



Town of Hamilton
Planning Board
Meeting Minutes of October 14, 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 October 14, 2025 at 7:00 PM. This meeting was held at the Hamilton-Wenham Public Library, 14 Union St. A Zoom Link was provided as a convenience for the public.

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 PM. Planning Board members: Marnie Crouch, Chair, 2026; Emil Dahlquist, Clerk, 2028; William Wheaton, 2028; Beth Herr, 2028; 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 Marnie Crouch called the Planning Board meeting to order at approximately 7:06 PM, identified the meeting was being recorded and those present: J. Poore, P. Norton, W. Wheaton, B. Herr, D. Dale, E. Dahlquist, M. Hamel. Not present: J. Austin. Also present: Alicia Brennan, Planning & Conservation Coordinator; others as noted.*

Agenda:

1. PLANNING BOARD BUSINESS:

a. The Planning Board will hold a workshop to discuss the proposed Brown's Hill Overlay District, a proposed zoning overlay district proposed for the parcel containing the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary campus at 130 Essex Street, Assessor's Map 64, Lot 5.

Chair Crouch opened discussion of the Planning Board's proposed edits to the Brown's Hill Overlay District draft bylaw language. Chair Crouch noted the removal of the words, "or lawfully begun" in Section 9.9.3.1, *Structures Lawfully in Existence as of the Effective Date of this Bylaw*, to clarify the exclusion of any proposed Zoning Bylaw changes pending with the Attorney General.

Chair Crouch noted the addition of Section 1B under Section 9.9.6.2, *Specific requirements for new development or expansion of existing buildings requiring a Special Permit*: "Existing buildings, including but not limited to the Chapel, the Academic Center, and the Goddard Library, that may encroach on the buffer cannot be expanded to further encroach on the buffer area, and any new construction anywhere within the BHOD must not encroach on the 50-foot buffer."

Chair Crouch noted a proposed change to the language, "steep slopes of 15% or more" in Section 9.9.5, *BHOD Special Design Process*, Section 1, *Identification of Protected Areas*. Based on feedback from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS), the Board considered increasing the minimum slope to 20%. E. Dahlquist proposed that the Board consider the slope percentage upon which development could occur before setting a minimum metric. J. Poore also noted that a stormwater delineation would assist the Board in determining buildable land on steep slopes. By a show of hands, the Board unanimously agreed to keep the percentage at 15%.

Chair Crouch noted an addition to Section 9.9.6.2, *Specific Requirements for new development or expansion of existing buildings requiring a Special Permit*, Section 8D, Retaining Walls. J. Poore noted that retaining walls would be a more environmentally sound way to manage stormwater, flooding, and erosion. By a show of hands, the Board unanimously agreed to include this addition.

Chair Crouch noted a proposed addition to Section 9.9.7.2, *Application Process*, Section 4: "Contours at two-foot intervals." By a show of hands, the Board unanimously agreed to include this addition.

Chair Crouch noted a proposed edit to 9.9.8.3, *Applicability of § 8.2 (Senior Housing Bylaw) and §§ 8.3 (Inclusionary Housing) of the Hamilton Zoning Bylaw to the BHOD*, to strike Section 4 and add § 8.2.33 to the list of provisions in 9.9.8.3, Section 2.

Chair Crouch opened discussion of proposed edits to the BHOD draft bylaw language suggested by Attorney Meirwyn Walters, representing GCTS. Chair Crouch noted a proposed edit to 9.9.2.2 *Allowable Land Uses* concerning the party responsible for maintaining infrastructure upon development of the GCTS property. Chair Crouch raised the question of whether the Planning Board was responsible for issues of infrastructure since they were not related to zoning. M. Walters confirmed that GCTS would continue to be responsible for roads and other infrastructure after development of the land. J. Poore expressed concerns about wastewater treatment on the property, particularly if several developers built on the property without allocating extra land for new septic systems. Chair Crouch proposed reducing Floor Area Ratio (FAR) as a potential solution.

Chair Crouch noted an edit proposed by GCTS in 9.9.6.2 *Specific Requirements for new development or expansion of existing buildings requiring a Special Permit*, Section 2B: Open Space Amount, which removed the ability of the Planning Board to protect common open space through deed restrictions, covenants, public dedication, or other methods acceptable to the Board. Chair Crouch noted that this edit was inconsistent with other provisions in the Hamilton Zoning Bylaw, and put the Planning Board at risk of spot zoning and making special allowances for GCTS as opposed to the rest of the Town.

Chair Crouch noted edits in 9.9.7.2 *Application Process*, Sections 7 and 9, which removed the words “permanently protected” in relation to common open space on the property. She commented that removing this language would make the BHOD inconsistent with the rest of the Zoning Bylaw’s provisions for open space.

W. Wheaton commented that Section 9.9.9, Planning Board Findings for Special Permits, should include the provision that all BHOD Special Permits be consistent with the goals of the Hamilton Master Plan. Chair Crouch agreed and added that the BHOD Special Permit findings should also be consistent with the Town Center form-based code.

Chair Crouch opened discussion of the proposed BHOD tables. W. Wheaton proposed to disallow by right reuse in existing dormitories and apartments, with all other buildings subject to Special Permit review. He noted concerns from residents about increased traffic, noise pollution, and light pollution because of changing building use, particularly in the Upper Campus section of the GCTS property.

Chair Crouch summarized the Planning Board changes to Table 1: the Lower Campus allowed by right use, the Upper Campus allowed use by Special Permit (except for the Gatehouse, which was allowed by right use), rehabilitation of the Retreat House was allowed by right, and expansion in the Retreat House in the Heritage Landscape was allowed by up to 10% by Special Permit.

J. Poore raised the concern that some uses of Pilgrim Hall, such as commercial use, would likely result in less parking for residents since parking in that section of the campus was already limited. E. Dahlquist expressed concern that there would be limited space for the 40% Open Space requirement in Lower Campus 1 due to the layout of the dormitories and the bordering wetlands.

E. Dahlquist summarized a comment from GCTS regarding the allowance of parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities in the Heritage Landscape. Chair Crouch suggested removing the phrase, “and recreational facilities” to allow only parks and playgrounds by Special Permit in the Heritage Landscape.

E. Dahlquist opened discussion of Table 2 and confirmed that changes in use for the Retreat House would require a Special Permit. Chair Crouch advocated for postponing final decisions on Table 2: Use Regulations until the Board received feedback at the public hearing and from the Planning Director, Mark Connors, particularly because changes to Table 2 would also impact Tables 3 and 4.

E. Dahlquist opened discussion of the BHOD Development Data, including existing FAR and development intensity for each section of the GCTS campus. He also summarized the BHOD Buildout Options as a way to present theoretical development scenarios on the property for consideration by the Board and the public. P. Norton commented that density should be concentrated more in the Upper Campus than in the Middle Campus. Chair Crouch advocated for keeping FAR between 0.17 and 0.2 as a reasonable development density standard.

Chair Crouch asked A. Brennan to check for local room availability for an additional Planning Board meeting during the week of November 10th for further discussion.

2. ADJOURNMENT:

D. Dale made a motion to adjourn at approximately 9:30 PM. P. Norton seconded the motion.

Vote: *The Planning Board voted unanimously by roll call to adjourn the meeting.*

Documents:

- [Meeting Agenda](#)
- Brown's Hill Overlay District (BHOD)
 - [BHOD Bylaw Language \(10/13/2025\)](#)
 - [Base Districts Map](#)
 - [Table 1: Description of Zoning Districts](#)
 - [Table 2: Allowable Uses in Districts](#)
 - [Table 3: Allowable Building Types](#)
 - [Table 4: Dimensional Regulations](#)
 - [BHOD Buildout Options](#)

Respectfully submitted by A. Brennan, 10/23/25.

The minutes were prepared from video and audio recording.