

## **Guidelines/Protocols for Planning Board Virtual Hearings**

The South Hadley Planning Board is resuming public hearings on pending and new applications beginning June 15, 2020. The Planning Board is looking forward to hearing from the public – albeit remotely via technology. To make this new approach proceed as smoothly as reasonably possible, the Planning Board has adopted some Guidelines and the Planning & Conservation Department have established some new tools to aid the public in participating in the hearings. Use of a virtual means of conducting hearings (and meetings) is anticipated to be temporary; accordingly, these guidelines/protocols are to remain in effect until the public health emergency permits a resumption of physical, in-person meetings and hearings. The Board may revisit these guidelines/protocols at any time to adjust and adapt to circumstances as the Board gains more experience with the virtual hearings/meetings.

### ***Helpful Suggestions:***

A few suggestions before detailing the Formal Guidelines:

- Try out your device on the platform – Google Hangout Meet - the Town is using prior to the date of the hearing or meeting. You can log on to other posted meetings in the community that use the platform.
- Know your device and how it displays the settings for the platform - the controls may appear at different places on different devices.
- Know how to mute your microphone and control what the camera displays – in virtual meetings, people can often see (and hear) you and what is behind/around you.
- We want everyone to enjoy the experience – part of that is helped by muting any other devices (such as cell phones, televisions, radios, etc.) which could disrupt the hearing.

### ***Organization/Procedures of Public Hearings***

The following sequential steps are typical of a Planning Board Public Hearing:

- a) Chair recesses the meeting for the public hearing
- b) Chair calls the hearing to order
- c) Clerk reads the public hearing notice (if it is a continuation of a previous hearing, there is not typically a notice read; the Chair will announce that it is a continuation)
- d) Chair allows the applicant to make a presentation
- e) Chair will ask staff or consultants working for the Town to speak or make a presentation
- f) Board members will ask the applicant, staff, and Town consultants questions (often this will occur during the presentations as well as after the presentations (staff may also pose questions))
- g) At a point that the Chair determines that the Board members, staff, and Town consultants have no further questions, the Chair will entertain comments/questions from the public (see last section for guidelines for submitting/making comments/questions)

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### *The Guidelines/Protocols - Generally*

- 1). Materials Submittal: All materials to be used by the applicant or the Town need to be submitted as a PDF to the Director at least one week prior to the hearing so the documents may be uploaded to the website to enable all parties (including, but not limited to, the Board members, Town staff, and the interested members of the public) involved in the hearing to download the documents for use during the hearing.
- 2). Time limitations - Meetings: Three-hour limitation on Planning Board meetings including hearings. The Chair may, in exceptional circumstances, at the Chair's discretion, extend this time limit.
- 3). Time limitations – Hearings: Two hour limitation on any hearing with the hearing to be continued to another predetermined date (unless extended at the discretion of the Chair).
- 4). Recording and Posting: Hearings will be **recorded and posted** (online and, hopefully, on Channel 15). Meetings are also anticipated to be similarly recorded and posted.
- 5). Live Streaming: Hearings will be live streamed online and Channel 15 when feasible – if the Selectboard or School Committee is meeting, it will not be feasible.
- 6). Virtual Platform: The Town's virtual meeting platform is Google Hangout Meets. The Planning Board will use this platform for all virtual meetings unless/until the Town acquires licenses to utilize an alternative platform.
- 7). How to Join/Speak: Joining and speaking during the hearings may be accomplished either on-line or via phone. Whether participating on-line or by phone, participants must adhere to the guidelines/protocols - particularly relative to being "muted" unless called upon by the Chair.
- 8). Chat Function - Use: The "Chat" function is to be used solely to
  - a) convey comments to the Board or
  - b) indicate a desire to speak.
- 9). Chat Function – Record: All "Chat" comments are to be **transcribed and appended to the minutes** of a public hearing/meeting
- 10). Unaddressed Comments/Questions: Any comments/questions submitted at a public hearing but not addressed due to the lack of time, will be the first public comments/questions addressed at the continuation of the hearing - immediately followed by comments/questions

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submitted following the hearing but no less than 4 days prior to the date of the hearing's continuation.

- 11). Staff Monitoring of Emails, Google Form, and Chat during Hearing: Planning & Conservation Clerk Colleen Canning and Assistant Planner/Conservation Administrator Anne Capra will separately monitor emails, Google Form submittals, and chats that are submitted by persons wishing to make comments or questions. They will maintain the order in which person have requested to speak and let the Chair know who is "next in line" to speak. They will also monitor participants to note if persons are remaining muted and whether the "Chat" function is being used properly in accordance with the guidelines/protocols.
- 12). Requirement to be Muted: All members of the public and the applicant are to remain "muted" unless the Chair authorizes them to speak. Once they have been recognized, they may unmute themselves and offer their comments/questions and then return themselves to a "muted" status.
- 13). Abuse of "Chat" Function or Not Remaining Muted: Persons misusing the "Chat" function or not remaining muted will be notified that they must correct their behavior/status. Failure to do so after one warning will result in the person being "removed" from the meeting (blocked).
- 14). Removal for Disruption: The Chair has authority to have any person failing to adhere to the rules of conduct removed if that failure is disruptive to a meeting or hearing. The Director of Planning & Conservation will remove ("block") any participant upon instruction to do so by the Chair.
- 14). Reference to Guidelines/Protocols: Posted agendas are to make reference to the Board's adopted Guidelines/Protocols so prospective participants have an opportunity to review and become familiar with them prior to a meeting.
- 15). Adherence to Guidelines/Protocols: Whether participating on-line or by phone, participants must adhere to the guidelines/protocols - particularly relative to being "muted" unless called upon by the Chair.

### ***The Guidelines/Protocols – Submittal of Comments from the Public***

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. The public is allowed and encouraged to submit their comments/questions via email prior to the scheduled meeting/hearing so that they can be shared with the applicant, Town Counsel, Peer Reviewer (if applicable), and the Board.</li></ol> |
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<p>b. Comments submitted at least 4 <b>CALENDAR</b> days prior to the scheduled public hearing will be the first comments the applicant will be asked to respond to following the Board members questions.</p>
<p>c. Comments may be submitted via a “Google Form” which will be created for each session of a public hearing on each application. This will allow for immediate submittal to the staff and can be shared with the Board members and allows for the form to be differentiated between projects and hearing dates.</p>
<p>d. During a hearing, the public may submit comments/questions via the “Google Form” or chat function.</p>
<p>e. All comments submitted, whether verbally, by “Chat” function, Google Form, or written, must include the submitter’s name, street address, and email address – if available.</p>
<p>f. The public may still submit comments/questions via email to <a href="mailto:SHPlanBoard@southhadleyma.gov">SHPlanBoard@southhadleyma.gov</a> . However, such submittals may not be retrievable during the public hearing and could be missed due to the volume of emails received on different topics.</p>