

Town of Starksboro
Planning Commission meeting
February 13, 2020
Approved

Board members present: Dennis Casey, Jeff Keeney, Brad Boss, Denny Barnard, Dan Nugent, Dan Harris, Rodney Orvis
Others present: Rebecca Elder (ZA)

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Chair Dennis Casey.

No visitor's business.

No changes to the agenda.

PC Current Business

Review of minutes of 1/16/2020

Motion: Jeff Keeney moved to approve the minutes of 1/16/20. Brad Boss second.

Motion carried.

Tax Sales and Delinquent Taxes

The Selectboard was presented with a list of delinquent taxes and properties that could be put up for tax sale in 2020. The Selectboard requested some additional research about the town's options for the growing list of mobile home owners with delinquent taxes.

Dennis Casey and Amy McCormick (Delinquent Tax Collector) met with Hinesburg officials to discuss how that town handles similar delinquent tax challenges. The parks in Starksboro are owned by Addison County Community Trust (ACCT), an organization that rents the lots to individuals. ACCT pays its taxes on the land. Local property and education taxes have been hard to collect on some lots and, in some cases, the delinquency has continued for years. When taxes cannot be collected, the Selectboard can choose to put the property/residence up for tax sale. In the case of older mobile homes, there is little value remaining and the homes will likely not be purchased. At that point, the town is left in a position of losing tax revenue and the local education taxes are also left unpaid. An additional issue can arise if a mobile park tenant is evicted and the home is abandoned. Then the park is left with the old home to clean up and remove and the town must abate the taxes.

Hinesburg reported nearly 50% of their mobile homes have delinquent tax balances.

The Planning Commission discussed a variety of ideas to help address this growing problem. D. Casey said the town needs to know what its rights are in order to pursue other solutions.

Some suggestions included:

- Could a formula be used to calculate the annual taxes for each rental lot within a park so that the amount would be consistent and easier to budget from year to year?
- Could the town choose to buy the older mobile homes?

Next steps:

- D. Casey and Rebecca Elder will talk further with Amy McCormick to compose a letter to the Addison County legislators or request a meeting with them to describe the problem and request assistance.

- The Town can ask the legislators to consider how to change the structure to help municipalities prevent this problem in the future. For example, could mobile homes be taxed like a car when purchased? Could a formula be applied to make annual taxes more predictable for lot renters?
- Research what is happening in other Addison County towns and talk with other municipal delinquent tax collectors about their solutions.

Community Engagement discussion continued

The PC continued its discussion about community engagement in Starksboro and where they could be most helpful and effective.

The PC wants to help ensure there is open recreational space in town for use by the sports program and town residents. Cota field has faced major flooding challenges in the last few years and the baseball and softball teams have been unable to use the ballfields for a few spring seasons due to the condition of the fields. Denny Casey, Peg Casey, and Rebecca Elder met with the field representative from the Vermont Land Trust to ask about parameters for making some parking and drainage improvements to the Cota field area. Due to the restrictions of the conservation easement and the Lewis Creek meander zone, the drainage needed is not possible. Expansion of the parking area is also restricted. These two factors make the future of spring sports at Cota field unknown.

The PC plans to talk to the Selectboard about the parcel of town-owned land behind the school, near the solar panels. The board would like to discuss and developing a proposal for how to use that land with its proximity being close to the school and more established parking. D. Casey will approach the Selectboard about the idea. A survey and site plan is needed to determine what would be possible.

Sugar on Snow activities:

The PC will participate again this year. The group discussed ideas for more interactive materials to have on hand and how to get folks thinking about future planning for the town. One possibility is a “concept board” on the topic of “What could a town green look like in Starksboro?” Another could be “What could you visualize for the 14 acres near the school?” Rebecca will consider some ideas for discussion at the next meeting. For kids, there could be a large ortho map of Starksboro with a “treasure hunt” game such as find your home, find various landmarks, answer trivia, etc.

ZA Update

Rebecca asked the PC for more information about the certificate of occupancy process for newly built structures. The Bylaws require folks to apply for and receive a CO upon completion of a new structure prior to occupancy. This step is often skipped by permit applicants and the ZA has to pursue people to complete paperwork and have the final inspection completed.

The reason for a CO is to avoid a set-back issue or problems with construction in relation to other buildings. The PC will consider additional clarifying language for the next round of amendments to the Bylaws regarding the CO process. Other towns require two inspections—the first being done when the building site has been pinned and BEFORE the foundation is poured. This way, if an issue is identified, it can be corrected easily. The second inspection should still occur upon completion and before there are people living in the structure.

Motion: Denny Barnard moved to adjourn at 9:00 p.m. Brad Boss second.

Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Elder

Next meeting: 2/20/20 at 7pm