



TOWN OF WARNER

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Planning Board Meeting Minutes

June 16, 2025, 7:00 PM

Lower Meeting Room Warner Town Hall 5 E Main St

I. OPEN MEETING / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chair Karen Coyne called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. ROLL CALL

Planning Board Member	Present	Absent
Karen Coyne, Chair	✓	
James Gaffney	✓	
Pier D'Aprile	✓	
Barak Greene, Vice Chair	✓	
Ian Rogers	✓	
Harry Seidel – Select Board	✓	
John Leavitt	✓	
Bob Holmes – Alternate	✓	
Micah Thompson – Alternate	✓	

III. NON-PUBLIC SESSION

None

James Gaffney made a motion seconded by Pier D'Aprile to instruct the Planning Board Chair to request the Select Board appoint a new ex officio member to the Planning Board.

Discussion on the motion: Ian Rogers asked for an explanation for this request. James Gaffney stated that a lot has transpired over the last 6 months plus the fact that Harry Seidel is now the Select Board Chair. Ian Rogers asked James Gaffney if he would like to elaborate on what has transpired over the last 6 months. James Gaffney declined at this point in time. Pier D'Aprile explained that he thinks it is best that Harry Seidel focus on the bigger and more important issues. He stated there have been a few items that came up recently (the Odd Fellow building, issues with the building inspector regarding setbacks and as built). He stated this would free up time for Harry Seidel to focus on more important issues. James Gaffney concurred.

Ian Rogers stated that the Odd Fellows building is a complicated situation and he wonders if there is a different reason that this was proposed. He questioned if this is an attempt to try and sway the Planning Board's opinion in a certain manner by putting a different Select Board member on the Planning Board. James Gaffney asked Ian Rogers to be specific. Ian Rogers stated that he believes that when Harry was nominated as Select Board Chair it was a surprise to people. James Gaffney requested Ian Rogers be specific. Ian Rogers stated that he assumes Mike Smith and the Town Administrator were surprised. James Gaffney stated that he is looking for specifics not a feeling relating to what sounds like an allegation. Ian Rogers explained that the allegations that he is making is that some people were surprised and that there is an attempt to sway the Planning Board in a certain way. He stated that he does not believe it is a coincidence that the contentious issue of the housing chapter is almost finished and other housing matters on the table. Ian Rogers stated that in the past there have been some people who were very concerned about the number of Planning Board voting members who agree with them on certain matters. Ian Rogers referred to an example when the Planning Board Chair made a request to the Select Board that John Leavitt be elevated to a fill

1 Andy Bodnarik's seat and that was a specific attempt to recommend that a certain member be elevated.
2 Karen Coyne explained that is the responsibility of the Chair pursuant to the RSA.

3
4 Pier D'Aprile stated that speaking only for himself, his comments have nothing to do with feelings or the fact
5 that Harry recently got promoted to Select Board Chair. He reiterated that he believes this will free time up
6 for Harry to spend more time on bigger items. He gave an example of the issues that are related to land use
7 with the building inspector. He stated that it would be better to focus on that and help preserve and reduce
8 legal expenses and be proactive in those areas. Pier D'Aprile stressed that speaking for himself this not
9 politically motivated, friend or foe, or pet projects. He stated that it is about Harry's freedom to address
10 other issues. He stated that this is not a performance evaluation for Harry or anyone else. Pier D'Aprile
11 stated that the Odd Fellow Building is a good example and to Harry's defense he was not here in 2017 when
12 the exemption was granted or when the permit was issued which has been expired for 5-6 years. Pier
13 D'Aprile stated that Harry has been on the Select Board and the Planning Board for the last few years and
14 this is an example of a major gap. He stated that a new fresh set of eyes from the Select Board ex officio
15 member will be beneficial.

16
17 Barak Greene stated that in the past Harry Seidel has served on the Planning Board while serving as Select
18 Board Chair. He acknowledged that there were issues that should have been addressed but were not Harry's
19 fault but perhaps with more of Harry's attention could be avoided. Ian Rogers spoke of Harry's strengths
20 relating being an engineer and his technical knowledge on things like drainage and driveways and site plan
21 reviews. Harry Seidel stated that he does not have a particular agenda. He stated that he wants Warner to be
22 a town of coherent growth and to be an affordable place to live. Harry Seidel stressed that he has given all
23 that he has to being a Selectmen. He acknowledged the difficulties that come with being one of three
24 selectmen. Harry Seidel stated that the Odd Fellows building, land use or building permits are not items that
25 the Select Board has the capacity, authority or responsibility to effect. He stated that a Selectmen can only
26 look at a situation from all sides and try to diffuse tensions. Harry Seidel stated that he is a little hurt. He
27 stated that he takes responsibility when mistakes are made.

28
29 John Leavitt stated that the issue he has is because of the time he spends on the Select Board he comes to the
30 Planning Board unprepared. He referred to a recent application that Harry Seidel stated he hasn't had time to
31 review the application.

32
33 Pier D'Aprile assured Harry Seidel that his intentions are not to be hurtful, he acknowledged that Harry's
34 intentions are good but sometimes his actions counter that. He spoke about the significant increase in
35 building permit fees. Ian Rogers stated that John Leavitt's comments speak to the importance of
36 professionalism among board members. He cautioned against singling out certain members.

37
38 **Barak Greene made a motion seconded by James Gaffney to call the vote. The motion passed, Ian**
39 **Rogers voted in the negative.**

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41 **Roll Call VOTE on the original motion: Ian Rogers NO, John Leavitt YES, Pier D'Aprile YES, James**
42 **Gaffney YES, Barak Greene YES, Karen Coyne YES and Harry Seidel NO. Vote Tally 5 YES 2 NO**

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44 Harry Seidel responded to John Leavitt's comments. He assured the Board that he has reviewed every
45 application that has come before the Planning Board. He takes exception with the suggestion that he was not
46 prepared. Harry Seidel spoke to the suggestion that he increased the building permit fees. He explained that
47 he and Michael Smith worked together on revising the building permit. He stated that as it relates to the fee
48 structure he had much lower fees in mind than Michael. Harry Seidel explained that he reviewed the
49 surrounding town's permit fees. He stated that Michael Smith was looking for ways to increase revenue for
50 the town and he understands that. He spoke about the need to cover the Town's costs. James Gaffney asked
51 Harry Seidel to make available the cost analysis he used.

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IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Kathy Frenette Town Administrator clarified that earlier Harry Seidel had asked if she was came to meeting. She stated that she had not planned on attending but as a break from her computer work she came down.

V. NEW BUSINESS

None

VI. REVIEW MINUTES: April 7, April 21, May 5, June 2

April 7, 2025 minutes were tabled to review the zoom video for clarification.

April 21, 2025 minutes were tabled to review the zoom video for clarification.

Ian Rogers made a motion seconded by Barak Greene to approve the minutes of May 5, 2025 as amended. Motion passed 6-0

Ian Rogers made a motion seconded by Barak Greene to approve the minutes of June 2, 2025 as amended. Motion passed unanimously.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Housing Chapter Master Plan Draft - Review/Discussion – James’ Edit.

The Planning Board discussed the edits submitted by James Gaffney. James Gaffney explained that his proposed edits speak to what has happened since the last rewrite of the housing chapter in the Master Plan. He stated that he is providing context. James Gaffney’s proposed edit:

Current housing environment: Since the 2011 Planning Board update to the Master Plan, housing vacancy rates throughout New Hampshire remained stable while prices rose slowly until late 2020.

Since 2020 prices have increased sharply while available inventory has decreased.

In early 2024, the median purchase price for homes in Warner rose to \$420,000. Vacancy rates for all rental units were .7%, and the Merrimack County median monthly gross rent for a two-bedroom unit was \$1,500. The lack of housing stock and rising prices make it difficult to find an affordable place to live, or even to afford and maintain one’s existing home.

The observed decrease in availability and increase in price is a national phenomenon that is principally a product of policy decisions at the federal level. Increased cost of existing housing is a function of increased demand for the available pool of housing that has accelerated since 2020.

Increased cost of new housing is principally a consequence of inflation and interest rates caused entirely by federal policy.

At the local level, the increase in the municipal tax rate in excess of 30% has contributed to lack of affordable housing in Warner.

Ian Rogers noted that the housing vacancy rates for the 10 years before 2020 were slowly going down, in 2020 the vacancy rates began to rise sharply. James Gaffney noted that the point is that things were relatively stable, there were no extreme swings in the housing environment. Ian Rogers stated from 2010 to 2020 the state lost 2800 units from 32,000 to 29,000 which is almost 10%. James Gaffney clarified that those were available units. He stated that that speaks to relatively modest change indicating things were relatively stable throughout the state. Ian Rogers noted that the report he saw from New Hampshire Housing marks it as a fairly significant change. James Gaffney stated that New Hampshire Housing is trying to push for housing.

Micah Thompson asked for clarification on the point of this edit. He is unclear why Warner on a local level would blame the Federal Government. James Gaffney explained that this is to address or highlight the tools that Warner has to influence the cost of housing. James Gaffney stated that there is very little the Town can do outside of controlling property taxes. James Gaffney explained that his edit provides historical context from the time the housing chapter was rewritten.

Harry Seidel disagrees with the first statement in the proposed edit. He stated that the New Hampshire housing vacancy rates experienced a decline from 2011 to 2020 that contributed to a tightening of the rental

1 market and increased rental costs. Harry Seidel noted that there was a shift in demographics where higher
2 income households were buying up properties that also contributed to lower vacancy rates and higher
3 housing costs. He acknowledged that inflation and higher interest rates caused by the Federal Reserve
4 policies have impacted housing. Harry Seidel stated that that cannot dictate the role and aspiration of
5 Warner's Master Plan. Harry Seidel feels the proposed edit is a personal position and it should be focused on
6 what Warner can control to make improvements. Karen Coyne stated that the discussion should not include
7 a personal opinion. Pier D'Aprile explained that the edit speaks to the significant change that occurred since
8 2020 on a macro level that was beyond Warner's control. Pier D'Aprile stated that at a local level the tax
9 rate increased 30%. Harry Seidel noted that Warner's municipal portion of the tax rate for 2024 increased
10 .79 cents (7.687%).
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12 Micah Thompson stated that a determination needs to be made if Warner wants more people to move to
13 Town or not. He spoke about his experience as a builder who works every day with people who want and
14 are looking for housing opportunities. He spoke about the local challenges relating to setbacks and zoning
15 rules that add to the difficulties. Barak Greene stated that the Planning Board does not make that decision.
16 He stated that in the past people have tried to stop people from coming to Warner. He believes there is a
17 touch of gentrification going on. Barak Greene spoke about the Town's difficulty in finding people to work
18 and the lack of housing could be a factor in that. He stated that people who are plumbers, electricians and
19 carpenters are leaving and going to places where they can afford a home.
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21 Ian Rogers agreed with Pier D'Aprile's comments on the impact that the Federal policies have had on the
22 affordability of housing. He agreed with Micah Thompson that there are areas that the Town can control
23 when it comes to making it easier for people to build. Ian Rogers would like to see the proposed edit draw
24 more attention to the kind of things that the Town can control.
25

26 Barak Greene spoke about the rising cost of building materials and other contributing factors. James
27 Gaffney stated that inflation covered it, he stated that the Covid phenomenon and supply chain issues were
28 also significant factors. Barak Greene stated that an increase in the cost of insurance should be included.
29 James Gaffney stated that he is open to an amendment.
30

31 Bob Holmes stated that he does not like the proposed edit as it blames the federal government and does not
32 address the purpose of the master plan regarding what the Town can do. Karen Coyne pointed out that this is
33 just a single entry statement that is then followed up with 50 pages of what the Town can do. She stated that
34 this is not replacing the housing chapter. Bob Holmes would prefer a statement that says something to the
35 effect that the following factors should be considered as contributing factors. Harry Seidel would prefer a
36 different tone in the edit. He would like to come at it from the perspective of what a new buyer wants in a
37 community; good schools, small-town feel, and a nice environment instead of saying the federal policies are
38 causing us to have a problem. Harry Seidel stressed the benefit of looking at what we do have to help figure
39 out how to make the Town's ordinances flexible and more accommodating.
40

41 Karen Coyne reminded the Board that this is only a preamble. She stated that the entire housing chapter goes
42 into all the recommendations. She stated that she likes the suggestion from Bob Holmes listing the factors.
43 James Gaffney stated that he would be happy to come back with a list of things, he clarified that his intention
44 was to keep it brief. Pier D'Aprile stated that he has two observations, 1) that in this town we are getting the
45 big things wrong and we argue about the little things. Pier D'Aprile elaborated by speaking about the
46 approved 20-million-dollar bond for the water district which works out to roughly 200 meters across
47 commercial and housing. He stated that this is an area where he challenges the Select Board to get things
48 right at the higher level rather than worry about the political feelings of someone's sentence. 2) Pier
49 D'Aprile stated that the role of a Planning Board member is not to put in our opinions here. He stated that
50 Planning Board members are servants of the community. He stated that the Housing Authority provided a

1 very nice document and it is clear that Warner residents want more housing but they do not want large
2 apartment buildings.

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4 James Gaffney spoke to the tax rate increase noting that in 2021 the municipal portion was \$8.50 and in 2024
5 the municipal portion was \$11.07. He considers that to be a massive increase in taxes. Ian Rogers concurred
6 with Bob Holmes about the scope of the edit. He agrees with Pier D'Aprile about focusing on what the
7 Planning Board can do. Barak Greene stated that this is not the first time in history that housing is difficult to
8 obtain. He stated that the Town could give consideration to multifamily homes. Barak Greene asked if there
9 was a way to revise the proposed edit into one concise sentence. James Gaffney offered to withdraw the
10 proposed edit, and he will come back with edits that incorporate some of the suggestions made. John Leavitt
11 suggested adding "relatively stable" to the first sentence. He stated that this preamble speaks to how difficult
12 it is for a town to offset what the Government is doing. He explained that the remaining housing chapter
13 provides ideas of what the Town can do. He stated that this edit sets the groundwork for the rest of the
14 chapter. John Leavitt stated that the rest of the housing chapter will have suggestions of what the Town can
15 do but from a practical standpoint those suggestions will never be done. He agreed that it is nice to say the
16 Town can do some things but unless it is clear how the Town can accomplish something, it is not practical.
17 Ian Rogers agreed with John about focusing on what can be done proactively. James Gaffney stated that he
18 will make revisions to his proposed edit. He challenged the Planning Board to go through the
19 recommendations in the document and assign a measure of efficacy or impact.
20

21 **VII. COMMUNICATIONS**

22 Karen Coyne informed the Board that late today the quote from Aries Engineering was received to review
23 the Peacock site plan. She stated the quote is \$5,000, and as part of this quote they are willing to attend a
24 meeting for one hour. She explained that if in the future the Board prefers to engage another engineer, an
25 RFP is required. Karen Coyne advised the Board that the letter from Peacock has been received requesting
26 an extension. Karen Coyne stated she has received CIP from the Assessing Department and Town Clerk
27 Office.

28 Barak Greene informed the Board that the State just passed a law that prohibits a bond on a subdivision. He
29 stated that it is allowed on site plan construction. Barak Greene stated that the reclamation bond amount
30 would need to be determined by the engineer. He stated that would be a good bond to consider for protection
31 of the Town.

32 Karen Coyne stated that the applicant has sent an email offering to the Planning Board to walk through the
33 situation in Sutton. She advised the Board that she is still waiting to hear back from the town's attorney to
34 determine if the Planning Board can consider the applicant's previous build in their consideration.
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36 **VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT**

37 Ian Rogers explained that the Board has been making minor edits to the housing chapter for the last 8
38 months. He asked in the 8 months how much has been productive conversation and how much is kicking the
39 can down the road and not approving the chapter. Ian Rogers stated that this ties into the questions of where
40 the Planning Board is going, what progress is the Planning Board making towards helping the town, what
41 kind of planning is the Board doing? Ian Rogers stated that much of the conversation over the past 8 months
42 has been less than productive. He would like to see the Planning Board move expeditiously towards
43 approving the chapter. James Gaffney stated that it will be ready when it is ready. Pier D'Aprile stated that
44 one of the issues facing the Board is that people are not listening to one another, they are talking over each
45 other. He explained that during this meeting a lot of time was wasted arguing about semantics and missing
46 the big picture. He questioned how the group can come together when there are such divides. Ian Rogers
47 agreed, noting that it would be beneficial to figure out a way for the Board to have conversations about
48 values, the future, and the master plan to determine as a Town what they would like to see. He stated that is
49 why he suggested looking at the master plan as a whole.

50 **IX. ADJOURN**

1 The meeting adjourned at 8:42 PM.
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3 Respectfully submitted on June 19, 2025 by Tracy Doherty
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DRAFT