

FINAL 3/17/25 MINUTES

APPROVED ON 5/5/25

On 5/5/25, Julia Callan moved to approve the 3/17/25 minutes as drafted and Dan Pipes seconded. The Board approved and on 5/5/25, Melissa Manson signed the 3/17/25 minutes as drafted and submitted them to the clerk for publication.

**TOWN OF FAIRFIELD
PLANNING COMMISSION AND ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Monday, March 17, 2025, 7:00 PM**

Members Present: Aaron Forbes, Dan Pipes, Melissa Manson (Chair), Don Wells, Vanessa Kittell, Julia Callan,

Minute Taker: Vanessa Kittell

Public Present: Lynda Ulrich, Chuck Verderber, Linda Hodet, Sorel Chaput, Gavin Ryan, Susan Magnan, Emily Kloft, NWRP.

1. **Meeting, Called to Order**, 7:03 p.m. and the Board determined that a quorum was established.
2. **Adjustments to Agenda**: None. Dan Pipes moved to approve as provided, Julia Callan seconded and the Board unanimously approved.
3. **Public Comment not related to the agenda**: None.
4. **Fairfield Zoning Bylaw Update; Summary of Public Outreach**:
 - a. Emily Kloft provided summary of highlights from the 2/17/25, 3/4/25, in-person public forums and on-line survey. A memorandum of these findings is attached to these minutes.
 - b. Emily Kloft reported that NWPR received (45) completed surveys.
 - c. Emily Kloft stated that among the major themes to emerge from the public survey were that many residents found that that over the course of the by-law review project, the perceived gap between Town Plan and bylaws narrowed. Another theme that emerged was that some residents expressed continuing misalignment around the issue of clustering development. She also reported that a final major theme to emerge was that residents expressed that significant interest remains in growth in the Town's villages -- though difficult to enact due to natural resource constraints.
 - d. Public comment included discussion of the benefits of clustered development. Additional comment raised the risk that change in by-law regulation may diminish an individual land owner's ability to maximize development opportunities and reduce potential income.
 - e. Emily Kloft stated that mapping analysis based on various "build out" presumptions would be an additional cost to the Town. Board expressed no further interest in spending funds on this analysis.

- f. The Board found that the survey and public forums rendered insufficient public interest for raising any proposed change to minimum lot size standards. The Board lacked a majority of Board members that supported revision of by-laws related to amending any specific lot size requirements in any district or subdivision standard.
 - g. Board agreed that the next steps would be to review NW Regional Planning's proposals for possible revisions to "tighten," by-laws, proposed language for accessory dwelling unit regulation, and additional consideration of subdivision clustering proposals.
 - h. Emily Kloft agreed to provide the Board with proposals in accord with these next steps at the next by-law review meeting on April 21, 2025.
5. **New Business: Common School Planning Grant:** The Board unanimously agreed in its support that the Common School building exploratory working group undertake and apply for a planning grant. The Board expressed its support that NW Regional Planning and the Town offer reasonable assistance to this group.
6. **Confirmation of Upcoming Meetings:**
- a) Next Regular Hearing Date: **April 7, 2025, at 7:00 P.M.**
 - b) Next By-Law Review Meeting: April 21, **2025, at 7:00 P.M.**
7. **Adjourn:** Motion to adjourn raised by Dan Pipes and seconded by Vanessa Kittell. Meeting adjourned at 8:44 P.M.



Northwest Regional Planning Commission

75 Fairfield Street
St. Albans, Vermont 05478
PHONE 802-524-5958
WEB nrpcvt.com

To: Fairfield Planning Commission
From: Emily Klofft, Regional Planner
Date: March 17, 2025
Subject: Fairfield Zoning Bylaw Update Summary of Public Outreach

Review of Project to Date

The bylaw project began in summer 2024 with a review of specific zoning bylaw provisions that implement Town Plan goals and policies. NRPC staff also completed a resource constraints analysis in consultation with the Planning Commission. Based on these documents, 5 areas were identified for discussion: 1) determining maximum number of lots that can be subdivided, 2) adding additional zoning districts, 3) resource protection standards, 4) site layout & road standards and 5) planned unit developments.

After reviewing zoning standards in relation to these five areas, the Planning Commission decided to focus the public outreach on subdivision standards, with a focus on standards that address the number of new lots allowed, lot size and layout.

Review of Public Outreach- What Did We Hear

NRPC supported the Planning Commission with a public outreach event on Monday February 17th and a follow-up shorter session after Town Meeting on March 4th. A survey was available online for additional feedback.

Several key themes emerged from these public outreach sessions.

Existing Bylaws conformance to the Town Plan- Many residents stated that over the course of the project the perceived gap between the Town Plan and bylaws narrowed, although some feel there is misalignment around the issue of clustering development. Several noted that the Town Plan vision of growth in the villages is difficult to achieve given the natural resource constraints.

Subdivision density and design- There were conflicting opinions. Some residents feel the current method of determining the number and size of lots that can be subdivided is acceptable and prefer avoiding additional restrictions on property rights. Some residents want larger minimum lot sizes of 3-10 acres, noting concerns about aesthetics and potential conflicts between agricultural uses. Some residents want to support additional clustering and allow lots of under 1 acre, which could be achieved with shared or innovative septic designs.

Need for Additional Information: Many residents noted they need additional information to better understand the potential impacts of the regulations. Imagery, examples and build-out analysis were noted as options.

Process Concerns: Several noted a desire to require site plan review, online applications and ensuring transparency in decision-making. There is a need to ensure that standards in the zoning bylaws are objective.

Affordability and Schools: Residents were concerned about how zoning decisions can impact affordability and the future of the Fairfield Center School. Some stated that smaller lot sizes can support more affordable homes, while others believed it was difficult to build affordable homes regardless of lot size. Some worried that increased development could cost the town taxpayers, while others noted the need to ensure enough students to prevent forced school mergers.

Other Zoning Tools: Some residents noted other potential zoning tools which could be used to implement the vision of an agricultural community. Zoning specific suggestions included:

- Creating new growth centers in other areas with less natural resource constraints such as the southwest of Town.
- Allow for smaller lot sizes for subdivisions that maintain active farms and larger/fewer lots for all other subdivisions
- Increase the number of lots defined as a major subdivision

Next Steps

The Planning Commission should consider the appropriate next steps for the project. Questions to consider include:

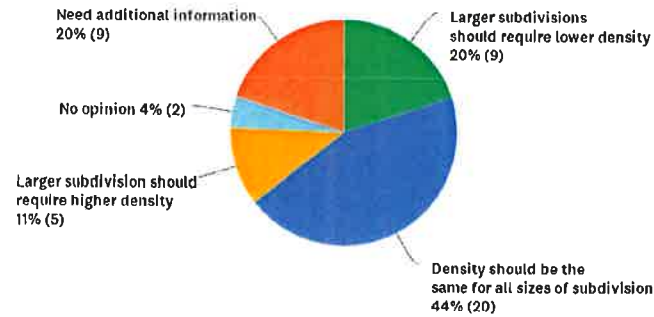
- 1) Is there a need for additional information, such as a build-out analysis? Note that this would likely require an additional planning contract with NRPC or another consultant.
- 2) Of the options discussed so far, are there options the Planning Commission can support moving forward?
- 3) Are there additional zoning tools discussed during the public outreach that should be further explored?

Attachments

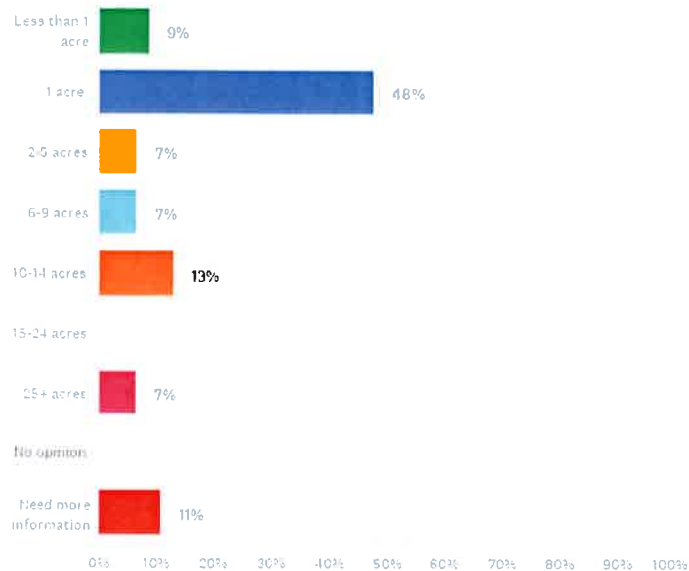
1. Results of Survey Questions
2. Portion of Town Meeting Day Presentation
3. Summary of Topics and Next Steps (December 2024)

Survey Results

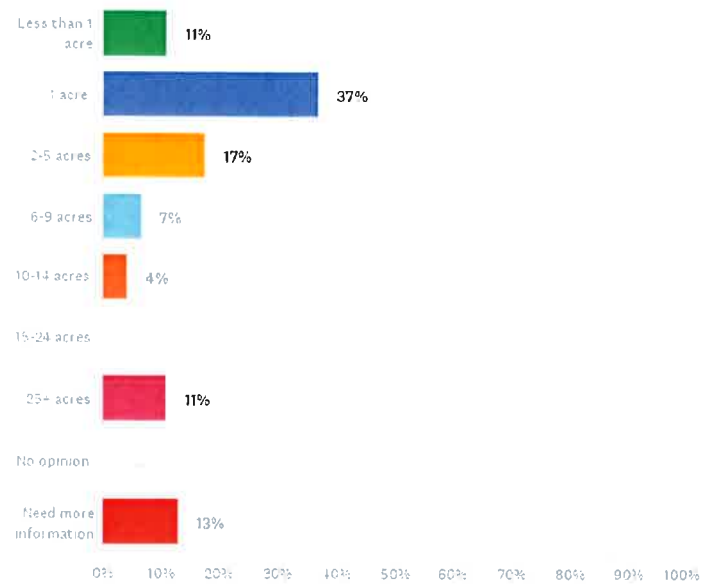
Q6 Should density be the same for all subdivisions or should larger subdivisions require a lower density?



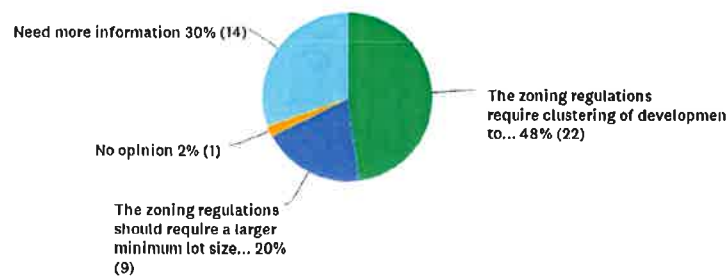
Q7 What should the minimum lot size in the Agricultural District be for two-lot subdivisions?



Q8 What should the minimum lot size in Agricultural District be for major subdivisions?



Q9 Should the zoning regulations require clustering of development to protect larger areas of agricultural land or require a larger minimum lot size to preserve the appearance of open space?



Current Regulations

- 1 acre minimum lot size
- Lots located on field or pasture edge or on least fertile soils
- No additional restrictions on future subdivision

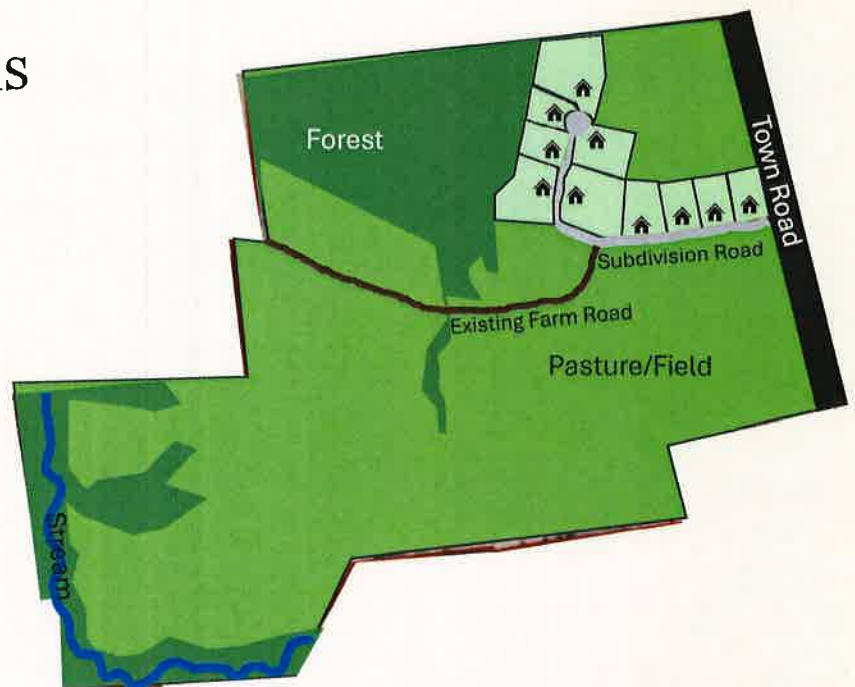


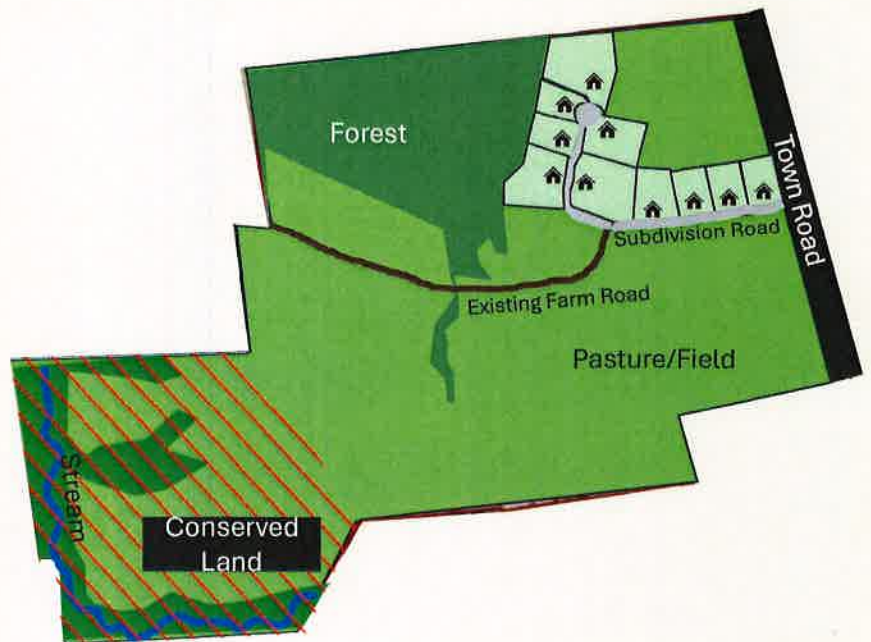
Figure: Example of 10 lot Subdivision under Current Regulations

Potential New Regulation

Conservation Subdivision

- 1 acre minimum lot size
- Lots located on field or pasture edge or on least fertile soils
- Some portion of land restricted from future development
- Reduces number of lots that can be subdivided

Figure: Example of 10 lot Conservation Subdivision

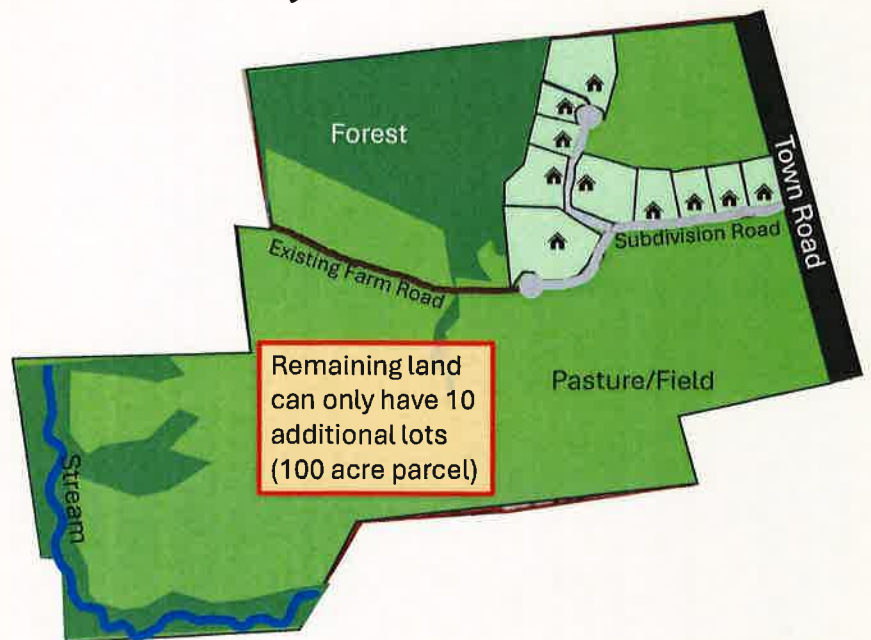


Potential New Regulation

Separating Lot Size from Density

- 1 acre minimum lot size
- Maximum density of 1 unit per 5 acres
- Lots located on field or pasture edge or on least fertile soils
- Some portion of land restricted from future **subdivision**
- Reduces number of lots that can be subdivided

Figure: Example of 10 lot Subdivision
Separating Lot Size from Density

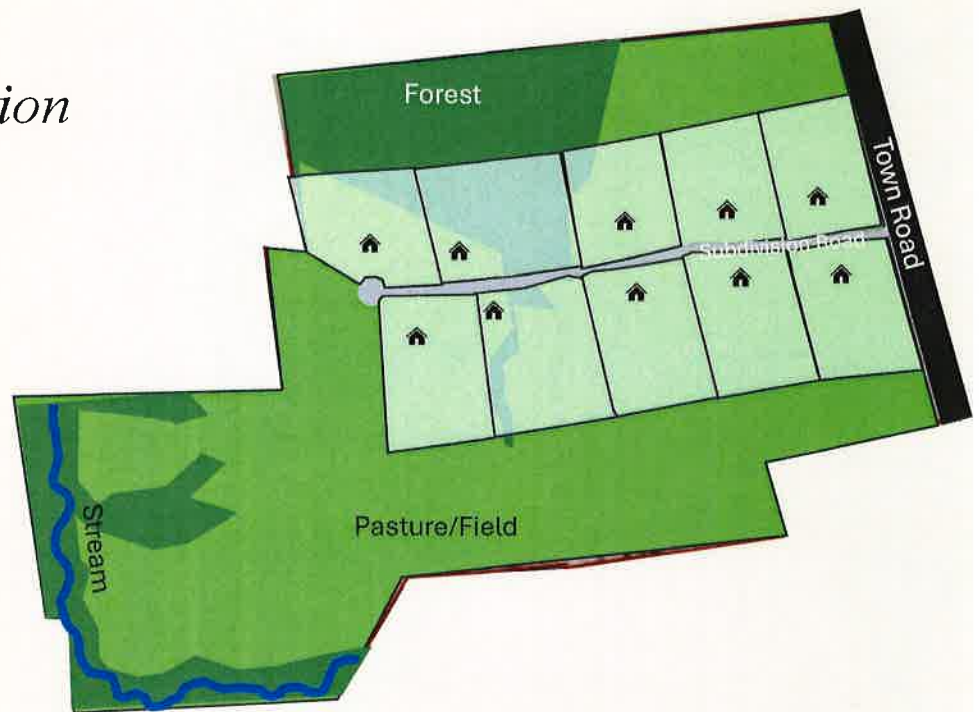


Potential New Regulation

Large Lot Subdivision

- Example: 5-10 acre minimum lot size
- Building envelopes located on field or pasture edge or on least fertile soils
- Reduces number of lots that can be subdivided

Figure: Example of 10 lot Subdivision with large lots



Summary of Key Impacts of Changes



Requires



Allows but does not require

	Preserve large areas of land in single ownership	Limit the number of lots allowed to be subdivided	Clusters development	Require conservation of land
Current regulations				
Conservation Subdivision				
Separating Lot Size from Density				
Larger Lots				

Zoning Tool	Summary of Planning Commission Comments	Focus of Public Outreach?
Subdivision Regulations- Density Standards		
<i>Density standards will be the main focus of the project.</i>		
Minimum Lot Size: Increase minimum lot size to increase open space. Very large lots (25+ acres) are most likely to preserve farmland based on current use enrollment standards.	Not interested in very large lot sizes. May be some interest in the 2-10 acre lot size, but not as a primary tool. Concern about affordability of larger lots.	Yes
Remove Undevelopable Land in Density Calculations: Remove undevelopable or resource sensitive lands from the calculation of total density, thereby reducing density in sensitive areas.	Interested in potentially incorporating this into the regulations.	Yes
Requiring a Building Envelope: Require each subdivided lot to designate a building envelope to ensure developed portions of lot are not on sensitive or resource areas. May also set a maximum building envelope.	Prefer to keep as is, where a building envelope is required only when conservation resources are present.	No
Separating Lot Size from Density: Separate the standards for lot size and density, allowing for smaller lots while limiting overall density.	The Planning Commission is interested in this tool but has some follow-up questions about how this tool has been used in other towns and the administrative burden. Need to ensure the tool does not negatively impact affordability.	Yes
Frontage: Consider definition of frontage (whether or not to include private ROW) and whether to have frontage as a standard.	Would like to have further discussion.	Yes
Adding Additional Zoning Districts		
Higher Density District Adjacent to Village District: Designate land near existing village for medium/high density residential neighborhood residential development.	The Planning Commission was concerned that adding additional zoning districts could unfairly burden landowners in some districts over others.	No
Resource-Based Districts: Zoning districts that restrict development based on natural resources such as prime agricultural soils.		No
Districts Based on Roadway Types: Divide districts on the basis of their proximity to Class 3 and above roads,		No

Zoning Tool	Summary of Planning Commission Comments	Focus of Public Outreach?
with the goal of reducing fragmentation of land far from existing roads. Can potentially lead to rural sprawl.		
Resource Protection Standards		
General Regulations: Regulations applied to all development that go above and beyond state regulations for those resources (e.g. wetlands, shorelands).	Generally, the Planning Commission felt that state regulations for resource protection were sufficient.	No
Required Planning Commission Review: Require Planning Commission review for projects that have conservation resources, even if the underlying use is permitted.	No need for additional standards.	No
Site Layout & Road Standards		
Planning & Design/Subdivision Standards for Resource Protection: Standards that apply to subdivisions/conditional uses that either directly protect certain natural resources or that reduce fragmentation of forest/farmlands.	The Planning Commission generally felt that the focus should be on density standards than resource protection standards. Existing resource protection standards are generally sufficient.	No
Road Standards: Standards that prevent the creation of long/inefficiently laid out development roads/driveway that can fragment forest/farmlands.		No
Planned Unit Development/Conservation Subdivision Standards		
Conservation Subdivisions: Subdivision standards incentivize or require a percent of the subdivided lot to be conserved.	There is some interest in standards that would limit the amount of area developable for large subdivisions while allowing for minor subdivisions with less land area.	Yes
Planned Unit Developments: A planning tool that allow for increased flexibility in development, in rural areas this often involves conserving a portion of the land and/or incentivizing certain types of development such as affordable/senior housing.		Yes

Zoning Tool	Summary of Planning Commission Comments	Focus of Public Outreach?
Transfer of Development Rights: A voluntary tool which allows developers to build more densely in areas targeted for growth by purchasing development rights from areas targeted for protection. Administratively complex to administer.	Lack of administrative resources to administer complex tools such as this one is a concern for the Planning Commission.	No
<i>Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Standards</i>		
Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUS): Consider expanding ADU standards to allow for more housing.	Interested in exploring ADU standards that are more permissive than state minimum standard/	No