

Department of Planning and Community Development

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MEETING MINUTES

JEFFERSON COUNTY PLANNING BOARD

Jefferson County Office Building, 175 Arsenal St.
2nd Floor Conference Room

May 26, 2026

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

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

PUBLIC PRESENT: None

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

APPROVAL OF THE April 28, 2026, MEETING MINUTES: The motion was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by Joe McLaughlin, and carried unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS: John Stano asked if there were any communications. A letter from NYS DOT concerning bridge maintenance in the Village of Deferiet and Towns of Alexandria, Champion, Orleans, and Wlna, was shared with the board members.

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: Andy Nevin reports that there is no other new business to share.

A. General Municipal Law, Section 239m Referrals:

1. Champion (T) Zoning Law Amendment, T Ch 2 - 26

Sam presented this project to the Board. The Town is proposing an update to its Zoning Law. Sam noted that this was also reviewed in February of this year and was delayed to allow for community feedback. He shared Article 4: District Regulations and the Zoning Reference Map,

and highlighted other changes, including Battery Energy Storage Systems, Tier 3 & 4 Solar Energy Systems, and Accessory Dwelling Units.

He 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 town updated its zoning law earlier this year, but delayed final approval to add community feedback. The town has now submitted a revised draft dated May 6, 2026, for County review. County planning staff suggests two main changes to protect local character and keep the rules consistent:

- The updated zoning law allows Tier 3 and Tier 4 Solar Energy Systems in more areas. Specifically, the new rules would allow these systems to be located in the Mobile Home Residential (R-2), Rural Corridor (RC), and Business (B) districts, subject to a Special Use Permit. At the same time, the rules cut the required distance between these solar setups and nearby homes from 400 feet down to 250 feet. Staff recommends keeping Tier 3 and Tier 4 Solar Energy Systems out of the R-2, RC, and Business districts. If the town intends to proceed with this expansion, it should have a data-backed rationale demonstrating how these installations directly align with the Comprehensive Plan's vision for these districts and establish rigorous buffering and setback standards to safeguard neighboring properties.
- The new draft removes ADUs from the Business and Lake districts. Before this change, they were allowed across all zoning districts with a basic zoning permit. To address environmental concerns, Section 630(G) now bans ADUs that overload a property's septic system. Staff notes that a blanket prohibition on ADUs in the Business and Lake Districts creates an unnecessary regulatory contradiction, particularly since these zones are already designed to support higher-density developments, such as multi-family dwellings and commercial spaces. Therefore, the Town should restore ADUs as an allowable accessory use in the Business and Lake Districts and rely upon its newly drafted septic capacity clause to handle environmental limitations on a case-by-case basis, rather than enforcing an arbitrary ban.

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.

2. Lyme (T) James LaValle, Esq (Young/Sommer LLC) Special Use Permit, T Ly 2 - 26

Andy presented this project to the Board, displaying aerial photos, site photos, and a site plan. He explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to County Road 57. The applicant proposes to construct a 199-foot-tall cellular communications tower.

He discussed County/State-related matters:

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Form 7460 should be completed when a crane may be used to build the tower. This will ensure that pilots to and from the Watertown International Airport are aware of the crane's presence during construction.

The applicant should contact the Jefferson County Highway Department to obtain a driveway permit for the entrance onto CR 57 and a construction permit for any work to be performed within the County right-of-way.

A Jefferson County Building Permit is required for the equipment cabinets.

Locally related issues discussed:

The local board should consider requiring the size of the lease parcel to be large enough to accommodate the Town setback of 110% of the tower height, consistent with Section 535, I.1. paragraphs c. and f of the Town Zoning Law.

The local board should request photo-simulations to illustrate the potential visibility of the cell tower from the various distances indicated on the provided viewshed map, per Section 535, I.2., paragraph c.

Jean Waterbury asked about the size of the leased land as compared to the height of the tower. The leased land was shown as 100x100, and the tower's height is 199 feet.

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

3. Philadelphia (T) Martins Country Store Site Plan Review, T Ph 1 - 26

Sam presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and site plan. He explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to US Route 11. The applicant is proposing to add a covered deck for seated dining and another addition on the rear of the building for indoor storage. This project is in the Business Zoning District.

There were no County/State-related matters identified.

There were no locally related issues discussed.

Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of local concern only with comments stated above, was made by Karen Freeman, seconded by Jon Storms, and carried unanimously.

4. Watertown (T) Stewarts Shops Corporation, Site Plan Review, T Wa 6 - 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 NYS Route 3. The applicant is proposing to construct a new gas station with a convenience store.

She discussed County/State-related matters:

A New York State Department of Transportation Highway Permit will be required. The proposed direct ingress off NYS Rt. 3 (southeast corner of site) could create traffic hazards. The proposed truck routing plan calls for opposing traffic flow where vehicles enter the site directly from Rt. 3. The potential obstruction to ingress risks collisions with entering traffic or with traffic backing up onto the state highway, where speeds are 45mph.

Additionally, the local board should ensure that the proposed NYS Route 3 access points meet NYS DOT and local spacing standards (minimum 500 feet) between driveways and intersections. The distance between the proposed ingress driveway and the intersection with the proposed Town road is approximately 215 ft.

A New York State Department of Environmental Conservation formal Jurisdictional Determination should be completed. The site plans delineate a clear "Edge of Wetland" and a restrictive "Wetland Buffer Area" along the western and northern borders, with the "Proposed Limit of Disturbance" encroaching directly against these boundaries. Additionally, any required Article 24 Freshwater Wetlands permits from the NYSDEC and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) should be received before granting local site plan approval.

A Jefferson County Building permit is required for the new building and the gas canopy.

Locally related issues discussed:

The local board should review and consider revision of definitions of "gas station," "retail sales," and "retail gasoline outlet." The Zoning Board of Appeals should interpret or determine whether the use is permitted before any site plan approvals proceed.

The local board must ensure that this site design and layout are sufficiently circumspect by addressing the following critical deficiencies before granting site plan approval:

Vehicle and Pedestrian Circulation:

The local board should ensure that the proposed road west of the site aligns with the existing intersection with NYS Route 3 and is built to Town road standards. Furthermore, the board must address the plan note specifying this roadway is "to be designed and constructed by others"; site plan approval should be strictly conditioned upon a binding legal agreement or performance bond guaranteeing this critical infrastructure is fully built before a Certificate of Occupancy is issued.

The local board should ensure that the site's internal circulation is safe and accessible. Relocating the ice chest, propane tanks, free-standing air machine, and condenser units would reduce obstructions to pedestrian and vehicular traffic circulation and would improve accessibility on the site (107-42. B.(5)).

Parking Layout and Capacity:

The site plan proposes 17 parking spaces while the Town zoning law requires 23 spaces. The layout positions the primary parking area directly in front of the building along the NYS Route 3 corridor. The local board should determine whether the applicant has demonstrated reasonable justification that alternatives (side or rear) are impractical or has taken other measures the local board deems acceptable (107-51. A.).

Additionally, the local board should ensure adequate provision for snow removal and storage

for parking areas; the site plan does not depict snow removal or storage (107-16). The proposed landscaping plan specifies an assortment of native wetland-edge plants; the local board should ensure that these visual screening species are protected from winter snow-plowing operations and heavy road-salt accumulation.

Additional Compliance:

The proposed site layout exceeds the Town zoning law's 50% impervious-surface-area cap. The local board must determine whether the applicant has demonstrated reasonable justification that alternative, lower-impact designs are impractical, or whether they must implement acceptable mitigation measures (Section 107-48.E.).

The proposed photometric plan shows an average of 3.57 foot-candles in parking areas and a maximum of 2.0 foot-candles along the property line, indicating potential light trespass onto neighboring properties. The local board should ensure the proposed lighting complies with the intensity levels outlined in the Town zoning law (107-20.2. B.9.(a)).

The local board should ensure the proposed sign is appropriately sized for the road on which it is built. The proposed sign complies with the Town sign law for State highways; however, it exceeds the maximum area allowed in the Town sign law for local roads.

The plan proposes alternative sewer infrastructure, which should undergo formal review and approval by relevant regulatory agencies to ensure overall engineering and operational compliance.

Lastly, the proposed site plan depicts a single, unified site spanning two parcels. The local board should mandate a parcel merger to eliminate internal setback violations and prevent future split-ownership issues that would compromise municipal zoning enforcement.

Mitch Robinson stated that there are too many inconsistencies in the provided site plan and that, given all the unknowns and variables as they stand now, the project cannot be completed successfully and safely without substantially changing the site plan.

Lisa Ruggiero stated that the sewer permit for this project would be affected by the existing issues concerning the Western Outfall Trunk Sewer.

Neil Katzman suggested to the board members that they deem the project incomplete and request a resubmittal demonstrating compliance with all changes and with all state, local, and additional compliance measures provided.

Richard Nuijens asked if the Board has legal grounds to deem the project incomplete. There is no exit, no snow removal indicated, no stormwater plan, and no sewer connection on the plan as submitted.

John Stano weighed in, stating that it is certainly incomplete, with no exit and all other inconsistencies covered.

Motion: To recommend disapproval and deem this plan incomplete as it has been submitted, and with comments stated above, was made by Richard Nuijens, seconded by John Stano, and carried unanimously, except for Jean Waterbury, who recused herself from voting on this project.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Hartley Bonisteel Schweitzer noted an upcoming training focused on Short-Term Rentals and encouraged members to register and attend on June 2nd.

Adjournment:

Neil Katzman moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:23 pm, seconded by Jon Storms.