



# Town of Barnard, Vermont

Chartered July 17, 1761

P.O. Box 274  
Barnard, Vermont 05031  
(802) 234-9211

Barnard Planning Commission Minutes  
Public Hearing, Barnard Town Hall, November 12, 2024

**Present:** Steve Cota, Ed Jodice, Kate Reeves, Carin Park, Brooks Wright, Greyling VanAlstyne. **ALSO PRESENT:** Kyle Katz of Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission (TRORC), Selectman Richard Lancaster, Kassie Hull, Simone Liebman, Matthew Berlin, Doreen Hurley, Lee Chesnut, Frank Verkaik, Brian Beaty, Barb Campbell, Steve Johnson, Teo Zagar.

**Call to Order.** The hearing opened at 7:03PM. Ed Jodice asked for comments, questions, and concerns about the revised draft of the ridgeline review overlay and zoning bylaws. He said that this is not a prohibition from building on the ridgeline. Kyle Katz explained that the overlay is in addition to or "on top of" the underlying zoning district where development is proposed, and, when someone already has a home in the overlay and is adding a deck, a small accessory structure or other addition to the home, it will likely be exempt from the ridgeline review overlay standards.

**Comment:** Matthew Berlin asked about language in different areas of the bylaws and suggested that edits to some definitions may make the standards clearer throughout. For example, pulling from the Goal Statement.

**Planning Commission Response:** The Planning Commission agreed generally, although the request is outside of the scope of the current project.

**Comment:** Steve Johnson asked if the Planning Commission has created a map to show the community how the wildlife corridor and ridgeline review overlay will overlap or impact the other. He also asked why the ridgeline from Tower Road to Stackpole Road was not identified as a ridgeline on the proposed map.

**Comment:** Frank Verkaik stated that he also wants to know why the Tower to Stackpole ridge is not on the map, as it is one of the highest ridges.

**Planning Commission Response:** Carin Park stated that this is worth discussing. The Planning Commission agreed to review and explain the methodology for determining the ridgeline review overlay soon.



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**Question:** Barb Campbell owns property that is in the proposed ridgeline review overlay and may want to build on it in the next few years. She asked how this would impact her.

**Planning Commission Response:** Kyle explained the zoning permit process and Carin mentioned the main goal of reducing visual impact.

**Comment:** Teo asked how many other towns have some type of ridgeline development regulations and if there is a record of how it's been working for other towns and/or what their experience has been since?

**Planning Commission Response:** Kyle stated that Pomfret, Woodstock, and Norwich all have a type of ridgeline development regulation. He is not familiar with Pomfret but knows that Norwich has enforced it since 2008.

**Comment:** Lee Chesnut lives on Route 12 and one mile behind his house is a five-acre field with a small cabin less than 750 feet from the ridgeline, maybe 300 feet or so. He asked what would happen, for example, if he wanted to expand on the cabin and turn it into an actual house?

**Comment/Response:** Teo, as Chair of the Development Review Board, stated that he reads flexibility in the proposal and in his interpretation the ridgeline review overlay "is not shutting anything down, just adding another layer of oversight" because even without the overlay there is still a process.

**Comment:** Steve asked Kyle/TRORC if they have "done any research on the tax burden people will experience if these are implemented" because if this prevents building in Barnard "none of us will be able to afford to live here."

Steve said that he lives in this world and has participated in the process of people getting permits in other towns where there are ridgeline development regulations. In that experience, Steve realized that "it comes down to money" and "if some neighbor has a problem with something and has enough money, they are going to push a project down." He then asked if people were familiar with the houses built into the hills on Route 110. He said that if people cannot build as they would like on the ridgelines, we will begin to see houses just below the ridgeline with huge clear cuts.



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**Planning Commission Response:** Kate Reeves stated that this is not a prohibition on ridgeline development and that the goal is to preserve the beauty of Barnard and keep it aesthetically pleasing for all. So that in the future residents don't have to see all the ridges and the glowing houses.

She asked Steve if he thinks the proposal and goal is a good idea at all.

**Comment:** Steve said, "there's always the bad apples" and a lot of questions that need to be answered before something like this moves forward because he is looking at what Barnard is going to be.

**Comment:** Richard Lancaster said that Steve is correct in saying that taxes and evaluations have gone up. Richard said that every town in Vermont has seen an increase in both. Richard said that Steve's argument is valid for trying to distribute the town tax burden over many people, but that will not decrease the amount of taxes that the state is asking for.

**Comment:** Steve said that adding the ridgeline review overlay will "degrade" pieces of property and that the values of the properties will go down. He said that if someone is told they can't have a beautiful view they will not build.

**Comment:** Frank said that all would be understood better if the planning commission spelled out their motivations. He thought there were "more problems going on in Vermont other than just the beauty of the hillsides."

**Planning Commission Response:** Carin stated that this is just one thing of many that are happening in town and around the state. Kyle said that every town has different areas of focus, and he thinks our proximity to Woodstock makes this an issue for us, as Woodstock had to implement ridgeline standards because they were seeing an issue with development.

Ed stated that there has been public outcry from a home on the ridgeline because bright lights can be seen from far distances. He thinks the houses will be few and far between but will have an impact, nonetheless. He reiterated that the goal is not to stop people from doing anything; that they are only asking that there be some level of thoughtfulness that goes into the visibility of a new build on a ridgeline within this overlay. Steve Cota said that the house on the ridgeline was the catalyst and when it's illuminated it



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looks like a “landing beacon” and we don’t want a repeat. He also thinks illumination is a bigger threat than the house itself.

**Comment:** Brian Beaty stated that in his experience in Lake Sunapee, NH, people spend a lot of money to abide by regulations and it has not dropped the demand for houses. He asked what the effectiveness of our zoning regulations are, and if they are enforced.

**Planning Commission Response:** Ed said that enforcement of the ridgeline review overlay conditions will be worked out, as it may create greater demand for resources. Carin stated that “there is no perfect system” and this proposal is an attempt to investigate the issue.

**Comment:** Teo asked what the next steps are.

**Planning Commission Response:** Kyle informed all that when a town is adopting zoning bylaws it must first go through a Planning Commission hearing process. After the hearing the Planning Commission reviews the comments, considers making changes, and sends their final draft to the Selectboard. Then, the Selectboard must hold a public hearing. The Selectboard can also make changes before adopting or putting it to a town vote.

**Comment:** Teo asked if the Selectboard can unilaterally reject or approve the proposed bylaws after they hold their required hearing?

**Planning Commission Response:** Kyle said YES.

**Comment:** Steve asked about the first meeting and if it was warned properly, as he believes that there was one document that was not sent out.

**Planning Commission Response:** Kyle and Ed stated they think it was.

**Adjourn.** The hearing was adjourned at 8:09PM.

Minutes prepared by Clerk Kassie Hull. The next regular meeting is Tuesday, December 3, 2024, at 7:00PM at the Town Hall Offices.