

Fair Haven Planning Commission

Town of Fair Haven - July 16, 2025 - Public Hearing and Regular Meeting

Commissioners Present: Robert Richards - Chair, Deborah Laiacona - Vicechair, Ann Finley, Sam Lucci

Commissioners Absent: Linda Sienkiewicz - clerk

Others Present: Phil Adams - Zoning Administrator, Jennifer Jackson - Minute-taker, Heather Donovan, Neal Robinson, Patrick Frazier, Senator Terry Williams

Agenda

1. Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 7:31 pm by Chairman Richards.

2. Review of Minutes of Previous Meeting:

Approval of Minutes: Regular meeting - July 2, 2025

Mr. Lucci motioned at 7:31 pm to accept the minutes of July 2nd as written, both public portion and the regular meeting. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Finley. Mrs. Laiacona abstained from voting due to her absence from the meeting. All were in favor and the motion passed.

3. New Business:

- a. **Heather Donovan - Application #A2025-028 for a change of use of the first-floor storefront area from Retail Sales to Dance Studio. To install a new exterior commercial sign and window decals. Property owner: Neds Downtown LLC. Location: 61 Main Street. Fair Haven Tax Map number 24-51-32-02.**

Chairman Richards read the agenda description of the application, noting the dance studio would be placed where the Old Finders Keepers Store was. Ms. Donovan explained that inside renovations were not planned, that they were going to clean walls, put up mirrors and the window decals and be ready to go. Mrs. Finley asked when the opening was planned. Ms. Donovan explained they were hoping for classes to begin in September, but plans are to hold an August open house for the community. ZA Adams asked what ages the classes were for. Ms. Donovan explained classes will be for all ages, they will have dance classes and competition classes. ZA Adams explained that the sign will be changed, but will be placed in the same location as previous signs. There will be no lighting added. Mrs. Finley stated the sign will be wooden.

Chairman Richards asked the Planning Commission if they believed a site plan review was needed. Mrs. Laiacona motioned at 7:36 pm that the application does not warrant a site plan review. Mrs. Finley seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Chairman Richards called for other questions. ZA Adams stated, as with other applications, he recommended language be included to only allow parking for employees of the studio in the Free Parking area of town and not in front of the businesses. Ms. Donovan stated she will write that into her application. Mrs. Finley asked if there was a backdoor to the

business. Ms. Donovan stated there was, but she was advised by the building owner not to use it during the winter months.

Mr. Lucci stated he believed the application wasn't filled out correctly, it is written for two signs and one is protruding from the building. Ms. Donovan stated that there will be two signs, the window decals and the flush mounted sign on the awning of the building.

Mr. Lucci asked about normal practices for the applications and if multiple applications should have been filed for the change of use and the signage. ZA Adams stated he normally suggests applicants use one application for the multiple things they are doing. Mr. Lucci stated he didn't have any objections to the signage, just to the application itself. Chairman Richards asked if it was okay to include in the motion that the applicant and the ZA make changes to the application.

With no other questions Chairman Richards called for a motion on the application. Mrs. Finley motioned at 7:42 pm to accept the application with the condition that employees park in the free parking area and not in front of the businesses and with the changes the ZA and applicant need to make to fix the signage wording.

The PC held a short discussion on how conditions were added for the new members. Mrs. Laiacona seconded the motion, all were in favor and the motion passed. Mrs. Donovan thanked the PC and left at 7:45 pm.

The agenda was adjusted for the Public comment to be had before the discussion of Downtown Designation matters.

4. Other Business:

a. Public Comment:

- i. Neal Robinson, discussion of possible future hydro-electric project for Fair Haven

Mr. Robinson spoke to the Planning Commission about the importance of using the dam Fair Haven owns to generate hydroelectric power. He passed out a feasibility study of the area and quoted from the book Shorting the Grid: The hidden fragility of our electric grid by Meredith Angwin (<https://www.meredithangwin.com/books/>) to help support his argument. Fair Haven is one of only two Vermont municipalities that owns their own dam. He believes that Fair Haven could make money by producing hydroelectric power and selling it back to the grid. There have already been studies conducted and presented to the town on how to implement hydroelectric productivity. He stated the need for more members to be added to the energy committee.

Chairman Richards stated that the PC was very glad to hear his presentation, but that they must wait until there are specifics before they can do anything. He stated that the Selectboard should be the driver of this project. Mrs. Laiacona suggested he speak with the Economic Development Committee as part of their goal is to drive the economy of the town. Mr. Lucci asked if any other towns had been spoken with who have done something like this before. Chairman Richards stated that in 2014 the study mentions Windsor and Hartford.

Mr. Robinson expressed his thanks for being welcomed into talk with the Planning Commission and thanked them for their guidance.

Senator Terry Williams stated he is on the Natural Resource and Energy Committee. He knows that many dams are being removed because of phosphate build up behind them that can

be dangerous. He knows that Morrisville is the only municipality that owns their own hydroelectric plant in Vermont. He suggested the Town Plan should have a space for energy annex that leads to future work in the town.

Neal Robinson left at 8:17 pm.

Mr. Lucci noted that in the Fair Haven Town Plan the second energy action point was to explore and implement Hydroelectric power from Poultney River.

ZA Adams gave an update from the application at the beginning of the meeting to clarify the application and the corrections made. The "projected" sign was there because the landlord wanted to replace the awning before the sign was put up. It was also learned that the sign would not have pink lettering as indicated in the application, but gold letter at the recommendation of the landlord.

Senator Terry Williams stated he wanted to say if there was anything the PC needed from him to please share and he would try to answer questions if he knew the answer or get answers as soon as he could if needed. Chairman Richards stated that the PC is trying to obtain a Downtown Designation from the State to help the town with ACT 20 applications and such. He stated that the application is very bureaucratic and time consuming. It is hard to get entities to nail down exactly what the Town needs to do for them for the application. He stated to Senator Williams, what I'd like you to hear is that for large municipalities there is staff dedicated to this process, as a small municipality it's a lot of work. Senator Williams stated the Regional Planning Commission should be helping. Chairman Richards stated they are, but they are busy as well. He asked that if you think about these situations please consider small towns. We can't afford to pay someone to help us and it should be this difficult to get the help. Senator Williams suggested Chairman Richards speak with Dave Weeks on the Economic Development Committee. Senator Williams left at 8:35 pm.

b. Review work on components required for Fair Haven to qualify for a Downtown Designation.

Downtown Designation Application Packet

(https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-DT-Application-Guidelines.pdf)

Tabled until the next meeting as it was getting late for discussion.

5. Other Business:

a. Review of Mail:

- i. Letter from Boarderland Solar LLC of Manchester Vermont. A 45 day notice of petition to be filed with Vermont Public Utility Commission for a 4.99 Megawatt solar installation in Fair Haven. The 29.66 acre Solar field will be at Rod Holdsworth property across from Sheldon Road on 22A.
- ii. Mrs. Finley asked that Andrew Graham be removed from any further communications as he was added by mistake.

5. Adjournment:

Mrs. Laiacona **motioned to adjourn at 8:44 pm.** Mrs. Finley seconded the adjournment motion. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Jackson, Minute-taker

The Next Regular Commission Meeting will be held on AUGUST 6, 2025 at 7:30pm