

**Shutesbury Planning Board**  
**Minutes – February 9, 2026**  
Approved – March 9, 2026  
*Virtual Meeting*

**Board Members Present:** Keith Hastie, Nathan Murphy (Chair), Michael DeChiara, Tom Siefert (Associate Member), Jeff Weston, Ashleigh Pycroft, Steve Bressler

**Board Members Absent:** Deacon Bonnar

**Other Staff Present:** Matteo Pangallo (Land Use Clerk)

**Others Present:** Cara Brostrom, Leonard Czerwonka (Fire Chief)

**Call to Order:** 7:02pm

This meeting is being recorded and all members are participating remotely.

Murphy activates Tom Siefert as a voting member of the Board.

### **Public Comment**

Murphy thanks Weston for his professionalism during the Board's previous discussion of the proposed data center amendment to the Zoning Bylaw. Weston acknowledges that and notes he is just trying to do what is right within his arm's length.

### **Landowner Education and Guidance**

There are no requests for landowner education and guidance.

### **Consider Cara Brostrom letter of interest for Associate Member**

Murphy welcomes Cara Brostrom who introduces herself to the Board. Murphy reads Brostrom's email to the Board regarding joining the Planning Board as an Associate Member.

DeChiara asks why Brostrom is interested in the Planning Board specifically. Brostrom explains that her term on the Cultural Council is coming to an end and she is looking to continue serving Shutesbury in a way that aligns with her professional work helping young people get involved with local government. She describes her work as chair of the Shutesbury Cultural Council and the values she upheld in that role. She is interested in the opportunity to grow her own expertise in public service by learning as an Associate Member while also supporting the Board.

DeChiara asks about Brostrom's work on housing and other planning issues that might be of interest to her. Brostrom explains that during her work for Mayor Menino in Boston there was a focus on how to get young people more interested in building sustainable communities. She is motivated by Governor Healey's observation that the new challenge is getting people with skills and knowledge to stay in the Commonwealth, which means making housing available and affordable. She adds that she is interested in issues of Quabbin equity and rural schools legislation, as well as solar use, data centers, and long-term sustainability and land preservation.

Weston describes the Planning Board as focused and committed to the Town but diverse in its members' viewpoints. He thanks her for her interest in joining the Board.

Murphy explains the expectations and duties for Associate Members and the history of why the Board decided to make Associate Members part of the Board's structure. He notes the importance of having someone who is willing to serve consistently in the role should a Special Permit process occur during that person's tenure.

Brostrom asks about the modality of the Board's meetings and the nature of the Special Permit process and Murphy explains that the Board currently meets remotely, though he hopes to meet in person more often. He provides a brief overview and history of the Special Permit process.

Brostrom asks about the length of the term and Murphy explains that it is for the fiscal year. DeChiara notes that Planning Board Associate Members can only be approved by a joint meeting of the Select Board and Planning Board.

Murphy invites Brostrom to send any additional questions by email.

Pyecroft adds that parenting and working a full-time job while serving on the Board has been manageable.

### **Fire Chief Leonard Czerwonka comments on Data Center bylaw**

Murphy asks about the enforcement of NFPA 855 in relation to battery storage at a potential data center and his views on the Board's approach to emergency response and preparedness for a data center. Czerwonka suggests the bylaw simply state that any center be compliant with CMR 527. He notes that for residential batteries, the process goes through the Building Inspector and involves the Fire Chief doing an on-site inspection. He says that he would consult with the Code Compliance Office of the Mass Fire Service in the event of a commercial battery proposal. He notes the challenge presented by frequent changes in the technology and the kind of suppression methods that would work. In general, it would be treated like an electrical fire which would mean ensuring the fire does not spread as it burns out.

DeChiara notes that the amendment draft currently requires that developers would need to work with the Fire Chief to come up with an emergency response plan and incident action plan. He asks if that would be acceptable. Czerwonka answers that the developer would come up with the plans and he would need to approve them.

Weston asks if it would be preferable to have a lithium battery system isolated to avoid water contamination. Czerwonka answers that they are already required to be isolated, even inside a building, with at least a two-hour burn rating to keep the fire from spreading beyond the room before it was safe to extinguish. Weston observes that lithium fires can burn for days and Czerwonka agrees, noting that the technology is also changing rapidly. Czerwonka points out that car batteries are probably more of a concern than batteries in a structure.

DeChiara asks if it matters if a battery is contained within the structure or is in a separate structure and Czerwonka thinks it would not make much of a difference, though a separate structure would probably be preferable but only if that separate structure is reasonably equipped to house the battery safely and does not house anything else at any point in its use.

Hastie notes that what a data center would house would be up to a 250kWh battery system. Czerwonka adds that the batteries could be housed in a unit on the outside of the structure.

Murphy clarifies that the Fire Department's main concern would be code compliance and Czerwonka agrees.

DeChiara thinks the Fire Department should have to approve of an emergency management plan and not just consult on it.

Czerwonka repeats that because the technology changes so quickly, creating a single set management plan would not make sense. It would be necessary to consult the State Fire Marshal's Office to create a plan.

Hastie observes that the Fire Department should at least know what types of batteries are installed, where they are, and where the cut-offs are located. Czerwonka notes that the current State Fire Code would require that of any such structure already.

Hastie notes the draft stipulation on the kind of agents that would be used to suppress a battery fire. He is concerned about the Planning Board imposing methods or prohibiting methods that the Fire Department might use. Czerwonka notes that none of the products the Department uses have PFAS and they almost never use foam suppression. He explains that firefighters respond situationally depending on what can best contain and suppress a particular fire. His training has

instructed him that with almost all electrical fires, no amount of water will suppress it so the best they could do is contain it and let it burn out as hot and fast as possible to minimize toxic emissions.

Weston asks about the tankers that the Department has available and Czerwonka states there are two engines for a total capacity of 3,000 gallons.

### **Review Comments Received from Catherine Hilton pertaining to Data Center Bylaw Draft**

Murphy notes that DeChiara has incorporated Hilton's feedback into the draft amendment.

### **Discussion of Data Center Bylaw Amendment - option to set date for public hearing**

DeChiara shares the draft Zoning Bylaw amendment regarding data centers. He reviews the revisions that he has made to the draft based on the previous meeting's discussion and other feedback the Board has received and the Board discusses the proposed revisions.

Motion to revise wording in the definition of data center: Siefert; second: Hastie. Vote: DeChiara - aye; Hastie - aye; Weston - aye; Siefert - aye; Bressler - aye; Murphy - abstain; Pyecroft - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously with one abstention.*

Motion to add a sentence to the definition of data center: DeChiara; second: Bressler. Vote: DeChiara - aye; Hastie - abstain; Weston - aye; Siefert - aye; Bressler - aye; Murphy - abstain; Pyecroft - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously with one abstention.*

Weston asks if the Board has the right to modify fire control and suppression methods as well as the design and plans of any data center and DeChiara confirms that is within the purview of the Special Permit conditioning process. Weston notes that the Board would not make the modifications itself, but it could ask the applicant to make those revisions and it could then reject the plan if the modifications were not made. Bressler points out that a condition is a requirement, not a request. Murphy also notes that this would be controlled by the Site Plan Review process.

DeChiara explains changes made in the Design and Performance Standards section to clarify the measurement of area and add revisions from Catherine Hilton to the section on cooling.

Motion to keep the language in B.A.1. regarding the use of ground and surface water for cooling purposes and add the phrase "on site": DeChiara; second: Hastie. Vote: DeChiara - aye; Hastie - aye; Weston - aye; Siefert - aye; Bressler - aye; Murphy - abstain; Pyecroft - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously with one abstention.*

Bressler asks Murphy to let Hilton know the Board heard her concerns and decided that the language does address her concerns.

There are no objections to accepting the revisions to section C on backup systems.

DeChiara reviews and explains the revisions to section D, on electrical storage. There are no objections to accepting the revisions in Section D. Bressler suggests removing the phrase “are encouraged to” and using “must.”

The Board discusses the restrictions on electrical storage systems and how to ensure they are reasonable, safe, and compliant with fire code and revises the language accordingly.

Motion to retain 4.a as drafted: DeChiara; second: Weston. Discussion: Hastie moves to amend the section to reference NFPA 855 and other relevant codes and the Board has no objections to the revision. Vote on the amendment: DeChiara - aye; Hastie - aye; Weston - aye; Siefert - aye; Bressler - aye; Murphy - abstain; Pyecroft - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously with one abstention.* Vote on the main motion: DeChiara - aye; Hastie - aye; Weston - aye; Siefert - aye; Bressler - aye; Murphy - abstain; Pyecroft - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously with one abstention.*

Motion to delete 4.b: DeChiara; second: Hastie. Seeing no objections, the Chair allows the deletion.

The Board revises and clarifies language in 4.c and 4.d.

DeChiara reviews the proposed revisions to section E, on water usage. Bressler considers the language repetitious and unclear given the earlier section on water usage for cooling. DeChiara agrees and suggests removing all of section E. There are no objections.

DeChiara reviews the revisions made to the emergency response section in response to the feedback from Hilton and based on the Fire Department’s procedures. The Board refines the language regarding firefighting and heat suppression tactics.

There are no objections to changes made to the section on emergency plans.

The Board clarifies language in the section on the mitigation for drinking water protection and requires the applicant to provide an expert’s documentation rather than documentation from the Board of Health. Murphy asks if this section is necessary since water cooling is prohibited entirely. DeChiara agrees that the section seems unnecessary now and the Board agrees.

Murphy notes that there is no requirement for an environmental impact statement. DeChiara agrees that such a requirement should be added.

Hastie proposes moving the items in the “mitigation requirements” in section 8.13-6 to the “requirements” section. There is no objection from the Board.

Motion to approve the Zoning Bylaw amendment draft as revised during tonight’s meeting pending corrections to formatting and grammar: DeChiara; Hastie: second. Vote: DeChiara - aye; Hastie - aye; Weston - aye; Siefert - aye; Bressler - aye; Murphy - abstain; Pyecroft - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously with one abstention.*

DeChiara and Murphy will communicate with Town Counsel to get her comments on the amendment. Murphy reviews the specific questions the Board will present to Town Counsel.

Motion to set the date of the public hearing for the Zoning Bylaw amendment on March 9, 2026 at 7:10pm: DeChiara; second: Pyecroft. Vote: DeChiara - aye; Bressler - aye; Hastie - aye; Weston - aye; Pyecroft - aye; Siefert - aye; Murphy - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

### **Review and approve minutes from 1/15/2024**

The topic is tabled.

### **Discussion of floodplain requirements**

The topic is tabled.

### **Discussion of Clean Energy Regulations for Municipalities**

The topic is tabled.

### **Member Updates**

Murphy notes that Siefert has taken out papers to run for Select Board and so the Board may need to be looking for another Associate Member.

DeChiara notes that three Planning Board seats are up for election this year and March 21 is the deadline for nomination papers to be returned.

### **Unanticipated Business**

There is no unanticipated business.

### **Executive Session**

The topic is tabled.

### **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn: DeChiara; second: Siefert. Vote: DeChiara - aye; Bressler - aye; Hastie - aye; Weston - aye; Pyecroft - aye; Siefert - aye; Murphy - aye. *The motion is approved unanimously.*

**Adjourned:** 9:42pm

### **List of Documents Used:**

- Cara Brostrom email expressing interest in becoming Planning Board Associate Member
- Draft of Zoning Bylaw amendment regarding data centers
- Email from Catherine Hilton on Zoning Bylaw amendment regarding data centers