

OXFORD PLANNING COMMISSION

MINUTES

MAY 4, 2021

The regular monthly meeting of the Oxford Planning Commission was called to order by the Chairman, David Baker, on Tuesday, May 4, 2021, at 6:00 p.m., via “Zoom” due to the on-going pandemic of a virus known as Covid-19.

Other members participating in the virtual meeting included James Reed and Bruce Beglin. Also in attendance was Town Manager Cheryl Lewis.

The minutes of the meeting of February 2, 2021 were approved and accepted as distributed.

The following building permit was reviewed by the commission:

- Permit #21-34, Walter Patton, 104 Sinclair Street, replace portion of existing fence and add new section. Mr. Patton, who was virtually present at the meeting, explained that he had an existing fence between his property and the boatyard next door to him. Mr. Patton expressed his desire to fix his existing fence and increase it due to the growth of the boatyard next door to him. He explained that starting 25’ from the waterfront where his fence is now, he would like to replace that existing section of fencing between himself and the boatyard on that one side by making it higher and adding on an additional section of fencing behind his garage, on the same property line, that would continue along the back of his property between himself and the boatyard, which would also be higher than 4’. He added that the profile of the fence would remain the same as it currently exists – gothic style picket fencing. Chairman Baker asked if all the fencing on the property would now be 5’. Mr. Patton responded that just the part that he would be replacing and the new section and that it would be between 4 ½’ to 5’ tall. Chairman Baker pointed out that fencing over 4’ is not allowed in the Oxford Zoning Ordinance so the request would require a variance through the Board of Appeals. Mr. Beglin spoke stating that he is a proponent of keeping to a 4’ maximum height on fencing in town but that Mr. Patton’s request is exactly the reason to have higher fencing because of having a boatyard along the side of this property and, as such, he thought it was a good thing to do and would vote in favor of it. Mr. Reed added that as someone with a 5’ fence behind his own house, he would agree with Mr. Beglin and give a favorable request to the appeals board as well. Mr. Reed made a motion that the Planning Commission deny this application to do the 5’ request but that he would recommend that the Planning Commission give a favorable recommendation to the Board of Appeals to grant any appeal that Mr. Patton may apply for regarding the 5’ fencing. The motion was seconded by Mr. Beglin and unanimously carried with all in favor.

This concluded the review of building permits.

New Business

Town Manager Lewis presented a visual to share with the commission regarding a permit request for a 15” x 7 ½” sign that a resident is looking to install on her fence. The applicant has a quilting studio in the back of her property at 206 S. Morris Street and the sign would reflect that. Attached to the permit were photos of similar signs within the historic district. Manager Lewis explained that the reason she was presenting this to the commission was because even though the HDC did not have a problem with the

sign there is language in the zoning that is questionable. The owner is allowed a home occupation and this request does fit into that as she is allowed a sign for her business. The question is that the code says one cannot put a sign on a telephone pole, tree, or fence. Manager Lewis commented that she understood the intent of that but felt it probably referred to random signs (such a yard sale signs), not this kind of thing, and, as such, she was inclined to approve the permit but wanted to discuss it with the Planning Commission members first. Manager Lewis noted that what the owner could do, instead of putting this little sign on a fence, was to put up a 20 sq. ft. sign in her yard or take this sign and hang it from a pole 10' back from the street on her property and that either choice would comply with the Oxford Zoning Ordinance. She felt this was a glitch in the sign language but wanted to see if the planning members felt the same. Again, it was noted that one could have a sign for a business and one could have a name placard in the front yard and that this request would appear to fall in this category. Mr. Beglin asked what kind of 20 sq. ft. sign could one put in their yard. Manager Lewis responded that the way the zoning code is written it does not clarify that or that it can only be on a commercial property. Mr. Reed agreed with Manager Lewis and that he too did not think that this was what the verbiage intended for a sign such as this that was being requested, adding that the commission really needed to look more closely at the sign ordinance. Manager Lewis responded that the Commissioners were in the process of doing that. She referred to Section 8.03.H which notes the following restrictions applying to permitted signs, which are as follows: no on site sign shall exceed twenty (20) square feet, no sign will be erected within ten (10) feet of the property line, and no person may erect a sign which is affixed to a fence, utility pole, tree or other natural object. Again, she noted that the last restriction is the one in question and yet what one could do is to have a free-standing sign per building lot not exceeding 20 sq. ft. While there are no other criteria for a small business sign other than 20 sq. ft., the Oxford Zoning Ordinance, under Definitions – Home Occupation, does note in #3 that “there shall be no visible change in the outside appearance of the building or premises, except for one sign as provided in Section 8.02(8.03).” Manager Lewis stated that from the discussion taking place, she and the planning commission members agreed that this application, as presented, is not what the zoning ordinance had meant with regards to not affixing a sign on a utility pole, trees, or fence and that in lieu of putting a 20 sq. ft. sign in the applicant’s yard, she and the Planning Commission members present at this meeting would prefer the small placard sign. Mr. Beglin agreed with Manager Lewis and saw no problem with a little sign such as this and that it was quaint. Chairman Baker also agreed. Lewis noted that she has mentioned before that the town’s sign ordinance does not fit in with Oxford very well and that a citizens committee has recently been established to do an inventory of all signs in town, looking closely at them, and making recommendations on how the town can reduce or make changes that will be more compatible with the town’s charm. Once the Commissioners have received that information and the opinions of the sign committee, they will pass that information on to the Planning and Historic Commissions for their recommendations as well. Manager Lewis noted the process will take awhile but encouraged the members to look at the sign ordinance themselves and to jot down any problems they find with it.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Willoughby

Administrative Assistant