

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

April 28, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT: Lisa Ruggiero, Neil Katzman, John Stano, Jean Waterbury, 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: None

CALL TO ORDER AND ESTABLISHMENT OF QUORUM: John Stano, Vice-Chair, opened the meeting at 4:01 p.m. and stated that a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF THE March 31, 2026, MEETING MINUTES: The motion was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by Karen Freeman, and carried unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS: John Stano asked if there were any communications. There were none.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (OTHER THAN AGENDA ITEMS): John Stano 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 except agenda items.

A. General Municipal Law, Section 239m Referrals:

1. Alexandria (T) Stephen Brown Site Plan Review for a wedding venue on Comfort Island, T AI 2 - 26

Andy presented this project to the Board. He shared the locator map, aerial photos, site photos, and the site plan. This project is being reviewed due to its proximity to Keewaydin State Park and to its location within 400 feet of the shoreline. The applicant is proposing to operate a wedding and event venue on Comfort Island in the St. Lawrence River.

He discussed County/State-related matters: The weddings\events constitute a public assembly type use, therefore approval from the New York State Department of Health and the Jefferson County Code Department are required.

Locally related issues discussed:

The project was referred as a site plan review\special use permit. However, event venues are not defined or listed within the Marine Island District. The local Zoning Board of Appeals should determine if the proposed use is allowed in the District.

Pursuant to the general site plan review criteria of the Town Zoning Law, Article VIII, Section 3, paragraph I, the local board should consider noise from the occasional events that may use amplified music that could affect adjacent and nearby homes, seasonal residences, and state park occupants. The Town should consider utilizing an event permit process with standards to limit potential impacts on neighbors. Alternatively, the application states up to five events per year, with none extending after 11 pm. Lacking an event venue permit process, the local board should consider conditioning the use on the number of events in the application and the application's closing time to limit the number of days and minimize after-hours impacts on adjacent neighbors, nearby residences, and state park occupants.

Similarly, the applicant should indicate whether any outdoor lighting will be used during events. Potential lighting should consist of dark-sky-compliant or shielded lighting to ensure any potential glare doesn't impact adjacent and nearby properties including the mainland and nearby island residents., consistent with zoning law Article VIII, Section 3, paragraph I.

The local board should consider where event attendees will park before arriving on the island. If the Keewaydin State Park is the primary staging area for boat transport, adequate parking should be identified.

An event management plan or emergency plan should be prepared for a natural or human-caused disaster. Tent use, fire and medical safety, evacuation procedures, volunteer training, and the appropriate emergency responders to contact should be identified.

The location of the private septic system should be shown on the drawing submitted.

Neil Katzman had asked what would limit the applicant to only holding 5 events as stated in the proposal. Andy answered that it would be the Town's responsibility to enforce.

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. Neil Katzman voted in opposition, and all other members present were in favor.

2. Orleans (T) Town of Orleans Zoning Law and Map Amendment, T Or 1 – 26

Andy presented this project to the Board. He explained that the Town is proposing a series of updates to its zoning law, including amendments to the zoning map. The reason for referral is the amendments affecting land within 500 feet of state and county roads and Town boundaries.

He discussed County/State related matters:

As part of its review, the Planning Board identified that New York State Town Law requires zoning amendments to be made in accordance with a Comprehensive Plan. The Town's Plan was adopted in 2019, and several of the proposed zoning amendments originated in the Plan's Implementation Actions table.

Locally related issues discussed:

A few of the amendments incorporate NYS standards or regulations to allow the Town to enforce such requirements as safety measures or to limit local impacts. As state regulations may be updated or amended from time to time, the related state standards should be monitored and amended accordingly to ensure local and state consistency.

SEQR Parts 1, 2, and 3 should be completed prior to final adoption of the Zoning Amendment.

Motion: To accept staff recommendation to pass a motion of approval based upon the positive impacts that sound planning practices will have on the development of the Town and adjacent communities, was made by Neil Katzman, seconded by Randy Lake, and carried unanimously, aside from Mitch Robinson, who recused himself from voting on this project.

3. Watertown (T) Town of Watertown Zoning Map Amendment, T Wa 5 – 26

Sam presented this project to the Board, displaying the locator map and aerial photos. He explained that this project is being reviewed due to its proximity to the Town/City municipal boundary. The Town proposes to extend the Business Zoning District and reduce the footprint of the Residential 2 zoning to accommodate a large-scale solar facility.

He discussed County/State related matters:

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

The local board should complete a SEQR form for the zoning map amendment.

Locally related issues discussed:

The local board should consider the potential impacts of rezoning the two identified parcels from Residential (R-2) to the Business districts, as highlighted in the Town of Watertown's Comprehensive Plan. Specifically, the following concerns should be addressed:

Infrastructure: These areas currently lack access to municipal water and necessary utilities.

Agricultural Preservation: The impact of nonfarm intrusions on prime agricultural areas must be evaluated to ensure the preservation of highly productive farmland.

The local board should consider the overall vision for the Spring Valley Drive corridor to determine whether expanding the area into a full business district truly aligns with the intended long-term land-use and development plan. It is important to assess whether such an expansion

enhances connectivity and economic vitality or instead conflicts with the existing balance between residential and commercial areas along Spring Valley Drive.

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.

OTHER BUSINESS: Andy reminded the Board about upcoming training opportunities for Site Plan Review on May 13, 2026, to be presented by New York State DOS, and a Short-term rental Toolkit on June 2, 2026, to be presented by Jamie Konkoski, AICP, with LaBella Associates. Hartley Bonisteel Schweitzer noted that the Department is aiming to bring back 2 Spring training and 2 Fall training opportunities to be held locally. Andy Nevin also asked members for input about potential locations for an off-site meeting in the summer month(s), that would be held in a public place and would be ADA accessible. Our initial thought was to meet close to or within the City due to the recent increase in gas prices.

Adjournment:

John Stano made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 4:46 pm, seconded by Neil Katzman.