

GREAT BARRINGTON PLANNING BOARD

DATE: January 8, 2026

TIME: 6:00 P.M.

PLACE: Large Meeting Room

FOR: Regular Meeting

PRESENT: Brandee Nelson, Chair; Malcolm Fick; Jonathan Hankin; Jeremy Higa;

Pedro Pachano

Jackie Kain, Associate Member

Chris Rembold, Assistant Town Manager/Director of Planning and Development

Ms. Nelson called the meeting to order at 6:04 PM.

Roll call vote: Mr. Higa, present; Mr. Pachano, present; Mr. Fick, present; Ms. Kain, present; Mr. Hankin, present; Ms. Nelson, present

Ms. Nelson said the meeting was being recorded.

FORM A's:

Mark Reynolds from Kelly, Granger, Parsons & Associates was present with a Form A plan for Deborah Mars. The plan separates 114 Brush Hill Road into 2 parcels, creating 116 Brush Hill Road. There is plenty of frontage for both parcels. The newly created lot has 2.522 acres of land. The remaining land contains 8.394 with 318.56 feet of frontage.

Mr. Hankin made a motion to endorse the plan, Mr. Fick seconded, all in favor

MINUTES: DECEMBER 11, 2025:

Prior to the Board taking action on the minutes of December 11, 2025, Claudia Shapiro requested to speak regarding the minutes of October 23, 2025. She requested to have the portion of the October 23 minutes pertaining to her read back. Ms. Shapiro said the address in the minutes mistakenly state her address as 70 Egremont Plain Road which is the address of the Great Barrington Airport. She said the Planning Board is abusing her and traumatizing her.

Ms. Nelson said the Board does not have an obligation to read the previously approved minutes back. She said she would look into Ms. Shapiro's concern.

**The October 23, 2025 minutes were resent to the Town Clerk and reposted on January 2, 2026. Ms. Shaw was not present at the December 11 meeting where the October 23 minutes were discussed and amended and approved per the discussion. After listening to the recording and noting the change Ms. Shaw corrected the minutes and resent to the Town Clerk. This was not stated at the January 8 meeting but for clarification purposes is being stated in the minutes.

Mr. Fick made a motion to approve the minutes of December 11, 2025 as amended, Mr. Hankin seconded, all in favor.

PUBLIC HEARING FOR A SPECIAL PERMIT: 53 VANDEUSENVILLE ROAD

The public hearing for a special permit for a commercial scale ground-mount solar energy facility in an R2 zone at 53 VanDeusenville Road was requested to be continued again by the applicant. The public hearing is rescheduled for February 12, 2026 at 6:00 PM.

Mr. Hankin made a motion to postpone the public hearing to February 12, 2026 at 6:00 PM, Mr. Fick seconded, all in favor.

SITE PLAN REVIEW: 148 MAPLE AVENUE

The Board conducted a site visit at 3:00 PM this afternoon prior to the meeting.

Present to discuss the application was attorney Nick Arienti, Justin Winter, landscape designer and Josh Blevins, Director for the Goldman Group.

Mr. Arienti said the group is present for the continued Site Plan Review discussion as required. He said Mr. Winter will discuss the landscape plan for the property.

Mr. Winter said 148 Maple Avenue is a condominium development. He said the grounds will be outfitted with native plantings. He said low plants will be used in the front. Larger trees, shrubs and taller plants will be planted around the property. He said the front streetscape will be emphasized by the plantings.

Mr. Fick asked about the area where the charging stations will be located, along the driveway on the right front of the building.

Mr. Winter said there will still be modifications for the landscaping He said additional trips to the site will be done. He said he will work with the plan to mitigate the view of the charging stations from Maple Avenue.

Ms. Kain said the screens on the charging stations are very large. She expressed concern about what the screens will look like when the charging stations are activated. She asked what the screens will look like from the abutting property.

Ms. Nelson asked Mr. Winter to review the eastern boundary to address the concerns about the charging screens. Ms. Nelson said she is also concerned about the view of the transformer from Maple Avenue and the abutter. She asked for an update on the cabinets for the chargers and bollards around the transformer.

Mr. Winter said he will provide the information and provide screening from the street.

Ms. Nelson said the plans show that a 15 gallon size will be used for the arborvitae. She asked how tall the plant will be.

Mr. Winter said the plants will be about 6 feet tall. He said the plant will grow about 5 feet per year until the maximum height of 60 feet. He said the earlier the plants are planted the faster they will grow.

Ms. Nelson asked about deer protection.

Mr. Winter said he would coordinate with the property owner.

Ms. Nelson asked if there is a plan in place if any of the plants die.

Mr. Winter said the plants are warranted for 90 days.

Ms. Nelson said we will have a note on the SPR approval requiring that plants will be replaced in perpetuity at the installed height.

Mr. Hankin said he is concerned about the height of the arborvitae that are close to the building.

Mr. Winter said the plants will be managed.

Mr. Hankin asked if the plants will be trimmed.

Mr. Winter said he won't discuss maintenance. He said the arborvitae are not meant to be a formal hedge.

Mr. Higa asked where the plants will be planted on the slope on the west side of the building.

Mr. Winter said he doesn't know about the gradient of the hill. He said he can't directly answer that question. He said the plants will be planted at a safe distance from the property line.

Mr. Higa said it will be a year before they start to grow. He added that there isn't a lot of space at the top of the slope.

Mr. Winter said the arborvitae will be about 10 feet in diameter when grown. He said the property line will be looked at to take into consideration the expected growth.

Mr. Rembold asked Mr. Winter to check on the maple tree in the curve of the driveway where the car chargers are located. He asked him to check to see if the location is still viable for the tree.

Mr. Winter said he will look at it.

Ms. Nelson said the proposed landscaping is attractive.

Mr. Rembold said the property to the left of the building was a key concern of the Planning Board in the previous discussion.

Josh Blevins, Director of the Goldman Group, said he will discuss the lighting and signage. He said there are 2 20 foot light poles shown on the plan. All of the light poles will be 14 feet tall. The 2 poles shown as 20 feet will be 14 feet. He said the lighting plan will be compliant and is fully dark sky compliant. He said all lighting will be downward directed, not up or out.

Ms. Nelson asked if there are any sconces proposed on the west side of the building.

Mr. Blevins said the light shown on the building will be eliminated. He said there will be sconces below grade for the garden apartments. He said the lights will be controlled by the residents.

Ms. Nelson said she doesn't have any concerns about the garden terraces. She said all lighting needs to be 3000k or less.

Mr. Higa said his only concern is the light color.

Ms. Nelson asked to please clarify what time the lights will be on for the property.

Mr. Blevins said the sconces will be controlled at the patio level by the residents. The building lights will be controlled by the building operations. He said the building lights will be on for all dark hour but the level of lighting will be reduced at some point.

Ms. Nelson asked for clarification of when the lights will be at full power between dusk and dawn. She asked for the motion and operational scenarios. She also asked for clarification about the light coming off of the chargers.

Mr. Blevins said the screens of the chargers are shiny and black. He said he expects there to be a small portion of the screen with a small screen in the back. He said he would bring in a picture.

Ms. Nelson asked if there could be clarification about if the sconces could be dimmable.

Ms. Nelson asked for clarification of the light imbedded in the wall in back of the building and the ramp.

Mr. Rembold added to show the lighting for the stairs and the ramp in the back.

Mr. Blevins said the stairs are illuminated.

Mr. Blevins discussed the sign. A drawing of the sign was shown. He said a 12 square foot sign is allowed in a residential zone. He said the nursing home bylaw allows a 9 square foot sign in a residential zone. He said the sign would be solid metal letters. He said the sign will be gently back lit. He said there will be a shadow outline of the letters. He said the shadow is what will be seen.

Ms. Kain asked what would be seen during the day.

Mr. Blevins said that is up for discussion. He said the sign could be made out of the material for the front of the building, a black aluminum material. He said the sign can be made out of whatever the Board wants.

Ms. Nelson said there is no preference. She said the light behind the letters appears to float.

Mr. Blevins showed a picture of what the sign would look like.

There was a brief discussion of the directional signage and the location. Mr. Blevins said he would revise the plan.

Mr. Rembold said the main sign should be located at the main driveway that enters the property.

Ms. Nelson said the driveway is a one way loop. She asked for clarification about where the sign will be located.

Mr. Blevins said it would be logical for the sign to be at the main entrance perpendicular to the road. Minimal directional signs would be located at the entrance and exit.

Ms. Nelson said the applicant needs to show where the signs will be located. There shouldn't be any impediment to the sight lines.

Ms. Nelson asked if there would be any other building mounted signs.

Mr. Blevins said the building name and address, 148 Maple Avenue, will be on the building. This sign will not be lit.

Mr. Higa said the color temperature for the backlit sign needs to be warm.

Ms. Nelson agreed. She said the color temperature must be 3000k or less.

Mr. Blevins agreed.

Ms. Nelson asked if Mr. Blevins was clear about what the Board is looking for.

Mr. Blevins said yes.

Mr. Higa said we see plans submitted as part of the SPR but when the project is built there are differences between what we saw and what is built.

Ms. Nelson said there was a conversation with the Building Department. The concerns raised were understood. She said she expects the Building Department will enforce the approved plans.

Mr. Hankin asked Mr. Blevins when he expected to get the certificate of occupancy.

Mr. Blevins said he expected to get the certificate of occupancy in 90 days or so.

Donna Jacobs from 260 Park Street asked about deer resistant plant species.

Mr. Winter said the arborvitae is a spectrum of deer resistant species. He said the goal is to get a deer resistant plant. He said no plant is 100% resistant. He said his recommendation would be to

install fencing for the first year. He said there will be oversight of the trees. He said there might be other materials used to discourage deer from eating the plants.

Michele Loubert from 70 Division Street said she planted 30 Green Giant arborvitae on her property. She said the deer do not eat it. She said the plants were 6-7 feet in height when planted. She said the trees have created a thick wall. She thanked the Board for focusing on this.

David Long from North Plain Road said he has seen signs with similar lighting proposed for this sign. He said the lighting is effective.

Ms. Nelson asked when the applicant would be ready to return to the Board.

Mr. Blevins said he would be ready to return to the next meeting on January 22.

PROSPERITY WAY SUBDIVISION:

Mr. Rembold said the mylar for the Prosperity Way Subdivision needs to be signed so the Town can transfer the lot to Habitat for Humanity.

Jim Bailey said the plan is different from what was originally approved.

Mr. Rembold said there is an approved subdivision plan creating the road. The lot will be transferred to Habitat for Humanity. He said the house footprints and a little more of each lot will be condominium lots. As people build homes a Home Owners Association will be created then Habitat will transfer the property to the HOA.

Ms. Nelson said the roadway parcel will remain Town owned and be pulled out so that the remaining lot can be conveyed to Habitat.

Mr. Bailey questioned the Board about conveying the lot to Habitat.

Mr. Rembold said a covenant was not required for the development because the Town is essentially the builder.

Mr. Bailey said he doesn't trust the Board. He wanted to make sure that signing the plan would not allow 10 more homes to be built.

Mr. Rembold said there is an approved subdivision plan and special permit that limit the building to 20 homes.

Ms. Nelson said there can only be 20 homes per the approved permits.

Mr. Fick made a motion to endorse the mylar, Mr. Higa seconded, all in favor, Mr. Hankin abstained.

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN:

Ms. Nelson said there will a public forum on Saturday, January 10 at the Mason Library. She said BRPC will run the program that will be held from 10:00 to 12:30. She said she hopes people will attend the meeting.

Ms. Jacobs said she didn't know where the meeting is being advertised. She said people have asked her. She will tell as many people as she can.

SEASONAL COMMUNITIES:

Mr. Rembold said Great Barrington has been designated as eligible to be a seasonal community. He said the Town has to vote at the Annual Town Meeting to accept the designation. At this time the State is still working on a regulation. He said three isn't much to review right now.

Mr. Rembold said the Town submitted comments to the draft regulation but at this time there is nothing new or revised. He said there will more discussion as the process moves forward.

BOARD & SUB-COMMITTEE ISSUES & CONCERNS:

Mr. Higa said the Community Preservation Committee will meet on January 13 to finish recommendations for funding at the Annual Town Meeting.

Mr. Fick said BRPC met to discuss clean energy systems facilities. He there needs to be a local consolidated permitting process in place by July 1, 2026. At this time there are no bylaw changes required as there are no regulations in place yet. He said BRPC will be drafting model bylaws.

Mr. Fick said it is difficult to discuss without regulations.

CITIZEN'S SPEAK TIME:

Ms. Shapiro asked Mr. Pachano to send her the 9 page addendum from Sarah Parker.

David Long, 304 North Plain Road, said he is appealing to the Board's thought process. He asked the Board to consider the highest use of the property. (Referring to the application for 54 VanDeusenville Road)

Mr. Rembold cautioned the Board about responding on an active permit.

Mr. Long said the property could be used for housing. He said Home Gas is on its way out. There is solar on the land near Home Gas.

Mr. Long said this is the last large tract of land. The Town would make more money and address housing needs. There are not a lot of large tracts of land like this in Town. He said he is a proponent of solar. He said solar fields use herbicides to maintain. He asked the Board to think about the project.

Ms. Loubert thanked Mr. Long for his comments. She said she is sad about what is happening with public records and the amount of redaction of public records. She said names and addresses are not protected. She said the packets posted for meetings are being posted 48 hours before a

meeting. The public records law allows 10 days for a reply to a request. She said something is wrong. She said there are some openness and transparency issues in Great Barrington. She said she would hate to see a rollback in Town regarding transparency. She said her comments are not directed at just this Board. She said the Chair of this Board is always respectful and responsive to citizens.

Mr. Rembold said that stuff that is vulnerable is what sits on the website. He said if he is emailed he could send the information directly through email. He said scammers target PDFs on websites.

Ms. Nelson said she works with a community that had AI generated invoices that seemed very realistic resulting in a significant loss of money. She said she is curious if the State has put forward guidelines and firewalls.

Eileen Mooney said she has asked about public records and open meeting law to try to find out about the redactions being done on professional formats.

Mrs. Mooney asked for the vote on Prosperity Way.

Ms. Nelson said the vote was 4 in favor, Mr. Hankin abstained.

Mrs. Mooney asked Mr. Hankin why he abstained.

Mr. Hankin said he would talk about it outside of the meeting.

Having concluded its business, Ms. Nelson adjourned without objection at 7:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly L. Shaw

Kimberly L. Shaw
Planning Board Secretary