

Fair Haven Planning Commission
Town of Fair Haven - March 4, 2026 - Regular Meeting

Commissioners Present: Robert Richards - Chair, Linda Sienkiewicz - clerk, Ann Finley, Sam Lucci

Commissioners Absent:

Others Present: Phil Adams - Zoning Administrator, Jennifer Jackson - recording secretary, Cynthia Hutchins - public, Gary Holloway - Downtown Program Manager State of Vermont (via zoom)

Agenda

1. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm by Chair Richards.

2. **Review of Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

a. **Approval of Minutes: Regular meeting - February 4, 2026**

b. **Regular Meeting February 18, 2026 Canceled, no quorum**

Mrs. Sienkiewicz **motioned to accept the minutes of February 4th**. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Finley. All were in favor and the motion passed.

3. **New Business:**

a. **Cynthia Hutchins - request to consider a change to the Zoning Regulations Article IX - General Regulations, Section 910 Keeping of Animals, to allow the keeping of poultry on lots of less than one acre.**

b. **Zoning meeting with Gary Holloway for a discussion of the Fair Haven Downtown Designation - Step 3 application requirements.**

[Community Investment Program Downtown Designation: Step Three Center Application: https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-DT-Downtown-Designation-Step-Three-Guidelines-FINAL.pdf](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-DT-Downtown-Designation-Step-Three-Guidelines-FINAL.pdf) .

Cynthia Hutchins presented on the keeping of chickens on less than 1 acre of land. She passed out information on Chicken Ordinances; suggested wording for Fair Haven Bylaws and Modernizing Fair Haven's Chicken Ordinance. ZA Adams included for information the Fair Haven Zoning Regulations on Keeping of Animals, Section 910 - Keeping of Animals. Ms Hutchins is requesting a modernization of the zoning bylaws. She would like to have a backyard flock. She states that she knows of households with less than 1 acre who do have chickens and would like continuity within the town. She stated that 4-6 hens produce enough eggs for a household. She would like to see practical limits to the zoning bylaws to allow for keeping chickens. She suggest a limit of 4-6 hens per lot, no roosters, rear yard coops, sanitation and nuisance control. She would like to see the ordinance updated to current VT Practices.

She brought three example ordinances; Burlington, Proctor, and Castleton. SHe stated Burlington's ordinance was very specific, Proctor considered chickens a nuisance animal and Castleton considered chickens a domesticated animal.

Chair Richards stated that the Planning Commission couldn't just change the bylaws, they would need a directive from the Select Board. Mr. Lucci stated that Ms. Hutchins came to the previous Selectboard meeting. Ms. Hutchins stated there wasn't any dialogue that took place at the meeting. She believes that is because she presented at the Public Comment period of the meeting and the Selectboard couldn't really discuss the issue. Chair Richards suggested she go back to the Selectboard as an agenda item and ask that a directive be sent to the Planning Commission. Mr. Lucci explained that the Select Board can't discuss without an agenda item and notice to the community. He urged Ms. Hutchins to get more community input before speaking with the Selectboard again. Chair Richards stated her proposal is reasonable and hits the high points of the needs. ZA Adams pointed out Section 910 from the zoning bylaws, and stated that he has had complaints from chickens housed too close to property lines. Ms. Hutchins stated she would prefer to see very specific guidelines for the keeping of chickens and is in favor of a permit system.

ZA Adams explained that changes in the zoning bylaws process and that ordinances are separate from zoning.

Ms. Hutchins thanked the Planning Commission and left at 7:47pm.

The Planning Commission then switched to the zoom meeting with Gary Holloway, Downtown Program Manager State of Vermont. He welcomed the PC and stated he wasn't totally clear on where the PC is on the application, and referenced the checklist spreadsheet that Logan Soloman created for the team before he departed from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission. He directed the PC to follow through the spread sheet and he would explain what was missing and important to be completed or how to complete the parts. He stated he realized that not all components fall on the PC's plate.

He stated he knew no one was assigned to Fair Haven as a senior planner and would speak with Devon Neary from the RRPC.

Mr. Holloway reviewed each section of the spread sheet with the PC noting that

- Local Historic District preservation; the comments given by Elizabeth were just guidelines although if vinyl windows were allowed then many grant options would be removed because of grant regulations.
- Local Historic District Preservation; demolition section should be more easily understood and able to be interpreted.
- Community Investment Agreement; Understanding value in the Downtown Designation exercise. Ms. Finley asked if this exercise should be completed before or after the partnership board is created. Mr. Holloway suggested after.
- Capital Improvement Plan/Budget; high priority. A new plan is not needed, just need to point out how it will fit with the new Downtown needs. Mr. Holloway noted that the VLCT is helping towns revamp their capital budgets if needed.
- Downtown 5 year Strategic Plan; A board is needed to work on this plan. There are grants to help put this together.
- Downtown Organization Vision; NOT part of the Municipal Plan. They need articles of incorporation; they should be separate from the town body and should be a non-profit.
 - MainStreet America is a good resource

- Hardwick received a grant to help create the non-profit; Laura Williams in Poultney could be a contact to help. Jamie Lee is also a resource.
- Evidence of Municipal Funding - annually
- The town must meet water and sewer compliance.
- Mapping the RRPC is doing.
- Photographs should capture the essence of the town, not necessarily every building.
- Subdivision Bylaws; Design Review Board in the Local Historic District. Mr. Holloway stated this area needs expertise, he will talk with Devon Neary about it and get back with the PC.
- Downtown Organization; must have.
 - Ms. Finley gave an update on where she was talking with business owners and their interest in the Organization.
 - She researched a 501c3 vs a 501c6; she believes the c6 is the route to go.
 - Mr. Holloway suggested the Downtown Vibrancy fund supporting the Downtown Coalition.
 - He suggested the town seek advice from a lawyer before committing to either type of 501 entity. Katy Buckley from VLCT may be a source
 - Ms. Finley asked if the Downtown Association Members needed to pay dues. Mr. Holloway stated not typically but suggested donations.
 - Mr. Holloway stated it seems the PC's biggest task will be around the Downtown Organization. He stated for the application it doesn't need to be perfect, but needs to have a structure in place.
 - Mr. Holloway suggested the PC talk with people from Randolph as they are going through the process as well. Erika Robinson is a contact. He stated that they should not re-invent the wheel, use what they can from others, but get the organization right the first time, and don't rush it together.

At 8:47 Mr. Holloway signed off.

Chair Richards stated the next event would be talking to the Legion. Mrs. Finley was concerned with what to tell them. She also suggested asking people to come to the next PC meeting to hear about what is going on. The general idea is that information on the process should be shared and how the Downtown organization should be created.

4. Other Business:

- a. **Public Comment:** ZA Adams stated the Rudnicki house isn't on the Historic District Map - is there an error there? Chair Richards stated it is in the Historic District, he doesn't believe each house needs a description.
- b. **Review of Mail:** ZA Adams stated he had received an email from the Town Clerk stating there had been a scam with the PC in Brattleboro using official documents to make people pay fees that weren't real.
- c. **Other:** ZA Adams asked for clarification on the agenda items for the next meeting. Organizational Meeting and Informational Meeting on Proposed

Downtown Designation.

5. Adjournment:

Mrs. Finley **motioned to adjourn at 9:06 pm.** Mrs. Sienkiewicz seconded the motion. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Jackson, Minute-taker

The Next Commission Meeting will be held on March 18, 2026 at 7:30 pm

Phil Adams

From: Cynthia Hutchins <cynthiahutchins@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 15, 2026 11:37 AM
To: fhza@comcast.net
Subject: Request to Review and Modernize Chicken Acreage Requirement

Dear Mr Adams,

I hope you are doing well. I am writing to formally request that the Planning Commission review and reconsider Fair Haven's current zoning requirement that residents must own at least one acre to keep chickens.

As you know, many families in town currently keep small backyard flocks on lots under one acre. This suggests that the ordinance may no longer reflect how our community functions in practice. When regulations are not consistently enforced, it can unintentionally create confusion and undermine public confidence. I believe this presents an opportunity for the town to modernize the ordinance in a way that is clear, fair, and workable for everyone.

Across Vermont, many communities now allow a limited number of hens on residential lots of any size, provided reasonable safeguards are in place — such as prohibiting roosters, limiting flock size, requiring permits, and maintaining sanitation standards. These measures effectively address common concerns about noise and nuisance without excluding responsible homeowners based solely on acreage. Allowing small, regulated backyard flocks would support food security, sustainability, and family self-reliance while still protecting neighborhood quality of life. Updating the ordinance would also ensure consistent standards for all residents.

I respectfully ask what steps are necessary to bring this matter before the Planning Commission for formal consideration. I would be happy to provide draft amendment language, examples from comparable Vermont towns, or attend a meeting to discuss this further.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Hutchins

5. Domestic Waste Prevention

- All food must be stored in rodent-proof containers.
- Manure shall be composted in a covered bin or otherwise stored.
- No odor, noise, or other nuisance conditions shall be allowed.
- Failure to maintain sanitary conditions may result in enforcement of ordinance.

(Suggested language for Fair Haven Zoning Bylaws)

Keeping of Backyard Hens in Residential Districts

Purpose:

To allow small-scale, non-commercial keeping of hens for personal egg production while protecting neighborhood health, safety, and property values.

1. Permitted Use

The keeping of hens shall be permitted as an accessory residential use in all residential zoning districts, subject to the standards below.

2. Number of Birds

- Up to 6 hens per residential lot.
- Roosters are prohibited.
- No commercial breeding or sale of eggs permitted.

3. Lot Size

- No minimum acreage required.
- Property must have sufficient space to meet coop and run setback requirements.

4. Coop & Run Requirements

Hens must be kept in a secure coop and enclosed run.

Coops shall:

- Be located in the rear yard.
- Be set back at least 25 feet from any dwelling on an adjacent lot.
- Maximum coop size: 120 square feet.
- Coops must be well ventilated and predator-resistant.

5. Sanitation & Nuisance Prevention

- All feed must be stored in rodent-proof containers.
- Manure shall be composted in a covered bin or removed regularly.
- No odor, noise, or other nuisance conditions shall be permitted.
- Failure to maintain sanitary conditions may result in revocation of permission.

TOWN	Chicken Restrictions?	Allows Roosters ?	Permits?	Lot size/ other
Castleton, VT	None (considered domestic animal)	yes	no	No lot size. Can not be allowed in roadway
Pittsford, VT	None found- only ordinances on domestic animals			
Clarendon, VT	None found- only ordinances on domestic animals			
West Rutland, VT	None Found			
Proctor VT	Nuisance Ordinance If more than 12 hens, Neighbor permission	Not allowed!		
Burlington, VT	Very detailed requirements about flock size, space, set back and coop.		5 or more chickens \$25 permit fee	10 feet from property line (reduced to 5 feet with neighbor permission)
Poultney, VT	Regulations for agriculture and farms, but not small back yard flocks.			
Williston, VT	Yes- Flock size (6 hens for a lot UP TO 1.99 acres)		\$20 first year, \$10 every year after	

Modernizing Fair Haven's Chicken Ordinance

A Practical Proposal for Backyard Hens

The Current Issue

- The current zoning ordinance requires 1 acre of land to keep chickens.
 - The policy is outdated compared to many Vermont towns.
 - It appears selectively enforced.
 - It prevents families on small village lots from producing their own food.
 - Modern backyard chicken keeping is low-impact and manageable.
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Proposed Amendment: Backyard Hens Ordinance

- **Permitted Use:** Hens allowed as an accessory residential use.
 - **Number of Birds:** Up to 6 hens per lot. Roosters prohibited. No commercial breeding or egg sales.
 - **Lot Size:** No minimum acreage required.
 - **Coop Requirements:** Secure enclosed coop in rear yard; at least 25 feet from adjacent dwellings; maximum 120 sq. ft.; well-ventilated and predator-resistant.
 - **Sanitation:** Feed stored in rodent-proof containers; manure composted or removed regularly; no nuisance conditions permitted.
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This proposal supports responsible local food production while maintaining neighborhood health, safety, and property values.

Section 908 - Travel Trailers and Campers

A travel trailer or other mobile camping vehicle may be parked on private land within the Town of Fair Haven, with the written permission of the landowner, provided it is not used for living purposes in excess of twenty-one days per year.

Section 909 - Radio or Television Antennas, Transmitters, or Relay Stations

A residential antenna attached to the roof shall not require a permit but shall not extend more than twenty (20) feet above the height of the building.

A dish antenna measuring 49 inches or more shall be considered an accessory structure in any district and shall meet setback requirements.

A free-standing radio or television antenna, transmitter, or relay station shall be considered a conditional use and shall be limited in height to 199 feet.

Section 910 - Keeping of Animals

Raising of livestock and keeping of animals is included in "Required Agricultural Practices" as a use.

Where a use does not meet the definition of "Required Agricultural Practice (RAP)" as defined by the VT Agency of Agriculture, Foods and Markets, owners may keep not more than two head of livestock and/or poultry up to 25 birds. No livestock or poultry shall be kept on lots of less than one acre in area, except household pets. No new building for the housing of animals or poultry shall be located within 150 feet from any street line or within 75 feet from any other lot line. This paragraph shall not permit the raising of swine or of furbearing animals other than rabbits. No manure or dust producing fertilizer shall be stored in the open within 100 feet from any property line.

Section 911 - Existing Small Lots

Any lot that is legally subdivided and is in individual and separate and non-affiliated ownership from surrounding properties, and is in existence on the effective date of the regulations, may be developed for the purpose permitted in the district in which it is located, even though not conforming to minimum lot size requirements of the new bylaw.

Section 912 - More than One Primary Use in a Structure

A structure may be used for more than one primary use, provided that each use complies both individually and jointly with all the applicable provisions of this ordinance.

Section 913 - Fences