finish grade”. **D. Bedard** said that natural grade is determined from the earliest documentation of the property (subdivision surveys or site plans). The Commission agreed that measuring height should be determined from the average elevation of 4 or more equidistant points. This discussion will continue at the next meeting.

Multi-Modal Path/Lavin Property: **J. Falcao** joined the South Hero Land Trust and the Conservation Commission on a walk around the Lavin parcel on Tuesday (April 15). She said there were some mowed paths and that the land was quite wet. Some trails could connect to the rec area behind the Folsom school. She thinks there is a lot of recreation value to the property. The Commission members feel that the Selectboard needs to be part of the planning with the Planning Commission, Rec Commission, Conservation Commission, and the Land Trust.

New Business

New FEMA Flood Risk Maps: ZA M. Taylor Varney is meeting with Shaun Coleman of Northwest Regional Planning Commission to access the map for South Hero. The maps will initially be reviewed by the Selectboard, Planning Commission, and DRB. **J. Falcao** suggested adding Road Commissioner John Roy to that list. After the initial review, the maps will be further reviewed and updated by FEMA before being made available for public review after several months (perhaps an optimistic schedule).

Review of Minutes

D. Bedard moved to approve the minutes of April 2, 2025, as written; **M. Gammal** second. All in favor.

Administrator’s Report

- 1. Martha attended a Zoning Roundtable hosted by NRPC on April 10. Discussion included cannabis regulation and a recent Vermont Supreme Court ruling related to deeded rights-of-way/easements for subdivision review. The next Roundtable will be in October.

Announcements

- A. **Meeting House:** The Commission discussed available grants and restrictions related to historical grants. Does the Meeting House have a historical designation, which would require any renovation to meet specific historical standards? No.
- B. **New Town Office:** Nothing to report.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be May 7, 2025 at 6PM.

Adjournment

Brooke Scott moved to adjourn; **J. Falcao** second. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Martha Taylor-Varney, ZA

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____

For the Planning Commission

These minutes are unofficial until approved at the next regularly scheduled meeting. All motions were unanimous unless otherwise indicated.