

GREAT BARRINGTON PLANNING BOARD

DATE: January 22, 2026
TIME: 6:00 P.M.
PLACE: Large Meeting Room
FOR: Regular Meeting
PRESENT: Brandee Nelson, Chair; Malcolm Fick; Jonathan Hankin; Jeremy Higa;
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: Ms. Kain, present; Mr. Fick, present; Mr. Hankin, present; Ms. Nelson, present
Mr. Higa had not yet arrived.

Ms. Nelson said the meeting was being recorded.

FORM A's:

Brian Koczela from BEK Associates was present with a Form A application for Dorinda Medley for the creation of two lots on West Sheffield Road. Lot 1 contains 5.647 acres with 150 feet of frontage. Lot 2 contains 3.689 acres of land with 300 feet of frontage.

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

Mr. Higa arrived at 6:04 PM.

MINUTES: JANUARY 8, 2026:

Mr. Hankin made a motion to approve the minutes of January 8, 2026 as amended, Mr. Fick seconded, all in favor.

SITE PLAN REVIEW: 148 MAPLE AVENUE

The Board continued its discussion of the project at 148 Maple Avenue. The applicants were present via Zoom. Present for the discussion was landscape architect Justin Winters, Josh Blevins, Director for the Goldman Group and attorney Nick Arienti.

Mr. Winters went through the modifications to the landscape plan per the discussion on January 8, 2026. He said there were the primary issues identified including 9 bollards surrounding the transformer in the front southwest corner, the 3 electric vehicle charging cabinets and the modified location of site signage, directional signs and primary freestanding sign.

He said there are 9 large bollards around the transformer in the front southwest corner. The bollards will be surrounded by plants used for screening in a tight location. Native conifers will be used in this location as the tight shaggy foliage will be terrific for screening. He said the conifers have stature, bright colors that will be good for the location. He said the lowest trees will be at the perimeter with a series of layered heights around the transformer. The tallest of the conifers will be located along the back.

Mr. Winters said there will be a 10 foot clear buffer where the cabinets open for maintenance access.

Ms. Nelson asked if the Board had any questions. There were none. Ms. Nelson said it looks great.

Mr. Winters said there are two primary areas to provide screening of the EV charging stations. He said there is limited space in front of the chargers. We don't want to block access to the cars. He said we can't screen at the source. He said there will be plantings along the edge of roadway (to the east). He said evergreens will be planted in that area. The evergreens will fill out and there will be layers of plantings to mitigate the view.

Mr. Winters said there will be Mountain Laurel, 8-10 feet in height planted along the edge as well as a hedge of winterberry to provide a dense screen along the parking area. There will also be a winterberry hedge planted to mitigate the transformer for the EV chargers.

Mr. Winters said the plantings are in context with the adjacent gardens.

Mr. Fick asked about the arborvitae between the property and the neighbor on the west side.

Mr. Winters said there is existing arborvitae on the property line. He said smaller plants will be planted to fill in the gaps. There is sufficient space on the hillside to install more plants to reinforce the existing arborvitae.

Mr. Hankin asked how the sign works. He said most of the traffic heading west will be by the entrance before the sign can be seen.

Mr. Blevins said he hears Mr. Hankin's point. He said the intent was to split the sign from being near the corner to being closer to the building.

Mr. Fick asked about small directional signs, enter/exit.

Mr. Rembold said those small signs can be put in. He said he can look into the details.

Ms. Nelson thanked Mr. Winters for his modifications. She said he did a great job addressing everything we requested.

Ms. Nelson asked about the free-standing sign. She asked about the lighting and how it would illuminate the letters. Will the letters be made to keep the lighting within the letter so it won't leak out?

Mr. Blevins the sign is made up of individual letters. We think this is the gentlest application for lighting the letters. He said he didn't know if light would leak out but he would be able to look at an installation to keep the light in. He said he would be happy to have this made a condition.

Mr. Arienti said the intent is for no direct light to escape from the reveal light inside. He said the intent is that no bulb or fixture will be visible.

Ms. Nelson said the letters are die cut. There is no way to shield the source of illumination, which is typically mounted on the rear of the projecting letters. She asked that the sign designer work on it.

Mr. Blevins said there was a critical error in the lighting plan. He said the height of the light poles was corrected. He said some lights were non-dimmable so that was corrected. The information for the remote control of property lighting has been corrected. He said the building light will dim to half lighting at night. The lighting will be on a timer. The parking lighting will be on a motion sensor.

Ms. Nelson said the motion lights are fine.

Mr. Blevins said that is all on the lighting. He said there was a question about the EV chargers. He said the screen can be set on the dark mode. A black background can be turned on. There are no ads on the screens so the screen is black until the charger is in use. He said there might be a red LED on the display when in use.

Ms. Nelson asked if the chargers' use is exclusively for the residents.

Mr. Blevins said no but it won't be advertised. The chargers were put in for the public to use.

Ms. Nelson asked if the use is pay as you go.

Mr. Blevins said access will be through an app.

Ms. Nelson asked if the parking spaces in front of the charges are restricted to vehicles charging.

Mr. Blevins said the intent is for vehicles to park while actively charging. He said the parking use could be revisited.

Ms. Nelson the chargers are short chargers so the turn over should be quick. She said there is ample parking.

Mr. Hankin asked if there is lighting at the exit. He said it looks like there is one pole near the exit and one light on the side of the building. He said is a particularly dark area, will bollards be installed.

Mr. Blevins said he will have his lighting engineer revisit.

Mr. Rembold put the photometric plan on the screen.

Mr. Blevins said his directive to the lighting engineers was for there to be a minimum a lot of light to ensure the safety of the site. He said he has resisted over lighting the site.

Ms. Nelson said she thought the use of lighting was appropriate. She said the landscaping plan does not show the light in the same place as the photometric plan.

Mr. Blevins said there might be some existing light shown.

Ms. Nelson said the photometric plan supersedes the landscaping plan.

Mr. Rembold said make sure the lighting on the photometric plan is followed.

Mr. Rembold reminded the Board that a condition discussed at the last meeting was the replanting of any plants that die. He added that the site plan review is compliant with the revised landscape plan dated January 22, 2026.

The Board discussed the SPR criteria. Ms. Nelson said there are two conditions, that any landscaping that fails will be replanted with plants equal to or greater than the original planting and the sign back lighting will be fully shielded.

Mr. Fick made a motion to approve the SPR with the two conditions stated, Mr. Higa seconded, all in favor.

Mr. Blevins thanked the Board for being efficient and professional.

Mr. Arienti said it will be a nice project.

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN:

Ms. Nelson said the OSRP discussion will happen the second meeting of each month. Seth Jenkins from BRPC was present via Zoom to recap the January 10 public meeting that was attended by 20-25 members of the public and the Planning Board. The survey results were presented at the meeting and there was lively discussion that brought up more interest in other topics. A less formal discussion in February and March would be a good opportunity to bring in specific groups to brainstorm ideas.

Mr. Rembold said he would like the Board to set goals and objectives. The time for the plan is getting short. He said he spoke with Vivian Orłowski about farms and food as a topic for the February meeting. The March meeting could have a discussion about parks and playgrounds.

Mr. Rembold said there were some things left undone from the 2013 plan. Discussion of trails, trail access and river access are topics that should have some focus. It would be good to set another public forum in early April.

Ms. Kain said she looked at the 2013 plan. She said on page 3 there are goals stated. She asked if the Board will follow those goals.

Mr. Rembold asked the Board what they would like to have for goals.

Ms. Kain said she would like some specificity of the trails.

Mr. Rembold said identify these types of things and put them in writing.

Ms. Nelson said there is a time line we need to keep in mind to help drive the discussion.

Mr. Jenkins said the final draft should be ready for public review early to mid-May. It should be sent to the Selectboard no later than the middle of June. The plan will be submitted to the State at the end of June.

Ms. Nelson asked if there is an action required by the Board to refer the plan to the State.

Mr. Jenkins said the Board will endorse with a letter outlining 3-4 bullet points of wide ranging goals. A formal endorsement from the Selectboard is also required. The more complete the package that is sent to the State the less editing they will do.

Ms. Nelson suggested preparing the endorsement at the last meeting in May.

The Board discussed the goals of the 2013 plan. The Board agreed that the economy goal is important as the OSRP could be an economic driver for the economy. The Board also agreed that it is important to make information regarding the OSRP widely available.

The Board discussed agriculture and the importance of food production, bike paths and the use of electric bikes on paths accessed by pedestrian. They discussed connectivity between public and private lands, protection and maintenance of street trees, the Housatonic River as a recreational resource, protection of habitat and natural resources and resources and programs for playgrounds and parks.

Ms. Nelson said the meetings in February and March can have discussion of these topics as well as focus on specific topics. The February meeting can be designated for discussion of farms and food.

Mr. Rembold said he and Mr. Jenkins will do some work to organize the discussions for the upcoming meetings.

Ms. Orłowski was present on Zoom. Ms. Orłowski said in 2016 Great Barrington was designated a Pollinator Community in 2017 the Great Barrington Pollinator Action Plan was put in place. She said a third of the food we eat relies on pollinators. She said the pollinators are facing elimination. She suggested discussing a framework around pollinators at the first meeting in February. The larger issues can be discussed to narrow down the discussion to specific issues. She said agriculture is not just about commercial food.

Eileen Mooney was present on Zoom. She asked where she could find the 2013 OSRP and the draft of the new OSRP. She asked where she could find Ms. Orłowski's plan. She said she has looked at the website but it is hard to find.

Mr. Rembold said he has started a OSRP page on the website.

Ms. Mooney said Mr. Jenkins comments would help people to become involved.

Mr. Rembold thanked Ms. Mooney for her comments. He said he is working on it.

Mr. Rembold asked if the meetings on February 26 and March 26 could start at 5:00 PM. The Board agreed.

Mr. Rembold said Ms. Orłowski's comments made him think that high priority items that help make the community more resilient need to be considered.

Mr. Jenkins said he will not be able to attend the February meeting but he will work with Mr. Rembold to have something ready for the meeting.

TOWN PLANNER'S REPORT:

Mr. Rembold reminded the Board to do the on-line training sent out by the Town Clerk.

Mr. Rembold said the next meeting on February 12 has a heavy agenda with both the solar public hearing and a special permit for the hospital. He suggested starting the meeting at 5:00 PM to discuss the special permit then the public hearing, scheduled for 6:00 PM can start on time.

The Board agreed.

BOARD & SUB-COMMITTEE ISSUES & CONCERNS:

Mr. Higa said the Community Preservation Committee sent a recommendation to the Selectboard.

Mr. Fick said BRPC gave an interesting presentation discussing land use areas in the region. There will be an informational meeting for Seasonal Communities on February 4th.

Mr. Fick said Chat GPT is being used in some communities by integrating with the bylaws.

Mr. Hankin asked if the Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust will discuss the plans for the Rising ball field.

Mr. Rembold said the GBAHT is continuing to work on the goals for that property.

Mr. Hankin said the Planning Board should be involved.

Mr. Rembold said the entire community will be involved.

Ms. Nelson asked if the Planning Board should revisit the issue of sidewalks. She said there are safety issues with some sidewalks.

Mr. Rembold said the Board can discuss but the issue doesn't specifically lie with this Board.

CITIZEN'S SPEAK TIME:

Ms. Claudia Shapiro spoke.

Ms. Mooney spoke.

Having concluded its business, Ms. Nelson adjourned without objection at 8:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kimberly L. Shaw

Kimberly L. Shaw
Planning Board Secretary