

PLANNING BOARD

[2011 Annual Report]

The Northbridge Planning Board meets the second and fourth Tuesday of the month in the Selectmen's Chamber of the Northbridge Memorial Town Hall (7 Main Street). The Planning Board consists of five (5) elected members and one (1) appointed associate member. The Planning Board has the responsibility to review proposed development projects and make decisions in accordance with state/local bylaws and regulations. The Planning Board is assisted by the Community Planning & Development Office (14 Hill Street –Aldrich School Town Hall Annex), which is staffed by a Town Planner, R. Gary Bechtholdt II and a Planning/Conservation Secretary, Barbara Kinney.

The Planning Board's official powers and responsibilities are defined in the Northbridge Subdivision Regulations, the Northbridge Zoning Bylaws, and as prescribed in Massachusetts General Laws. The subdivision rules and regulations have been enacted to protect the safety, convenience and welfare of the inhabitants of Northbridge by regulating the laying out of new lots and construction of ways providing access to lots therein. In addition to subdivision control, the Planning Board reviews site plan developments; the Board reviews proposals in accordance with Chapter 173 of the Zoning Bylaw. The Planning Board oversees development proposals from the planning stage through completion of a project. The Board is required to hold public hearings for zoning amendments articles prior to Town Meeting action.

During the calendar year of 2011, the Planning Board held 20 public meetings, hosted a number of public workshops and conducted various site visits. Applications reviewed by the Planning Board include: Approval Not Required (ANR) - division of land creating new lots on existing/approved roadways; Preliminary and Definitive Subdivision - divisions of land creating lots and new roadways; Site Development - plans for commercial/industrial developments; Common driveway special permits; and Scenic Road Permits - proposed work that may affect public street trees and/or stonewalls along designated scenic roads.

Due to the economy and continued real estate conditions a number of residential subdivisions remain unfinished and in various stages of construction. The Camelot, a subdivision consisting of 65 single-family house lots began construction earlier in the spring; with Phase 1 currently underway home construction is anticipated for next spring. The Shining Rock Golf Community continues to progress towards completion with Shining Rock Drive (portion of), Fairway Drive (portion of), Clubhouse Lane, and Linkside Court accepted as public ways at the 2011 Fall Annual Town Meeting. The Planning Board would like to acknowledge Norwood Cooperative Bank, specifically John Galvani, Senior Vice President/Lending where after a shaky and tumultuous start with the bankruptcy of the original developer Norwood Cooperative Bank was able to manage the project to a point where the golf course was restored & sold and the roadways corrected & completed. The Planning Board would also like to thank the residents within Shining Rock Golf Community for their unwavering commitment to see this development through completion and for enduring the many trials and tribulations along the way. The Shining Rock Golf Clubhouse also completed construction in the summer of 2011; this new golfing facility has received much praise and accolades, including ranked 1 of the 10 Best Public Courses in the State –Golf Magazine and voted Best of Boston 2011 -Boston Magazine.

In the spring of 2011, the Planning Board, in working with the Department of Public Works (DPW) prepared a list of deficiencies for the Castle Hill Estates subdivision. As a result of the developer's failure to address outstanding issues the Board called-in the remaining performance bond in August of 2011 for

the benefit of the town to complete work. Since this time the Planning Board had monumentation (bounds) installed, legal descriptions and layout plans prepared and the following roadways were accepted as public ways at the 2011 Fall Annual Town Meeting: Hastings Drive, Windsor Ridge, Cliffe Road, Clover Hill Road (remaining portion of), and Dublin Way (remaining portion of). The Planning Board will continue to work with the DPW to prioritize deficiencies for completion. Delwyn Barnes Drive (Delwyn Barnes Estates) was also accepted as a public way at the 2011 Fall Annual Town Meeting.

The Planning Board would like to acknowledge and thank Richard R. Sasseville, PE Director of Public Works (Retired) for his many years of service and assisting the Board and the Community Planning & Development office on countless projects and initiatives; his attention to detail and commitment to the town will be missed. The Planning Board would also like to thank Burnham and Elizabeth Miller for their gift, a framed color-aerial of the town displayed at the Community Planning & Development office.

During the summer of 2011, Alternatives' Whitin Mill, an adaptive reuse project was awarded the coveted LEED Gold Certification for its GREEN restoration of the historic Whitin Mill (50 Douglas Road). LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is a designation awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council. The mill buildings get approximately 90 percent of its energy needs through the use of photovoltaic, hydroelectric and geothermal power. Elsewhere the Linwood Mill Lofts celebrated the commencement of construction (October 2011); this mixed use project includes 75 rental units for 55+ senior housing as well as retail and commercial space. Both projects were permitted pursuant to the town's Historic Mill Adaptive Reuse zoning bylaw.

The National Park Service released a Special Resource Study in the summer of 2011, and determined sites within the boundaries of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor contribute to the Corridor as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution in the United States and would be eligible for inclusion as a unit of the National Park System. In October, legislation was introduced by both the US Senate and House of Representatives to establish the new John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Historical Park; this multi-state park would encompass land in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts; including the Blackstone River and its tributaries, the Blackstone Canal; the nationally significant historic districts of Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket and the villages of Slatersville and Ashton, Rhode Island; and Whitinsville and Hopedale in Massachusetts. The Senate bill was introduced by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI), John Kerry (D-MA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), and Scott Brown (R-MA). The House bill was introduced by Representatives David Cicilline (D-RI), Richard E. Neal (D-MA), James McGovern (D-MA), and James Langevin (D-RI). The Planning Board is excited of the prospect of a new National Park (in Whitinsville, MA) and views such as a great opportunity for future economic development in the area.

During 2011, the town amended its Zoning Bylaws: (1.) expanded the Business –One zoning district within Plummers Corner; (2.) extended the Residential –Two zoning district to include properties within the Shining Rock Golf Community; (3.) allowed “water filter plants” in multiple zones, to assist the Whitinsville Water Company in addressing the high iron-manganese content from the Carr Street wellfield; (4.) updated the Floodway & Floodplain provisions to remain compliant and eligible under the Federal Flood Insurance Program; and (5.) created a 43D Expedited Permitting provision to further the expedited permitting of priority development sites target in Northbridge for commercial and industrial development. The Planning Board is also considering amendments to the town's Heritage zoning provisions aimed to provide for greater flexibility and opportunity for the reuse of Heritage zoned

properties by providing for alternative uses which may encourage and promote the preservation of historic structures.

The 2010 US Census figures were released in the summer of 2011; accordingly Northbridge increased in population from 13,182 (2000) to 15,707 (2010), an approximate 15% increase. Total population for the Commonwealth, according to US Census data is 6,547,629. The Planning Board once again emphasizes, based upon applications and remaining undeveloped land Northbridge could see a significant build-out of 300 to 600 additional house lots/units. The Planning Board cautions; as the town continues to grow the need to (re)evaluate its land use provisions; as more and more development occur the demand on public infrastructure and town services will also increase. The Planning Board continues to work on updating the Master Plan and welcomes all residents to participate and offer input on this important town document.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Dolber, Chair

Barbara Gaudette, Vice Chair

Richard Griggs, Clerk

Edward Palmer

Kevin Curtin (Resigned)

Cindy Key, Associate Member