

1. Amesbury Planning Board Meeting Minutes
2. In Person Meeting – March 2, 2026, at 7:02 PM
3. Chairman Pascal Rettig called the March 2, 2026, Planning Board meeting to order at 7:02 PM.
4. *To submit a public comment ahead of time email Becky Frey at freyr@amesburyma.gov. To speak live at the meeting fill out a public comment form and turn it into Becky Frey. There will be a public comment portion of each public hearing discussed tonight.*
5. *The Chairman notes that tonight's Planning Board meeting is being recorded by Amesbury Public Access Television; this legal step has been taken but does not act as the official record. The written meeting minutes by the Recording Secretary is the official record.*
6. Pascal Rettig initiated roll call –
7. Keith Ratner – YES
8. Joel Nice – YES
9. Michael Jewell – YES
10. Tracey Chalifour – YES
11. Tom Salemi - YES
12. David Frick – YES
13. Pascal Rettig – YES
14. Also: Nipun Jain (Planning Director) and Becky Frey (Community Development Coordinator)
15. **Minutes – 10-27-25**
16. David Frick motioned to approve the 10-27-25 minutes as submitted. Seconded by Tracey Chalifour.
17. Pascal Rettig initiated roll call vote–
18. Keith Ratner – YES
19. Joel Nice – YES
20. Michael Jewell – YES
21. Tracey Chalifour – YES
22. Tom Salemi - YES
23. David Frick – YES
24. Pascal Rettig – YES
25. Motion passed 7-0
26. **Minutes – 11-3-25**
27. Tom Salemi commented that on line 187 he was questioning if the soil was strong enough for the substation.

28. Tracey Chalifour motioned to approve the 11-3-25 minutes as amended. Seconded by David Frick.
29. Pascal Rettig initiated roll call vote–
30. Keith Ratner – YES
31. Joel Nice – YES
32. Michael Jewell – YES
33. Tracey Chalifour – YES
34. Tom Salemi - YES
35. David Frick – YES
36. Pascal Rettig – YES
37. Motion passed 7-0

38. Minutes – 11-10-25

39. Tracey Chalifour commented that line 163 should note that the units would face a garage not another building.
40. Tom Salemi commented that line 158 his name was spelled incorrectly.
41. Tracey Chalifour motioned to approve the 11-10-25 minutes as amended. Seconded by David Frick.
42. Pascal Rettig initiated roll call vote–
43. Keith Ratner – YES
44. Joel Nice – YES
45. Michael Jewell – YES
46. Tracey Chalifour – YES
47. Tom Salemi - YES
48. David Frick – YES
49. Pascal Rettig – YES
50. Motion passed 7-0

51. Preapplication – 29 Water Street

52. Mike Sanchez from Construction Operations Group represented the applicant, 21 Water Street Realty Trust, along with attorney Paul Galiardi and Engineer Sam Colombo. This is a preapplication for the project 29 Water St. There is an existing mill building that was owned previously by the city. 21 Water St Realty Trust purchased the building and donated most of the land around it back to the city. They are proposing a Historic Special Permit with 6 residential units. The property is in the floodplain, so there is no occupiable space on the ground floor. The ground floor will be access and storage. It was built in 1878 in the IC zoning district and is 200 feet from the river. The lot is a little over 5,000 sf. In 2008, some renovations were made, and a dormer was added. There is a large open landscape setting and it is near other mill buildings. The plan is to restore the original building. They will add balconies on the front and rear of the building. The 6 residential units on the second and third floors will consist of 3 two-bedroom and 3 one-bedroom units. They will need to submit to the Conservation Commission. They are not actually doing any work other than bringing in utilities. They have a zero lot line on the south side of the building and minimal lot line on the north side. On the front, ownership extends out to the sidewalk. They will

look to blend their sidewalk into the city sidewalk. The Water Street parking lot is 30 feet away from the corner of the building. They have not evaluated the roof yet, but they will likely replace it with new architectural shingles. The ground floor will likely have a mechanical room and electrical room near the front entry. It could be a good place for tenant storage as well. The second floor plan has 20-foot cathedral ceilings. They will work out the dormers with the Design Review Committee. They need to work with the existing openings of the building. Structural analysis shows the building is sound. They will need to repoint it. The bones of the building and the floors themselves will remain on the second floor. There will be a new floor on the third floor. During construction, they will plan to use a driven stake fence. They are seeking a temporary easement to occupy a buffer space around the building, for 10–15 feet for the construction project. They will restore the grass around the project site. The construction fencing will have a gliding gate door. That should protect the area and still allow for community events. All the utilities will come in from Water Street. There are no additional stormwater management measures. They will need a waiver for the required 9 parking spaces. The municipal lot is very close, with plenty of parking. They will be looking to negotiate the affordable housing unit out of the project; and understand some compensation is associated with that.

53. Pascal Rettig questioned if they considered any other use other than residential. Mike Sanchez responded that there is not a high demand for office space. These will be viable and good units for residences.
54. Keith Ratner questioned what zoning district this was in. Nipun Jain responded it was Industrial Commercial.
55. Pascal Rettig commented that 90% of the time no one is in that area but, then it is packed and surrounded for Amesbury Days. Mike Sanchez responded that he appreciated that feedback, but it's owned by a private developer. David Frick noted they may like to be part of the party.
56. David Frick questioned if there was a way to use the ground floor for parking. Mike Sanchez responded that in order to meet the turning radius they would need a significant amount of space. Also, the ceiling height on the ground floor is not high enough to fit cars.
57. Keith Ratner commented that there was a lot of potential municipal parking that has been discussed in past meetings. Council did some management with that. Nipun Jain added that the city has a fee sticker program to use at municipal lots. That is being further developed and refined in terms of what it will look like. Right now, it is \$50 a year for a sticker to park in the downtown area. Given the program is put in place, it can be used for this project. It still requires a waiver from the Board, but it's available. They are looking at revisions to the zoning code to develop a more practical program to ensure they are not overburdening the system. That is still under review. They also have a long-term lease option if they have parking off-site or with another property owner. Under the code, the applicant is required to show parking either onsite, off-site, or through the city. Mike Sanchez commented that the owner has a certain allocation in the municipal lot already. When the owner donated land back to the city, they were also granted a letter to give them future consideration for parking.
58. Pascal Rettig noted that residential parking in the lot across the street should work symbiotically with commercial customer parking. Nipun Jain commented that the Board

should also be cognizant of the fact that parking standards are higher than they have been in urban complexes. It is a balancing act between vibrant downtowns and parking. They don't need parking for every use. There are different uses of parking that can be shared.

59. Tracey Chalifour questioned if the mechanicals would be on the ground floor. Mike Sanchez responded that some portion of the ground floor would be dedicated to water service and mechanical equipment. They are proposing a dry system and talking to fire about it. There will be a main electric room and water room. They are allowable components in a floodplain.
60. David Frick questioned if the mechanicals could be raised. Mike Sanchez responded that the electrical shutoff needs to be on the ground floor or outside. The rooms would most likely be 10' by 10' and tucked in corners.
61. Tracey Chalifour questioned if the elevator would be coming in on the ground floor. Mike Sanchez confirmed that was correct. It would be similar to the marina.
62. Tracey Chalifour commented that she thought the parking waiver would make sense here, unlike some of the other projects. This is a perfect setting for those residents.
63. Joel Nice questioned if there would be a curb cut for a loading parking spot to unload groceries etc. Mike Sanchez responded that there were a couple spaces on the street up from the building. If they want any greenery at all, the only opportunity is a little to each side of the entrance. Joel Nice questioned if they had any preferences on the dormer design. Mike Sanchez responded that he was okay with either option. Joel Nice questioned why they didn't want to do the affordable unit. Nipun Jain responded that right now the applicant was looking to do the project under the Historic Preservation Special Permit. If a project has 6 to 15 units proposed, then they are required to provide one affordable unit. The more units a project has, the better they make out. Smaller projects are penalized the most. It is unfair when larger projects have a better pro forma. Based on the projects the Board has approved and the feedback they have received, the city needs a more formalized payment-in-lieu program. We are working on that.
64. Keith Ratner clarified those payments go to the Housing Trust. Nipun Jain confirmed they did.
65. Tom Salemi commented they could combine two one-bed units into a two-bed and go down to 5 units. Then an affordable unit would not be required. Nipun Jain confirmed that was correct. That could be an option. The Board should look at all the competing interests and what makes sense for the community. Mike Sanchez commented that they looked at 4 units vs. 6 units. This is a tight pro forma and they are looking at what makes sense.
66. Pascal Rettig clarified they were looking to do payment in lieu. Mike Sanchez responded that if the proposal is relatively close to what was discussed, then it works for them.
67. Michael Jewell commented that the city doesn't maintain parking lots. Part of the Water St lot is shut down. City hall employees are parking there and as well as businesses and customers. However, they are only talking about 6 units.
68. Michael Jewell questioned if they would consider donating their time or energy to do something with the grassy area in the park. Mike Sanchez responded that they would end up getting some new grass around the building. They are not opposed to doing more than what they impact, but not sure they are willing to replant the entire Lower Mill Yard.

69. Tom Salemi commented that he loved the idea and is in favor of saving older buildings. Originally, he was opposed to the waiver for affordable units, but this discussion has made him open to finding a solution. The parking would need to go through the parking program. Mike Sanchez responded that's how they would market the units.
70. Keith Ratner questioned if they needed to any setback waivers. Nipun Jain responded this was a Historic Restoration Special Permit. A whole host of building design standards are in the code. They have worked with the team to look at the windows. They are taking out some of the doorways that don't lead anywhere, and that's what drove the balconies. They asked the applicant to look at doorways in the Lower Millyard to take inspiration from those entryways. Those are the ways the applicant is striving to meet the intent of building design standards. They are not expanding or altering the footprint and should not require additional waivers. There are some areas where they will be making improvements in the right of way, area along Water St. They will be matching the brick walkway. They should not need any dimensional relief based on the plans.
71. David Frick questioned what they were doing for landscaping. Mike Sanchez responded that the only area on their property for landscaping is in the front. Nipun Jain commented they were working to put easements in place and will match city sidewalks. David Frick clarified there would be an exit on the river side and the street side. Mike Sanchez confirmed that was correct. David Frick questioned if they would do landscaping on the river side. Mike Sanchez responded that there would be a back stoop area, and there's a walkway in the back that could connect to the city path.
72. Mike Sanchez commented that they plan to continue the brick sidewalk from the north side to the south side of the property. Nipun Jain commented that they have suggested doing a seamless continuation of the sidewalk similar to what was done at 21 Water St.
73. David Frick questioned if they would put landscaping on the sides. Mike Sanchez responded that they don't own the land on the sides. David Frick commented there were ways to work that out. Mike Sanchez noted the rear might have room for a few bushes. There are two proposed landscaping areas in the front. David Frick commented it would look nicer to have landscaping on the sides as well.
74. Tom Salemi added that it was a good opportunity for the developer to work with the city. Nipun Jain commented that the design could be discussed with DRC and the mechanism to allow it could be worked out via an easement. Mike Sanchez agreed there were ways to achieve common goals to make it more attractive. 21 Water St. has continually participated in enhancements with the city. Landscaping is a reasonable way to handle that. There are some challenges with the grade. They may not be able to run a planting bed the whole length of the building.
75. Pascal Rettig questioned what the plan was for the first floor so that it would not feel like an empty warehouse. Mike Sanchez responded that they would be installing a plaster ceiling, painting it a light color, and adding lighting in that space. They may put in a wrought iron-looking grate in the front.
76. Joel Nice suggested adding a corridor on that side so people would not look in and see storage. Pascal Rettig added it could be a gallery of mill building pictures.
77. Tracey Chalifour questioned if these would be rentals or condos. Mike Sanchez responded they would be condos.

- 78. Mike Sanchez noted their biggest concern was the parking waiver, so they wanted to check on that. It's a small site and they are not changing stormwater impact. They are not planning for this to be peer reviewed. Nipun Jain responded they haven't seen all the engineering and calculations.
- 79. Tracey Chalifour commented that condo owners would want patio spaces and grill areas. It may be something to think about. Mike Sanchez responded that was probably not something they would be able to provide.
- 80. Keith Ratner commented he was comfortable with the plan to use the municipal lot.
- 81. Pascal Rettig commented that he wished there were a better way to activate the bottom floor. There may be an opportunity for a public-private partnership. Mike Sanchez agreed there may be a creative use that would work for everyone.
- 82. Tracey Chalifour questioned if they considered making the first-floor open air. Mike Sanchez responded that would not work.
- 83. Pascal Rettig noted that no one from the Board was raising major objections to the parking or affordable units waivers.
- 84. Nipun Jain commented there was still ongoing discussion on the use of the first floor and a public-private partnership.

87. Administrative – Administrative Procedures

- 88. Pascal Rettig commented that he sent out proposed procedures. They do not need to necessarily vote on them or enshrine them in an official capacity, but this outlines the way the Board does business internally. There were a few important parts we wanted to capture. The first was deadlines and when we send materials to the Board. We went from paper to digital and there was a weird knock-on effect. Applicants don't get hardcopy submittals in on time. There were unintended consequences giving applicants the ability to submit things later and later. The Board doesn't hold a hard deadline, so it's harder for OCED to enforce. We have not enforced a hard deadline and have seen the effect of that. There should be a deadline, and the Board should stick with it to the extent that we can. We need to put in guardrails. In the procedures it outlines that the deadline is two Wednesdays before the meeting is when most things should be submitted and that Friday is the last day.
- 82. David Frick questioned if an applicant submitted material later than that, would they accept that. Nipun Jain responded they already have the two-week deadline outlined for submittals. If it's something small, it may not need that whole time.
- 83. Tracey Chalifour noted that Rocky Hill came in with a presentation and none of the materials were in our packets. Nipun Jain clarified that presentations are not submittals. However, the presentations should not contain new information that has not been submitted to the Board. The Board should enforce that. They can give them two minutes to present and move it to the next meeting. Tom Salemi agreed the Board needed time to look at it to discuss it appropriately.
- 84. Tracey Chalifour agreed for late submittals they should state the deadline and continue the application to the next meeting. Nipun Jain commented that there could be some nuance depending on the scale of the change.
- 85. Pascal Rettig commented that the procedures allow for minor changes to come in until that Friday. Nipun Jain commented in an ideal world, the Board would get reports from

subcommittees letting them know comments have been addressed. That would eliminate debate at the meeting because we have written comments and recommendations. Pascal Rettig agreed they could get more done via memos instead of a back and forth. The Board can submit written questions to departments or the applicant so they can come prepared to discuss.

86. Nipun Jain commented that presentations with new information should meet the submission deadline.
87. Pascal Rettig commented that the Board needs to use other Boards and Departments of the city better. We need to crystallize concerns and figure out how we can farm those out to get authoritative answers back.
88. Nipun Jain commented that for example the Board could ask for memos about parking for applications like the 29 Water St. Landscaping is a separate section in XI C. The applicant can claim there is no land, but they need to justify it. Have they checked with the city? There are ways to negotiate. They should know what is required and how to leverage that. Landscaping creates privacy and buffer.
89. Tracey Chalifour questioned how they got memos from other Boards? Pascal Rettig responded that they need to send specific requests.
90. Keith Ratner commented that they should make a form or memo. Nipun Jain noted they used to get detailed memos. Departments need to be given 30 days to provide comments.
91. Nipun Jain commented that at the initial meeting, the Board should document their questions and synthesize them for distribution.
92. Pascal Rettig commented that they need a waiver table with justification. Keith Ratner agreed they shouldn't really even talk about waivers until they get justification. Nipun Jain commented that they could also delegate them to different Departments and Boards to get information.
93. Pascal Rettig commented that they can interact on the Google Doc. They can do a section-by-section review. We should go over all the items and make sure we have everything then organize comments. Nipun Jain commented that the Board should be mindful to not to be subjective. This is not discretionary, it is driven by performance and design standards. They need to be clear about who is signing off on that. They need to rely on subject matter experts to close it out.
94. Pascal Rettig commented that they should have a pre-decision hearing. They shouldn't ask for a decision until they are ready to close the public hearing. We need to make sure we have everything we need. Then we would take final public comment, close the public hearing, and ask for a decision. Staff needs some time to write it, so it should be in by Friday. The idea is to break decisions down into two parts: one part clearly labeled as our standard conditions which are largely the same for every project, and a small number of project specific conditions. The Board can focus on the specific conditions. Then the Board can discuss and edit it live in the meeting so we can see exactly what we are voting on.

89. Admin –Invoices

90. David Frick motioned to approve the invoices listed below. Seconded by Keith Ratner.

1. VHB invoice for Rocky Hill Development in the amount of \$7,700.
2. VHB Invoice for Clarks Road in the amount of \$7,648.

91. Pascal Rettig initiated roll call vote –

92. Keith Ratner – YES

93. Joel Nice – YES

94. Michael Jewell – YES

95. Tracey Chalifour – YES

96. Tom Salemi - YES

97. David Frick – YES

98. Pascal Rettig – YES

99. Motion passed 7-0

100. Adjournment

101. Michael Jewell motioned to adjourn at 9:31. Seconded by Tom Salemi.

102. Pascal Rettig initiated roll call vote –

103. Keith Ratner – YES

104. Joel Nice – YES

105. Michael Jewell – YES

106. Tracey Chalifour – YES

107. Tom Salemi - YES

108. David Frick – YES

109. Pascal Rettig – YES

110. Motion passed 7-0