

The Planning Commission will host a public forum on April 6 at 7:00 to present amendments to the Zoning Bylaw on Home Business and Signs and get feedback from Dummerston residents. The meeting will be held on Zoom and more information will be available as the date approaches. Everyone is welcome to attend.

The Planning Commission has tried for years to improve the regulations on home businesses, and even held a public forum on a previous draft- probably in 2012. I have drafts going back to 2011 but the PC was working on it before I took my seat. It has proved to be one of the hardest sections of the bylaw to write, but we believe that what we have drafted is better than what is currently in our bylaw and has remained unchanged for too long.

While businesses are allowed in most parts of the Route 30 and Route 5 corridors, in almost all other parts of Dummerston, the only type business allowed is one that is operated out of the business owner's home. Many people make their living from home and their right to do so is protected by state statute. However, the statute also allows towns to regulate and permit home businesses, in order to protect residential neighborhoods from too much disturbance. A home business that creates noise or traffic (for example) beyond levels that the neighbors can reasonably abide, is a problem that the bylaw should prevent from happening if it is written well and enforced consistently.

Many residents are probably unaware that their work at home may qualify as a Home Business and may require a permit. Currently our Bylaw requires Conditional Use approval by the Development Review Board (DRB) for ANY home business – even if it is a one-person operation with no customers or deliveries. It also limits all home businesses to three non-family employees. The proposed amendment allows home businesses with up to two employees and five client visits per day to operate without a permit. Home businesses with up to 5 employees and up to twenty client/customers on-site per day require a permit but can avoid DRB approval. Larger operations with up to ten employees and/or outside storage or displays of goods or materials are allowed but require a Conditional Use permit with DRB approval.

These changes to the Home Business section of the zoning bylaw relieve small business owners of the DRB approval requirements and allow for more robust operations to legally operate out of the owners' homes. Permitting and DRB review are required where there is the potential for an impact to neighbors.

Another part of the bylaw in need of updating are the sections regulating signs, but here the main objective is to make it simpler and clearer. While certain types of commercial and nonresidential advertising signs will be allowed a minor increase in total area, the significant changes are in the way the section is presented, and how signs are defined. While this may seem arcane to anyone but a planning commissioner, if you own a business or home business, you probably will want to install a sign one day and you might want to learn about the requirements. If you come to our forum you could even tell us what you think of them!

Drafts of the proposed amendments will be available a few weeks before the public forum on the town website. There will be printed copies available for pick up at the town office as well. Even

if you cannot- or will not- access Zoom, please take a minute to review the amendments. Commissioners want your feedback- whether at a public forum or by email or phone call.

After considering your comments at the April 6 forum, the Planning Commission is planning to hold its public hearing on these amendments and a few other minor ones on June 1, after which they will be sent to the Selectboard for adoption.

Regular meetings of the Planning Commission are on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30pm. The agenda and minutes are posted on the Commission's page of the town website. Meetings are always open to the public. As long as we hold them via videoconference, the Zoom invitation will be included on the agenda so that anyone may attend. Written comments are welcome and can be emailed to planning@dummerston.org or mailed to the Town Office.

Planning Commissioners are appointed by the selectboard. Currently there is one vacant seat so if you have an interest in working on the zoning bylaw and the town plan please come to a meeting or speak with one of us. Current planning commissioners are Annamarie Pluhar, Beverly Tier, Bob Danzi, Maria Glabach, Regina Stefanelli, Rick Contino, Sam Farwell and Sarah Bergh.