



Town of Hamilton
Planning Board
Meeting Minutes of April 8, 2025

Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, MGL Chapter 30 A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk delivered to all Planning Board members, a meeting of the Hamilton Planning Board was posted for April 8, 2025 at 7:00pm. This meeting was held at the Hamilton Council on Aging/Senior Center at 299 Bay Road in Hamilton.

The Planning Board has seven members elected to three-year terms with one, two, or three seats up for election each year. The Planning Board typically meets the first and third Tuesday evening at 7:00 p.m. Planning Board members: Marnie Crouch, Chair, 2026; Emil Dahlquist, Clerk, 2025; William Wheaton, 2025; Beth Herr, 2025; Patrick Norton, 2026; Jonathan Poore, 2027; Darcy Dale, 2027; Matt Hamel (associate) 2026; Jeff Austin (associate) 2027.

Call to order: *With a quorum present, Chair Crouch called the Planning Board meeting to order at 7:05 PM, identified the meeting was being recorded and those present:* Marnie Crouch, Jonathon Poore, Emil Dahlquist, Darcy Dale, Jeff Austin, Patrick Norton, Beth Herr. Others present: Mark Connors, Director of Planning; Matthew Littell, Utile Associates; Zoe Mueller, Utile Associates.

Agenda:

1. CONSIDERATION OF ZONING BYLAW AMENDMENTS

The Board opened discussion of the proposed amendments to the Hamilton Zoning Bylaw. Z.Mueller and M.Littell of Utile Associates presented the current Hamilton zoning districts and highlighted the newly proposed zoning districts. Some of the proposed updates included doubling the number of zoning districts, requiring special permitting for large projects, a potential sunset clause, and the addition of multi-family housing in the use table.

Chair Crouch suggested using this provided a good opportunity to revisit uses like gas stations and repair shops for motor vehicles and boats in the Town Center area. Chair Crouch indicated she did not think these uses were appropriate.

Ms. Herr asked if Hamilton could push the affordable housing percentage to every seven units instead of 10%. Ms. Mueller noted that this change could not be made at this time due to the shortened timeframe. Ms. Herr also asked whether the proposed amendments with the sunset clause would return to town meeting if they were passed at town meeting but not approved by the Attorney General. Mr. Connors confirmed that the sunset clause would likely be stricken without being returned to town meeting.

Mr. Norton asked for clarification on the math in the compliance table. Ms. Mueller clarified that the compliance model examines all buildings in the district and analyzes square footage, parking, and other features of each structure, then gives an estimate of the building envelope for new structures. Mr. Norton asked whether these calculations would affect parking and development in open space in each parcel. Ms. Mueller confirmed that this model is very protective of open space since it does not allow buildings or parking in the minimum 40 percent area that must be reserved for open space. This is a significant change from the existing zoning in the Business District which allows buildings to occupy up to 75 percent of the lot.

Ms. Dale asked for clarification on the definition of Floor Area Ratio (FAR). Ms. Mueller confirmed that it is built floor area divided by area of parcel on which it sits, or the amount of building on a given amount of land. Mr. Poore noted that FAR is effective only with proper dimension limitations. Mr. Littell noted that there is an amendment to include this definition in the zoning bylaws for clarity and make the gross floor area calculation more precise to support this definition, and that the other protections in the amendments and existing bylaws make the ratio more effective.

Mr. Poore requested that a title for the code, an effective date, and a purpose for the amendments be added to the document. Chair Crouch noted that the effective date would not be determined until the amendments were approved by the Attorney General and that the amendments would be inserted into the existing code. She added that some of the descriptive information could be added to the purpose and intent section of the existing code.

Mr. Littell noted a new definition of a half-story as a pitched roof with 50% or more dormers, as well as the addition of types of roof forms and dimensional requirements. Mr. Norton asked why the provision for building facade lengths was included. Mr. Littell clarified that this provision ensures building elements are consistent with the rest of downtown.

Chair Crouch asked about the difference between the dimensional suggestions being definitions versus requirements. It was decided among meeting participants to continue reviewing more pressing aspects of the amendments, including 3A zoning.

Ms. Mueller noted that each filled-in section on the map was a new district replacing an existing district and supplanting the base zoning on the Hamilton town-wide map. Mr. Norton asked why districts were being replaced instead of using an overlay. Ms. Mueller confirmed that replacing the districts gives more control than the regulations in place now, and that it would help Hamilton restrict increased, unrestrained multi-family home development that many residents do not want. Ms. Mueller also noted that town-owned property has more flexibility for updates and changes than other types of property.

Ms. Dale asked if the public safety building was subject to development since it was highlighted. Ms. Mueller confirmed that the parcel was part of the Bay Road Civic District. This would include requirements for how future buildings are sited on the lot but would not permit residential development as the parcel at this time is envisioned to remain for civic and municipal purposes. Chair Crouch noted the parcel could be sold in the future.

Mr. Norton questioned whether Carriage Lane should be included in the Bay Road Mixed-Use District. He said his understanding was that the Planning Board agreed Carriage Lane would not be part of the Section 3A districts. Mr. Dahlquist said that it was similar to how Cummings Avenue was treated in the past; instead of having an island of single family zones, it made sense to incorporate the street into the larger surrounding zoning framework for the Town Center. Mr. Norton requested a vote. Chair Crouch noted the workshop is for discussion purposes; though the Board could revisit the issue in the future.

Mr. Dahlquist asked why the planners didn't use Streets rather than Districts as the organizing feature since the districts are more similar than different whereas streets are the elements defining character. Mr. Littell noted that all new districts were created by considering frontage requirements.

Mr. Poore asked if Depot Square was intended to follow Railroad Avenue in one district. Ms. Mueller confirmed that this district was inclusive of the pattern of Railroad Avenue and Hamilton Crossing to allow the Hamilton Crossing parcel to have a different pathway through regulations compared to smaller parcels in the area. Ms. Mueller also noted that these districts were formed based on suggestions from Hamilton residents. Mr. Poore asked for clarification regarding what rehabilitation could occur on Bay Road in Depot Square. Mr. Littell noted that specific requests cannot be accommodated for individual buildings or streets, but if anything occurs in Depot Square, it will require a special permit.

Mr. Dahlquist asked to add more language concerning amenities shared across property lines that indicates it can be advantageous for residents and will help with parking problems. Mr. Littell confirmed that this language could be added. Mr. Norton expressed concern about adding more parking creating bigger buildings. Mr. Poore noted that building size is typically limited by available parking and by adding shared parking, more people can use parking at different times. Mr. Dahlquist noted that combining parking also promotes connectivity and walkability of the area.

Mr. Poore requested that there be landscaping and site design recommendations listed in the code for the areas between buildings on Bay Road. He asked if there were any protected buildings downtown on a historic register. Mr. Littell noted that typically, protected buildings are carved out of regulations. Ms. Mueller noted that there are different levels of historical protection that protect historical value and limit the ways in which a protected building can be altered. Mr. Connors noted that the Town has a Demolition Delay Bylaw which can be activated for historic buildings built before 1940. He said that would continue to apply. Ms. Dale asked if state and federal historic buildings under 3A could be redeveloped. Ms. Mueller clarified that redevelopment could occur in the sense of making small dimensional alterations, changing the use of the buildings, and making additions so long as those changes did not override historical protections.

Mr. Dahlquist asked if the corner at the Cumberland Farms was considered to have significant value to the community and if a sidewalk requirement could increase the value of the corner's importance and walkability. Mr. Littell noted that wherever there is street frontage, the rules for front setbacks and treatments apply. Ms. Mueller asked if the Board wanted this request for a sidewalk requirement to be uniform throughout the downtown area. Several Board members agreed that more sidewalks downtown would benefit Hamilton residents. Chair Crouch asked if landscaping could be incorporated at that corner. Mr. Littell noted that planting standards were not applied to front yards in this round of code edits. Mr. Norton noted that landscaping maintenance would come at an economic cost to the town. Mr. Poore asked if there could be recommended guidelines added for the public sector and a definition of curb cuts. Ms. Mueller clarified that zoning changes would not affect public investments in the right of way, and noted that trying to make individual, specific changes to the code right now would not be effective.

Mr. Poore requested that the code amendments address smaller aspects of site development, including walkways, lighting, and parking. Mr. Littell agreed that they could add simple guidelines for smaller parking areas and planting standards since their

priority is to keep this round of amendments simple to fit with the existing code. Mr. Littell requested that the Board address the use table at the next Planning Board meeting.

Mr. Poore asked for clarification regarding whether there was a prescribed minimum or maximum height from the ground to the ground floor level. Mr. Littell confirmed that this height was separate from the Ground Floor Height recommended in the zoning amendment draft, and this allowed for more flexibility when developing for either retail or non-commercial uses.

The Board discussed the timing of public hearings and future meetings. The Board agreed that the next meeting would be a joint meeting with the Select Board.

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:20 pm.

Documents:

[April 8, 2025 Planning Board Agenda](#)

[Draft Code – Proposed Hamilton Town Center and 3A Compliant Zoning](#)

[Presentation – Hamilton Town Center and Section 3A Zoning](#) (Presented to Planning Board on April 1, 2025)

[Presentation 2 – Hamilton Town Center and Section 3A Zoning](#) (Presented to Planning Board on April 8, 2025)

Respectfully submitted by A. Brennan, June 11, 2025.

The minutes were prepared from a recording.