

**March 3, 2026
Planning Board**

Present were Regular Members: Tom McCue, Lori Langlois, Henry Noel, Dan Whittet, Cassandra Mason, Micah Bachner, Jeffrey Quackenbush **Ex-Officio Member:** Mia Qualls, alternate

Alternate Member: None

Excused were Members: Brian Valerino

Others Present: City Manager Philip Warren, Jr; Mayor Robert Cone; Michel Salek, Code Enforcement Officer; Eamon Kelley; Maureen Patry; Avery Halle; Christine Gaulin; Theodore Bosen; Justin Halle; Councilor Steve Korzen; and Shelli Fortin, minutes

Tom McCue called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

Approval of February Minutes

Lori Langlois made a motion to approve the minutes of February 3, 2026, as presented. Cassandra Mason seconded the motion.

Jeffrey Quackenbush made a motion to add information to the minutes, which was seconded by Henry Noel. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Chair McCue asked Mr. Quackenbush to put his corrections in writing and bring them to the next meeting for review.

Lori Langlois withdrew her motion to approve the minutes, and Cassandra Mason withdrew her second.

Draft Review of Zoning Ordinance Changes with Barrett Planning Group, LLC

The draft review was rescheduled for the April meeting.

Public Comments

Avery Halle, owner of Split Ends at 148 Main Street, spoke in opposition to the two-way traffic design on Main Street. Ms. Halle stated that the reduced number of parking spaces will affect her business. Ms. Halle stated that she has elderly customers, and customers in wheelchairs, who need to be assisted to their cars and require parking close by. Ms. Halle stated that she was not notified of the project, and felt blindsided. Ms. Halle stated she is in favor of revamping Main Street to look good, however two-way traffic will hurt businesses. Ms. Halle stated that she may have looked at opening her business in another community if she had known this was the plan, and stated it was discouraging.

Maureen Patry stated that she believes two-way traffic is a terrible idea. Ms. Patry noted that the report provided by the consultant, Ilana Preuss, compares Berlin to Louisville, KY, which has a population of 650,000. Ms. Patry noted that none of the Council members ever came to speak with her, and that she was not included on the list of business owners to

speak with for the consultant. Ms. Patry stated that she disagrees with taking away parking on Main Street and taking down the Woolworth building to create a parking lot. Ms. Patry noted that they do not have a problem with speeding, so changing the traffic pattern to slow down traffic is not needed. Ms. Patry advised that two-way traffic for the Woolworth connector road will be a danger coming and going. Ms. Patry noted the current problems with snow removal and Bickford Place not being cared for, and questioned who would provide the maintenance that would be needed for the trees and plants planned along Main Street. Ms. Patry noted that the parking lot at Woolworth's would be filled with employees or customers of the Hydro Tavern. Ms. Patry asked about parking for City Hall, as the handicapped parking spaces are full every day. Ms. Patry stated that more police will be needed to enforce 2-hour parking.

Justin Halle suggested that they consider how deliveries from FedEx and UPS will be handled, and stated there are multiple issues to consider.

Christine Gaulin, of 901 Sixth Avenue, stated that she is concerned for elderly customers, and those who need handicapped parking, not being able to come to the downtown area. Ms. Gaulin stated that if you are on the outside looking in, the renderings are beautiful. However, looking at them from the perspective of a business, they look scary. Ms. Gaulin requested that they keep the one-way traffic on both sides and do not take away parking.

Theodore Bosen, of 13 Bisson Road, shared the concept of blue zones, which are areas in the world where people live to be 100+ years old. Factors that lead to longevity, and a happy and healthy life, are places that are easily walkable, and where people feel a sense of community. Mr. Bosen noted that Fort Worth, TX is changing their downtown from 2-way to one-way to provide an area for people to walk safely and congregate. Mr. Bosen stated that the key is to enable and maximize the ease of pedestrian access and to make the downtown more pedestrian friendly. Mr. Bosen referenced the snowmelt system, noting that the President unlawfully took the money back for that portion of the project. Mr. Bosen noted Holland, MI, and the positive impact the snowmelt system had on their community, attracting people and business, and saving on labor costs for snow removal.

Michelle Lemoine, of 143 Howard Street, stated she is hesitant to see two-way traffic as Berlin has an older population who are creatures of habit. Ms. Lemoine stated that she fears there will be accidents, and is apprehensive about fire trucks and ambulances coming down Main Street. Ms. Lemoine stated that the renderings look beautiful, but the design is not practical.

Councilor Steve Korzen asked to speak concerning the proposed Dummer Yard project. Tom McCue advised that the Board does not have an application for this project, and in fairness cannot and will not respond to any comments concerning the project.

Councilor Korzen read a prepared statement:

"I acknowledge that contamination exists on the landfill property, I am here to make clear that the data presented does not, in my view, demonstrate a current, acute threat to our

community's health and safety. More importantly, the exceedances documented in this letter should not be used as justification for approving a new Soil Disposal Facility at this location.

If our neighbors are connected to municipal water and are not trespassing on the landfill itself, they are not currently being exposed to these contaminants through drinking water or direct soil contact.

New Hampshire's groundwater and soil standards are set with conservative assumptions to protect sensitive populations—particularly children—over an entire lifetime of exposure[1]. PFAS standards, for example, are now regulated in the single-digit to low-double-digit parts per trillion range, which is at or near the analytical detection limit[2]. Many of the reported exceedances are not orders of magnitude over these very protective thresholds; they simply exceed regulatory trigger points in monitoring wells at an industrial site.

This does not mean we ignore the contamination. It means we put it in proper perspective: the data shows a need for continued engineering controls on-site, not evidence of widespread community poisoning. Why is remediation of the old landfill being bundled with approval of a new Soil Disposal Facility? These issues should be handled with standard remedial measures. They do not require community acceptance of decades more waste importation.

Our community has already borne more than its fair share of industrial and waste-management facilities. Approving a new Soil Disposal Facility here is likely to extend that burden for another generation, with more truck traffic, more potential for contamination, and more long-term liability. In my view, this proposal primarily advances a private business model, not our community's health.

In Conclusion, the Exceedance Notification Letter documents real contamination that requires real action. But it does not show an emergency that justifies fast-tracking approval of a new waste facility. The data show a legacy landfill that needs a modern cap, better leachate controls, and continued monitoring—not an expansion of waste operations.

I urge you to separate remediation of past harm from authorization of future harm. Fix the old landfill. Protect our wells. I believe this contamination is being used as a Trojan horse to deliver a new landfill that serves corporate interests at the expense of community health and quality of life.”

Councilor Korzen asked to pass out information sheets with his information, and Tom McCue advised they could not be passed out at the meeting.

Richard Poulin, owner of Middle Earth on Main Street, advised that he did not believe two-way traffic would be chosen for the design, and shared concerns over available parking. Mr. Poulin stated that he was opposed to removing the Woolworth building for parking, as they need more buildings, not less. Mr. Poulin commented on the new Walgreens building,

stating that the Board needs better site plan review, as the building is not attractive and the parking is awful. Mr. Poulin cited the need for an Administrative Board of Relief, who could overrule decisions based on building and life safety codes, stating there should be flexibility in the laws.

Maureen Patry asked if residents could still come to fight the decision or if it is done. Tom McCue advised that she should speak with the Mayor or City Manager concerning this.

Member Comments

Dan Whittet commented that the Planning Board does not have control, and recommendations go to the City Council. Mr. Whittet noted that several people spoke against the two-way traffic design, however this was voted on by the City Council, and not the Planning Board. Mr. Whittet agreed that the public had a hard time finding out about hearings, and suggested that they need to evaluate the process. Mr. Whittet noted that he prefers the one-way pattern, but has looked at what other communities have, and many are two-way. Mr. Whittet noted that either way, they will get a more attractive downtown.

Jeffrey Quackenbush noted that he was disappointed in the outcome and bothered by the process, as he felt that the Council did not get the full information. Mr. Quackenbush read a prepared statement outlining his process concerns for the decision on Berlin's downtown traffic configuration:

"1. Different options for the street configuration on Main St. and Pleasant St. were presented by Stantec and discussed during the December 2025 and February 2026 Planning Board meetings. There was affirmative support for a one-way configuration from both Planning Board members and members of the public, including several merchants downtown. There was also some interest in converting Pleasant St. to a two-way traffic pattern, while leaving Main St. as a one-way street. There was no affirmative support for two-way traffic on Main St., although questions were asked about these plans, and supporters of the other options were overwhelming negative about the possibility of two-way traffic on Main St. At the City Council meeting on 2/17/26, only two options were presented, a plan that maintains the current configuration of one-way streets and a plan that provides for two-way streets on both Main St and Pleasant St. During the City Council meeting, Councilor Korzen referred to the Planning Board minutes, which had not been approved by the Planning Board, and asked about the consensus during the December Planning Board meeting. He was told that support between one-way traffic and two-way traffic was mixed. This is a misrepresentation of the discussions during both Planning Board meetings where no affirmative support was voiced by members of the Planning Board or the public for the two-way proposal that the City Council voted on. The decision to remove the option of two-way traffic on Pleasant and one-way traffic on Main St. was made absent any consultation with or clear support from the Planning Board.

2. With two-way traffic, the street parking on Pleasant St. and Main St. will be nearly cut in half. Stantec looked at how much parking could be added if the Woolworth building, which

the City of Berlin owns, were demolished and a new connector street with parking could be built in its footprint; much of the lost parking could be recovered in this scenario, albeit in a more concentrated area. The city also owns several other properties along these streets where parking could be added. The City Council did not vote on any proposals to add parking in downtown, including the Woolworth building demolition option. There was no information provided in any of the presentations on the administrative, legal and political processes and risks involved in any of these options. There was no budget provided for the costs the city might incur for the demolition of the Woolworth building, site preparation, street and parking construction or legal fees. No timetable was discussed for when these decisions might be made or when this work would happen relative to main work on Main St. and Pleasant St. As it stands currently, parking will be cut half when the new streetscape construction work is completed.

3. Stantec has designed the one-way option to include sidewalks that are about a foot wider than their current width. The sidewalks for the two-way option will be the same width they are now, and narrowed or re-shaped at intersections to accommodate the new traffic flows. During the City Council meeting it was stated several times that the City might have the “option” of reverting to one-way traffic if, after some time, the two-way option is not found work very well. The reason that the one-way configuration couldn’t be converted to two-way later is because the sidewalks widths along the street and at intersections would not support it. However, there was no discussion of the following in order to accomplish a reversion of the traffic pattern: administrative, legal and political processes and risks; a budget; the permanent reduction in sidewalk width.

4. If changes to the status quo traffic plan are being proposed to the Planning Board, it should be clearly stated how they advance the goals set by the Master Plan adopted in 2022. There was no mention of the Master Plan in any of the presentations. Section 3 specifically describes improvements to Berlin’s downtown. Goal 3 of section 3 states: “Make the Downtown more pedestrian and bicycle friendly and a destination for residents and visitors through coordinated, strategic infrastructure investments, and connection with other adjacent facilities like the parks, playgrounds, and Riverwalk.” 3A.11 states: “Provide convenient bicycle lanes and parking in the Downtown area and link to the sidewalk network and parking facilities.” By adding congestion and reducing sidewalk space, a two-way traffic pattern would specifically work against achieving these goals. Support for more walkability and bicycle lanes was frequently expressed in public comment at all three meetings.

5. The Fire Chief indicated in a communication shared by City Staff that a two-way traffic pattern would be preferred on Main St. to speed up response times to the East Side of Berlin. The specific amount of time this would save per trip was not discussed. Also, the Fire Department currently have the right to go the “wrong way” on the section of Main St. to Mason St. to get the East Side. No one from the Fire Department testified before the Planning Board or the City Council, so they were not asked why they choose not to utilize this option currently or would not in the future.

6. The theory behind the change to two-way streets is that drivers moving through downtown could opportunistically stop to patronize businesses there without having formed some prior intention; businesses would have better visibility and drivers would have shorter drive lengths to their destination. For Main St. businesses in particular, this means that the target driver would:

- Be headed south;
- Be driving during business hours;
- Not have bypassed Main St. to use the more direct route through downtown on Pleasant St.;
- Not be a local resident with a detailed knowledge of businesses downtown;
- Not be going downtown on a specific, pre-determined purpose;
- Be willing to stop at a business downtown even if there is no parking immediately in front of it;
- Not be a through-driver without the time or inclination stop for any purpose.

During the presentation to the Planning Board and subsequent discussions, there has been no discussion of the quantity of drivers per week or per month who would fit this profile, or the magnitude of revenues they might generate given regional traffic patterns and demographics.

7. During the February Planning Board meeting, Planning Board Member Micah Bachner expressed concern that Stantec had drafted 3D visuals of the two-way option, but not of the one-way configuration. His concerns were dismissed. In the City Council meeting, several Councilors indicated that they found the quality of these visuals to be persuasive in their support for the two-way option. Member Bachner's concerns were not mentioned.

8. Several City Councilors commented that Stantec had "approved" the two-way traffic pattern, implying that the engineers had possibly endorsed this option over the one-way pattern. Stantec was asked to determine the technical feasibility of both options, not to express an opinion about their aesthetic or economic merits. Stantec's limited opinions on the options were not clarified during the City Council meeting."

Mr. Quackenbush stated that he would like to make a motion to address the concerns he shared, and Tom McCue asked that he give the Board time to read and review his written comments.

Micah Bachner stated that everyone has made good points, and noted that as a building owner on Main Street he was taken aback that none of the owners or businesses were called in to discuss the proposal. Mr. Bachner stated that he does not like the 2-way design, and feels that the process left little room for any real discussion. Mr. Bachner suggested a longer decision-making process. Mr. Bachner noted that there were lot of people not in favor of the project, and nobody spoke supporting it. Mr. Bachner questioned why not all options were presented equally to the Council, and noted that he does not like the idea of a parking lot on Main Street. Mr. Bachner asked where businesses will be, if they do not have

an effort to build a walkable Main Street. Mr. Bachner stated that although one business owner in Gorham did not open a business here due to not having two-way traffic, that does not carry weight as current Berlin business owners do not like the plan.

Dan Whittet asked the City Manager, Mayor, or Chair where they stand.

Tom McCue advised that he was not at the January Planning Board meeting, and that he spoke in favor of one-way traffic at the Council meeting on February 17. Mr. McCue stated that he watched the March 2 Council meeting and read the report by Ilana Preuss, who was the consultant hired by BIDPA. Mr. McCue stated that he finds it ironic that with the snowmelt system being the reason they received this grant, it is the part that is no longer funded. However, Mr. McCue stated that he disagrees with Mr. Bosen that the City should fight to get it back. Mr. McCue noted that they did have a discussion a while back about taking down the Woolworth building, and that staff was working on ways to fund the demolition. Mr. McCue noted that in listening to the Council discussion, it was pointed out that if they design for two-way traffic, they could go back to one-way, but questioned the cost involved to switch back. Mr. McCue stated that this grant has been in the works for 5-6 years. Mr. McCue stated that although the Master Plan was not mentioned during Stantec's presentation, he felt it was acknowledged and that it is constantly coming up in conversations. Mr. McCue stated that he understood they needed a decision to proceed, and the Council listened to the public and made a decision. They had a motion to reconsider at the following meetings, which failed the 2/3 majority required. Mr. McCue noted that this is an example of public engagement, and as Councilor Higbee pointed out at the meeting, there were a number of opportunities for the public to be heard. Mr. McCue suggested that the public needs to pay attention, and it is up to individuals to inform themselves, as Council meetings are available to see and hear online.

Mia Qualls stated that the Council did not receive an opinion from the Planning Board and heard that the Board was split. Ms. Qualls stated that a recommendation would have been helpful.

Staff Questionnaire

Jeffery Quackenbush requested to add an agenda item for a questionnaire for city staff.

Micah Bachner made a motion to add an agenda item for a questionnaire for city staff, which was seconded by Dan Whittet. The motion carried with all in favor.

Jeffrey Quackenbush presented a statement and questionnaire for city staff to fill out for the City Council, noting that there was a lack of factual details for the Council to consider when making this decision.

City Manager Warren noted that under the Council rules, the Council cannot reconsider the vote at this point.

Tom McCue requested time to consider how this would work, as he is not familiar with the Planning Board issuing statements or submitting questionnaires to City staff.

Cassandra Mason noted that these questions could be asked of the staff at the meeting.

Micah Bachner stated that he felt the questionnaire was targeted.

Mr. Quackenbush stated that the answers could be presented to the City Council to preserve the integrity of the process, noting that it would be a better representation of what was discussed at the meeting.

The Board agreed that the statement and questionnaire would be added as an agenda item for the April meeting.

Other

Dan Whittet noted that he corresponded with Pamela Laflamme about the downtown traffic pattern, and although they disagreed on the design, he respects her opinion having worked on this grant for almost a decade. Mr. Whittet noted that he had a hard time speaking against it in public.

The Board discussed public notifications, and the need to better inform the public. Tom McCue noted that information can be easily found on the website, and that there is only so much we can do. Mr. McCue stated that it is important to participate before the endpoint, as timelines must be met.

Mr. McCue noted that the traffic pattern was a decision of the City Council, and the Planning Board should not get flack for a decision that was not made by them.

Dan Whittet suggested that any decisions that are impacted by the Master Plan should be voted on by the Planning Board.

Tom McCue advised that how grant money is spent is a Council decision, not the Planning Board. This decision was not a site plan review, subdivision, or a land use issue. Traffic and budget is not within the purview of the Planning Board.

Jeffrey Quackenbush stated that the applicability of the design to the Master Plan should require a recommendation from the Planning Board.

Mia Qualls asked about bringing information to the Council from the Planning Board, and City Manager Warren advised it should be done under Council Committee reports.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the board, Jeffrey Quackenbush moved to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Mia Qualls. All in favor, the motion carried.

The Planning Board meeting ended at 8:16 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelli Fortin