

## Department of Planning and Community Development

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### MEETING MINUTES

#### JEFFERSON COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

**Jefferson County Office Building, 175 Arsenal St.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room**

**February 24, 2026**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Lisa Ruggiero, Neil Katzman, John Stano, Jean Waterbury, Richard Nuijens, Randy Lake, Mitch Robinson, Karen Freeman, Joe McLaughlin.

STAFF PRESENT: Hartley Bonisteel Schweitzer, AICP, Director  
Alicia Dewey, Deputy Director  
Andy Nevin, Senior Planner  
Sam Wilson, Community Development Coordinator  
Aileen Anderson, Community Development Coordinator  
Emerald Macilvennie, Secretary

PUBLIC PRESENT: Deborah Biondolillo, Planning Board Chair (LeRay)  
Lee Shimel, Zoning Officer (LeRay)  
Timothy Newman, Champion Fire Chief (LeRay)  
Geoffrey Urda (City of Watertown)

CALL TO ORDER AND ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM: Lisa Ruggiero opened the meeting at 4:00 p.m. and stated that a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF THE November 25, 2025 MEETING MINUTES: The motion was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by Richard Nuijens, and carried unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS: Lisa Ruggiero asked if there were any communications. There were none.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (OTHER THAN AGENDA ITEMS): Lisa Ruggiero asked if there were any public comments (other than on agenda items). There were none.

NEW BUSINESS: Lisa Ruggiero welcomed and introduced new members Mitch Robinson, Karen Freeman, and Joe McLaughlin to the Board. Hartley Bonisteel Schweitzer reported the officers' committee's findings to the Board. It was announced that Lisa Ruggiero will advance from Vice-Chair to Chair of the Board. Also, John Stano has agreed to serve as the new Vice-Chair. Both positions carry a 2-year term. Sam Wilson took an opportunity to review routine board procedures for the benefit of all. The topics were recusal and abstention voting guidelines. Hartley Bonisteel Schweitzer introduced Alicia Dewey as the new Deputy Director of County Planning and Community Development.

A. General Municipal Law, Section 239m Referrals:

**1. Leray (T) Calcium Fire Department Site Plan Review, T Le 2 – 26**

Hartley presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to US Route 11, Water District #2, and public wells. The applicant proposes to construct a new Fire Department building and to make site improvements.

She discussed County/State-related matters:

As the total disturbance exceeds one acre, coverage under the NYSDEC SWPPP General Permit for Construction Activity may be required.

Additionally, DEC requires Construction Stormwater Permit coverage, and the project must comply with the NYS Stormwater Management Design Manual and must be approved by the local MS4.

Locally related issues discussed:

The local board should ensure full consistency with the Town's Wellhead Protection Law, Article XX stormwater requirements, and any conditions necessary to formally incorporate the operational commitments described in the Town's response, particularly with respect to prohibited on-site fuel storage, salt use, fire training exercises, and outdoor maintenance activities. The Board further notes that the Town's Wellhead Protection Law, originally adopted in 1989, may warrant a comprehensive review and update to reflect all Town well locations, current regulatory standards, hydrogeologic data, land use patterns, and best practices in source water protection.

Neil Katzman expressed concerns over possible contamination from the proposed facility. He claims the area in question is "a particularly delicate area" and should be treated as such.

Hartley added that the NYS DEC and the Town Engineer have been very involved with this project and are satisfied that the applicant has met all requirements, recommendations, and considerations per their standards at this time.

Tim Newman, the point of contact for the Calcium Fire Department, explained to members that any foam used in the trucks is environmentally friendly as it is a Class A foam. He assured members that no chemicals are stored on site and that foam will not be used at the facility.

Lisa Ruggiero asked about the mention of a separate filtration system with a double-lined oil separation component.

Andy Nevin stated to the Board that a Hydrologist was hired to analyze groundwater flow in the area and provided a detailed report on well depths, flow rates, bedrock, and soil composition, reflecting their due diligence on this project. The input from the professionals trained on these exact matters should be considered.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by John Stano, seconded by Richard Nuijens. Neil**

**Katzman opposed this and did not vote in favor of the project. All other members were in favor of the motion.**

## **2. Watertown (C) Zoning Map Amendment, C 1 – 26**

Alicia presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to New York State-owned land. The City is proposing to remove the subject land from the Waterfront Overlay District on the City's approved Zoning Map and sell the land for a parking lot extension for an existing office building occupied by Jade Stone Engineering.

There were no County/State-related matters.

Locally related issues discussed:

The City should ensure that removal of parcels from the Waterfront Overlay is consistent with the Black River Waterfront future land use character area and the City's Comprehensive Plan.

Geoffrey Urda, a Senior Planner for the City of Watertown, explained that the Waterfront Overlay District spans across the entire City. This is a City-initiated referral, which differentiates it from previous referrals in which the applicants requested a use change. He stated that the use will not change, as the boundaries in the Comprehensive Plan for the City have blended areas, and the parcel in question is in a blended area.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Randy Lake, seconded by Jean Waterbury, and carried unanimously except Mitch Robinson, who recused himself from voting on this matter as he works in the office building.**

## **3. Watertown (C) 925 Main Street West Area Variance, C 2 – 26**

Alicia presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed because it is located near New York State-owned land. The applicant is seeking subdivision approval to divide the parcel into two lots, one of which will no longer meet the minimum rear setback and require an area variance.

There were no County/State-related matters.

Locally related issues discussed:

In reviewing the area variance, the local board should consider the benefit to the applicant against the detriment to the health, safety, and welfare of the community, using the five factors for an area variance as stated in NYS General City Law.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Richard Nuijens, seconded by Neil Katzman, and**

carried unanimously.

#### **4. Champion (T) Zoning Law Amendment T Ch 1 – 26**

Hartley presented this project to the Board. The Town is proposing to update its Zoning Law.

She discussed County/State-related matters:

NYS Town Law requires zoning amendments to be made in accordance with the current Comprehensive Plan.

Locally related issues discussed:

The proposed amendments represent a substantial modernization of the 2014 Zoning Law. Because of that, the Town should ensure internal consistency between newly added definitions and the Use Control Schedule. For example, the tiered Solar Energy System framework and Battery Energy Storage Systems should clearly cross-reference dimensional standards, screening requirements, decommissioning provisions, and site plan or special permit criteria to avoid ambiguity during application review.

The expansion of energy-related provisions, especially battery storage and large-scale solar, warrants careful attention to fire safety, emergency response coordination, screening, fencing, glare control, and security for decommissioning. The Town may wish to consult with the local fire department to ensure that emergency access and setback standards are adequate.

Additionally, Accessory Dwelling Unit provisions should be carefully aligned with lot area, septic capacity, and density standards to prevent unintended increases in dwelling intensity in districts with limited infrastructure.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of approval, as it represents a proactive and comprehensive update to the Town's zoning framework, was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by Richard Nuijens, and carried unanimously.**

#### **5. Cape Vincent (T) Lucianne Lapierre Area Variance, T CV 1, 1a – 26**

Hartley presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to County Route 4. The applicant proposes to install 2 commercial storage buildings that will require an area variance, as the proposed building locations will not meet the front and side setback requirements.

She discussed County/State-related matters:

The local board should ensure that a County Highway Work Permit is obtained and that the driveway width, sight distance, culvert installation (if required), and drainage along the County right-of-way are reviewed and approved by the Jefferson County Highway Department.

Locally related issues discussed:

The Planning Board should confirm compliance with drainage, parking, and buffering

requirements and ensure the use remains consistent with the definition of a Small Commercial Enterprise rather than expanding into a more intensive industrial storage operation.

The site plan should clearly identify signage, snow storage, and exterior lighting. All lighting should be downward-directed and shielded to prevent glare onto adjacent parcels. Vegetative buffering along property lines and road frontage should be considered to maintain rural character and reduce visual impacts.

The Zoning Board of Appeals must consider all five factors of an area variance collectively and balance the applicant's benefit against community impacts.

Neil Katzman mentioned buffering requirements to shield/screen the storage buildings; others agreed, as the project is sure to change the character of the parcel and the surrounding area.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by John Stano, and carried unanimously.**

#### **6. Clayton (T) River Roc Storage LLC Area Variance, T Cl 1, 1a – 26**

Hartley presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to County Route 3. The applicant is proposing a 60x160 boat storage facility.

There were no County/State-related matters.

Locally related issues discussed:

Any new lighting should be downward-directed and shielded to avoid glare onto neighboring parcels. Landscaping and vegetative buffering should be added to reduce visual prominence from County Route 3 and adjacent properties.

Although the application characterizes the proposal as a Small Commercial Enterprise, the use more closely aligns with "Storage Facility, Enclosed," given its primary function as the passive storage of property rather than the provision of goods or services to the public. The local board should carefully consider whether the proposed activity is more appropriately classified as an enclosed storage facility rather than a small commercial enterprise.

The Zoning Board of Appeals must consider all five factors of an area variance collectively and balance the applicant's benefit against community impacts.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by Jean Waterbury, and carried unanimously.**

#### **7. Watertown (T) Design Build Innovations Site Plan Review, T Wa 2 - 26**

Aileen presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed because it is within 500 feet of a farm operation within an Agricultural District. The applicant proposes a 16,000-square-foot addition to an existing egg hatchery building.

She discussed County/State-related matters:

An Agricultural Data Statement is required as the property is located within 500 feet of a farm operation in a NYS Certified Agricultural District.

The project will require a Jefferson County Building permit.

Locally related issues discussed:

The local board should ensure internal circulation is adequate, given the merging of the parking area with the access road to accommodate the building's northern expansion.

The local board should ensure that the onsite changes to the drainage patterns adequately prevent impacts on adjacent properties.

The County Planning Board expressed particular concern regarding the proposed temporary leach field. The local board should require detailed information on its design capacity, location, soil suitability, separation distances, anticipated duration of use, and the specific plan and timeline for connection to any permanent system. The temporary system must be demonstrated to meet all applicable state and local health requirements. It should not create a risk of system failure, surface discharge, or adverse impacts to neighboring properties or groundwater resources.

The natural tree line on the east side of the parcel should also be retained for adequate screening/buffer between this project and adjacent uses to the east.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Richard Nuijens, seconded by Neil Katzman, and carried unanimously, except Jean Waterbury, who recused from voting on this matter.**

#### **8. Watertown (T) St Lawrence Seaway RSA Site Plan Review, T Wa 3 - 26**

Aileen presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. She explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to New York State Route 3. The applicant proposes to mount a cellular antenna atop an existing utility pole.

There were no County/State-related matters.

Locally related issues discussed:

The local board should clarify whether the proposed project is a public utility facility or a telecommunications facility (wireless telecommunications facility). The referral notice defines the proposed use as a "public utility"; however, the referral notice type of action indicates it is

considered a telecommunications facility.

The local board should clarify what permits are required for the project. The Town Zoning Law requires public utilities, where allowed, to obtain a zoning permit and site plan review. The Town Zoning Law requires telecommunications facilities, where allowed, to obtain a zoning permit, site plan review, and a special use permit. The Town's Wireless Telecommunications Facilities Law specifically relieves applicants from obtaining zoning permits and site plan reviews.

Karen Freeman asked how tall the addition would be; Aileen stated it is about 2 feet tall.

**Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Randy Lake, seconded by Karen Freeman, and carried unanimously, except Jean Waterbury, who recused from voting on this matter.**

OTHER BUSINESS: Lisa Ruggiero asked if there was any other business. Andy Nevin announced the Local Government Conference coming up in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of April at Turning Stone Resort. Staff will send a reminder to members to register for the event if they wish to attend.

Adjournment:

Neil Katzman made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:46 pm, seconded by John Stano.