

Town of Hancock, Maine

**MINUTES OF APRIL 17, 2025 PLANNING BOARD MEETING
AND PUBLIC HEARING**

Board Members: Doug Kimmel, Ken Emerson, Scott Dyer, Meredith Akerstein, Deb Foster, Ant Blasi; CEO Kevin Brodie; Assistant CEO Nick Branca

Public Participants: Chris Holmes, George Moon, Sam DiBella, Rusty Goodwin, Catherine Ednie, David Johnson, Brett Ciccotelli, Renee Duncan, Ruth Franzius, Rod Franzius, Austin Schuver, Ron Schwizer, Dustin Tracy, Richard Tracy.

Doug Kimmel called the meeting to order at 6:05.

1. Public Hearing: Proposed rezoning of former Tannery site and adjacent properties between Joy Road and Route 182

Doug explained that the Selectboard had asked the Planning Board to consider rezoning properties in this area from commercial and rural undeveloped to industrial. He drew the audience's attention to three maps of proposed options and a schedule of uses indicating what activities are permitted and not permitted in each of the three zones. He asked if a member of the Selectboard was present to explain its proposal. No Selectperson was present, and Assistant CEO Nick Branca spoke on the Selectboard's behalf.

Nick said that the Selectboard wanted to sell the remediated Tannery site and return it to the tax roll. It thought that rezoning the property and adjacent ones to industrial might make the property more attractive to prospective buyers and bring more jobs and full-time residents to Hancock.

Doug said that though much of the profit from selling the Tannery site would go to the site's previous owner, not to the Town, the Selectboard thought that rezoning it and adjacent properties to industrial might encourage processing and other activities that would increase the tax revenue the Town would realize from it.

CEO Kevin Brodie said that processing rock at the quarries on adjacent properties might reduce traffic on Route 1, which trucks currently use to carry

rock to a processing facility across from Hancock Heights.

Doug invited comment from the audience. Ant Blasi asked if abutters had been notified of this public hearing. Doug said they had been notified and that the hearing had been advertised. Two abutters in the audience raised their hands.

Brett Ciccotelli cautioned that the area under consideration is unique because Kilkenny Stream and Meadow Brook converge there. The Planning Board and the Hancock community should consider the possible effects of rezoning on these streams, as well as the most beneficial uses to which this area can be put.

Nick said, "The Selectboard would be just as happy if just the Tannery was rezoned."

Doug noted that he had forgotten to begin the meeting with conflict of interest recusals and a quorum call, and a motion to begin the public hearing. There were no recusals, and all Planning Board members were present. Scott Dyer moved, retroactively, to begin the public hearing, Meredith Akerstein seconded, and the motion passed, 5-0.

Hancock County Planning Commissioner Sam DiBella, a former Selectboard member, said money was tight and would probably get tighter, so it was important to get the Tannery back on the tax roll.

Hancock Road Commissioner George Moon said he would "take the blame" for suggesting "inviting the neighbors in" and rezoning a larger area than just the Tannery site. He recalled how the area in question had once been a hive of timber harvesting and processing.

Audience members cited increased tax revenue, more jobs and more full-time residents as reasons to support rezoning. Brett Ciccotelli noted that other uses of the area might yield comparable benefits.

As reasons to oppose the rezoning, Meredith cited possible increases in noise and traffic. Ken Emerson asked whether the rezoning might discourage the building new residential housing. Nick said the Town was running out of spaces where new businesses could locate without occupying land that might otherwise be used for housing.

Austen Schuver said another possible reason to oppose the rezoning was that it was jumping ahead to the Comprehensive Plan.

George Moon said that today environmental protection regulations are so stringent and technology so sophisticated that rezoning is unlikely to cause significant pollution.

Doug asked whether members of the audience preferred the minimal proposed rezoning (just the Tannery site), the maximum proposed rezoning (from stream to stream) or a midsized rezoning. A raise of hands showed that eight people, including the two abutters, preferred the maximum option, one preferred rezoning only the Tannery site, and none preferred the midsized option.

Ken said it was important to ask how many people opposed all the rezoning options. Seven people (including Planning Board alternate Ant Blasi) opposed all the rezoning options.

Doug said that this voting was for informational purposes, and that only at a subsequent Town meeting would people have an opportunity to cast a real, dispositive vote.

Meredith moved to close the public meeting, Deb Foster seconded, and the motion passed, 5-0. The entire audience departed, although they were told the Planning Board meeting was open to the public and they were welcome to stay.

2. Discussion of rezoning proposal and next steps

Deb moved to report to the Selectboard the results of the audience's straw vote.

Ken seconded, and the motion passed, 5-0.

Ken asked whether the Planning Board felt it was prepared to make a recommendation regarding the rezoning proposal. Meredith said she would like more input from a second public hearing, especially because many people could not attend a meeting on Maundy Thursday. Kevin said that according to Town ordinances, the Planning Board had 60 days within which to vote a proposal up or down, but it could schedule another public hearing within that time frame. If a majority of the Planning Board voted for rezoning, a majority of the subsequent public vote could approve it. If the Planning Board voted against rezoning, two-thirds of the public vote would be required to approve it.

Ant said it was telling that the two abutters supported the maximum rezoning. He suggested the Planning Board ask the Selectboard to conduct a second hearing.

Doug asked for a “straw poll” of whether board members favored rezoning at this time. Deb and Scott said they did, Scott pointing out that rezoning properties from rural undeveloped to commercial or industrial would permit a lot of businesses, from a bank to a greenhouse, behind the Tannery site in addition to mining and blasting, albeit still subject to Planning Board approval.

Kevin said that the Planning Board could provide additional protection to the two streams by enacting stronger environmental measures than the state requires.

Meredith and Doug said they supported rezoning.

Ken said that since Nick had said the Selectboard was not in a rush, he was not convinced the Planning Board should act independently from or prior to the new Comprehensive Plan.

Deb said there was no telling when a new Comprehensive Plan would be

completed.

Doug, who co-chairs the committee developing the new Comprehensive Plan, said it could be completed in two years, but that it “would not necessarily shed any light on this sort of thing anyway.... I would not wait for the Comprehensive Plan on this.”

If that is the case, Ken said, and if we can enact more stringent environmental measures to protect the two streams as Brett Ciccotelli and Kevin suggested, I could support rezoning in principle without approving a particular proposal, which the Selectboard has not submitted.

Deb suggested and Doug and Scot agreed that the Board support the maximum rezoning option because, among other things, the streams clearly define its boundaries. It was noted, however, that none of the current maps shows that all of the lots bordering Route 1 except for the Tannery site would remain commercial. And the shore protection zones are depicted inaccurately.

Board members agreed they could not approve a rezoning proposal without an accurate map. Deb moved that the Planning Board send a letter to the Selectboard stating that it is in favor of rezoning and will present a proposal when it has reviewed and approved a map that represents accurately the areas it recommends rezoning. Meredith seconded, and the motion passed, 5-0.

3. Schedule workshop meeting on ECO revisions

The Board agreed to review Ken’s revised signage ordinances at its next regular meeting, and Kevin and Sandy’s ECO revisions at a workshop meeting in May.

4. Adjourn

Ken moved to adjourn, Deb seconded, the motion passed 5-0, and the meeting adjourned at 7:50.