

Windham Planning Commission Minutes  
4/14/21

Those present: Bill Dunkel, Vance Bell, Tom Johnson, Dawn Bower, Chris Cummings, Kate Wright

Meeting called to order at 6:30PM.

Agenda:

I. Act on Minutes of March 10, 2021 meeting

No comments or suggested changes to minutes. Motion to accept by Vance.  
Seconded by Dawn. All agreed.

II. Discuss Helipad Issue

According to Bob Bingham the Planning Commission had no previous discussion about helipads.

There was some discussion about the landing strip near Tater Hill golf course and whether helicopters could use it. Vance thinks the airstrip is still regulated by the FAA. He mentioned someone living on or near Hitchcock Hill Road who used the airport, at reasonable hours, sometime in the past.

Bill reported on his research into how other towns deal with helipads.

- Jamaica, Townshend, and Grafton have no zoning at all.
- Kevin Stine, WRC Commissioner from Dover, could not find any information in their zoning regulations about helipads.
- Londonderry requires zoning permits for airports be submitted to the Vermont State Transportation Agency prior to submitting an application to the Planning Commission. There is nothing in their zoning about helipads.
- Newfane zoning does not mention helipads or airfields.
- Wilmington allows airport runways in Resort/Residential District; no mention of helipads; helipads not listed as a prohibited use.
- Town of Stratton zoning allows helipads and helicopter facilities as possible conditional uses subject to a number of restrictions. In Residential districts a

helicopter landing pad is allowed. In a Commercial/Residential district a helicopter landing facility is permitted.

- In Winhall, in December 2014 the ZBA granted a conditional use permit to the Stratton Corporation for a helicopter landing zone for emergencies on land they owned that was a sand/gravel storage area. There is nothing in the March 2018 Winhall zoning regs about airfields or helipads. The Stratton.com website advertises helicopter service to a landing zone “steps from the slopes” through Wings Air or Heliflite charter services.
- Wardsboro zoning allows helicopter landing pads in Rural Residential, Resource Residential and Village Commercial districts, and airplane landing strips in the first two districts.
- Eaton, N.H. zoning regulations say “Aircraft or helicopter landings and takeoffs are not permitted in the Town of Eaton except under emergency Situations.”
- To summarize, some towns have no zoning, some have zoning without helipad considerations, some have zoning with helipads permitted, one bans helicopters except in emergencies.

Bill asked the committee whether they felt we should develop a recommendation to the Select Board about helipads now, or whether we should solicit input from people in Windham before we make a recommendation. Dawn asked whether the PC has to seek input from the town before making changes to our zoning regulations. Bill said he had contacted John Bennett at the Windham Regional Commission about this matter. Bennett mentioned that the town of Dover has an ordinance regulating helipads that was adopted by their Select Board without a public hearing. However, John felt that approach was risky and he recommended that before we make any additions to our zoning regulations regarding helipads we should hold a public hearing.

After some discussion the group agreed with Chris’s suggestion that we gather more information before deciding how to proceed. Chris volunteered to contact Stratton Corporation and find out about the helicopter service they advertise on their website.

Dawn suggested that there should be specific areas in town where helipads are allowed for emergencies. There was some discussion about whether designated areas would be helpful. Kate volunteered to call DHMC re regulations about landing the DART helicopter in emergencies.

Everyone seemed to agree that Windham should have some written regulation about helicopters and helipads. No one favored listing helipads as a permitted use in any zoning district. Some committee members thought helicopters and helipads perhaps should be permitted as a conditional use in some zoning districts. Others felt helicopters should be prohibited in Windham except in emergencies.

Kate thought we might use the town of Stratton's conditions for helipads as a guideline in framing a policy for Windham. Bill will send a copy of Stratton's regulations to committee members before our next meeting.

### III. Discussion of Paramilitary/Firearms Training Facility/School Issue

Bill asked the Select Board whether they wanted input from the PC regarding paramilitary facilities. The SB would like the PC to investigate the issue. Bill contacted Carl Andeer, a VLCT attorney, who sent an email outlining several different ways the PC and SB could address this issue. Mr. Andeer noted that if we do nothing but rely upon our current zoning regulations, we may not be protected against paramilitary facilities like the one in West Pawlet that is causing so much trouble. Everyone agreed that our committee should be proactive and develop some kind of policy.

Bill has shared Mr. Andeer's email with all members of the PC. At our next meeting we will look at the suggestions contained therein. It was suggested that if we had a proper legal definition of a paramilitary facility that would be helpful..

Our next meeting is scheduled for May 12, 2021 at 6:30PM via Zoom..

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:38 by Dawn; seconded by Chris. All agreed.

