

MINUTES OF TOWN OF BERKLEY SELECTMEN’S MEETING OF 04/16/2026

SELECTMEN IN ATTENDANCE: Tabitha K. McCrohan-Member, Mark Horsfall-Member

TOPIC		ACTION
Call To Order	Board of Selectmen - Called to Order at 6:00PM in the Council on Aging Room	
Old Business:	<p>1. Board to review updates to the Town’s Economic Development Plan, including continued coordination with SRPEDD representatives and potential progression toward finalization. Review of matter; votes may be taken.</p> <p>Chris Welch, principal comprehensive planner with SRPEDD, introduced himself and explained that he would present an April update to the Berkley economic development plan. He noted that the update would focus on draft recommendations, organized primarily by geographic area in town.</p> <p>Chris began by outlining town-wide and corridor-level recommendations. First, he described a recommendation to pursue pedestrian improvements along major corridors. This stems from repeated resident and town official feedback about the need for sidewalk and roadway upgrades to support business activity and to address anticipated traffic increases from future development. He mentioned programs such as Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School as potential vehicles for funding and implementing these improvements. The second major town-wide recommendation was to develop design guidelines for the proposed village overlay district and other key areas. These guidelines would protect nearby neighborhoods and open space while maintaining Berkeley’s rural character, building directly on the 2020 Master Plan strategies (particularly land use elements related to dimensional and design standards). Chris emphasized that guidelines embedded in board regulations could offer flexibility, because they might be adopted or updated without always requiring Town Meeting votes.</p> <p>Next, Chris turned to home occupations. Based on business license data provided by the town, the consulting team found that approximately 77% of active Berkeley business licenses—74 licenses—are associated with home-based businesses. He reported that some home-based business owners had experienced challenges working with the town when certifying their businesses. To support this large share of the local economy, Chris recommended updating the town’s business guide to explicitly address home occupations, clarifying expectations and making the process more accommodating.</p> <p>The discussion then shifted to infrastructure as a foundation for economic development. Chris presented a recommendation to engineer and construct water and sewer infrastructure improvements, reflecting survey results and conversations with residents and officials that identified water and sewer as critical constraints on economic growth. He referenced potential funding sources such as MassWorks, EDM, and USDA programs, stressing the importance of getting these opportunities on the town’s radar because eligibility and access can take time. A related recommendation was to pursue additional inter-municipal agreements (IMAs) for water and wastewater services with the City of Taunton, particularly to support key development sites near the town line, including the riverfront district and the Myricks Airport area.</p> <p>Mr. Welch then focused on the Myricks Airport area. He recommended that the town refine and integrate “light industrial” as a defined use within its bylaws to create opportunities for small-scale industrial development there. He explained that survey respondents showed strong interest in light industrial uses in this area, but that current zoning does not allow light manufacturing either by right or by</p>	Discussion Only

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	<p>special permit. Several possible zoning strategies were discussed, including allowing light industrial by right in the general business district, recognizing that such a town-wide change might be controversial because residents may not want industrial activity in other parts of town. An alternative would be to allow such uses only in a special business district focused on the Myricks area, creating more targeted opportunities for tax-generating industrial development.</p>	
	<p>During this portion of the discussion, Mark Horsfall and other board members worked with Chris and his colleague, Lizeth Gonzalez to distinguish between heavy industrial (high-impact manufacturing, such as steel or chemical production) and light industrial (lower-impact, smaller-scale operations like workshops, cabinet makers, small warehouses, or similar enterprises with limited employees and environmental impact). There was also discussion of an example involving a coffee roaster, which had previously raised definitional issues under the town's existing bylaw language. Participants generally agreed that properly defined light industrial uses could align with the town's character while broadening the tax base, and that clarifying definitions for light industrial and related uses such as light manufacturing would be an important long-term zoning task.</p> <p>Chris also recommended integrating "flex space" as a defined use under light industrial and storage categories. He explained that flex space typically combines industrial functions with a significant share of office space, often leasing to multiple businesses and creating a mix of uses within one structure. The group discussed the need to determine which zoning districts or overlays should accommodate flex space and to manage potential conflicts or perceptions of industrial encroachment in inappropriate areas. This led to a related recommendation to clarify the purpose of the special business district and consider expanding it to appropriate parcels around the Myricks Airport area. Mr. Horsfall, Town Administrator Chabot, and others noted that the special business district currently has very similar use tables to general business and only a small number of parcels; its original purpose, board members recalled, was to locate and manage adult entertainment uses on the furthest edge of town, near the highway and away from most residential neighborhoods. Participants acknowledged that expanding the special business district could inadvertently expand the area where adult entertainment is allowed, and several members suggested revisiting how adult uses are handled in the bylaws so that economic development goals are not constrained by this legacy zoning structure.</p> <p>The conversation then turned to landscape design and rural character, especially in the Myricks Airport area and other prospective development sites. Chris proposed a recommendation to provide clear expectations for rural landscape design to enhance and maintain Berkeley's rural character, potentially through design guidelines that address elements like trees, shrubbery, shade structures, and green space around commercial or light industrial development. Board members and participants cited examples of neighboring towns where poorly maintained commercial properties had created eyesores on main roads, contrasted with local examples where relatively simple, well-kept lawns and plantings created an attractive appearance. Several members favored an approach where "less is more"—not over-complicating landscaping requirements, but ensuring minimum standards for greenery and aesthetics that make businesses welcoming. There was interest in keeping the recommendation intentionally flexible or "vague" at the bylaw level, to acknowledge requirements for plantings and open space while allowing site-specific judgment based on parcel conditions, utilities, and practical maintenance needs.</p>	

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The board and the consultants focused on how best to structure zoning for the new “residential business” section and related areas, and the discussion centered on **using overlays rather than changing the base General Business district**. Planning Board Chair, Marc Oliveira explained that they want this new section to host quiet, retail-oriented, in-and-out businesses and to avoid heavier or incompatible uses, and asked whether there was a way to achieve that “instead of” relying solely on an overlay. Chris responded that, given the underlying zoning there is **General Business**, the “cleanest” and simplest way to introduce those tailored restrictions is indeed an **overlay district**: if the town amends the General Business bylaw directly, the change would apply **town-wide** to all General Business parcels, which could provoke resistance in other neighborhoods that do not share the same development vision. He then outlined a strategic option of creating **one overarching overlay with multiple subdistricts**—for example, a village subdistrict, a riverfront subdistrict, and a Padelford subdistrict—so the town can set different use lists and standards for each area while keeping the legal structure and mapping coherent.

The discussion then centered on the **proposed Riverfront District** and how to shape it as a mixed-use, waterfront village that both activates the Taunton River and respects existing properties. Mr. Welch explains a recommendation to adopt a **riverfront overlay district** that would support river-dependent and tourism-oriented uses while creating a compact, walkable cluster of **small-scale commercial and residential buildings**. Board members generally agree that a successful riverfront area must mix **ground-floor shops and restaurants with residential units above (“top-of-the-shop”)**, noting that such a configuration would make the waterfront more vibrant and economically viable. They discuss several specific parcels, including land with an old shipyard area, deep water access, and sandy shoreline, emphasizing that much of the buildable upland lies behind a natural visual buffer from the main road; this means visitors would turn off Berkley Street and only then encounter the riverfront village, preserving the existing streetscape. There is sensitivity around including already-developed or owner-occupied parcels in the conceptual drawings; some members worry that residents could be unsettled by seeing their homes depicted as future commercial buildings, so the group leans toward illustrating **generic mixed-use buildings and riverfront access** without directly targeting occupied houses. They also begin to grapple with how much **development intensity** to show—recognizing that a certain level of residential density is necessary to interest developers, but also wanting to avoid renderings that appear overbuilt or threatening to current neighborhood character. Finally, they touch on the idea that some of the new square footage shown in the latest drawings could be treated as **shade structures or non-building elements**, and that historic character and any inventoried sites in the broader village/riverfront area should be reflected in future **design guidelines** so that new construction complements Berkley’s traditional riverfront identity.

The board and SRPEDD talked about how **infrastructure limits** shape the plan’s “high” and “low” development scenarios. Mr. Welch notes that the more intensive build-outs shown in the new renderings would depend on **expanded water and sewer service** and asks how far the plan should go in depicting those possibilities. TA Chabot explains that this is why the plan includes a town-wide recommendation to pursue **water and sewer upgrades and inter-municipal agreements with Taunton**: without those, the high-density concepts are aspirational only. He points out that the **riverfront area is especially close to existing water, sewer, and natural gas lines**, making it a logical place for any future increase in density, potentially through **joint grants and cost-sharing with developers**. Mr. Welch agrees to make clear in the written plan that the **“high” scenarios are contingent**

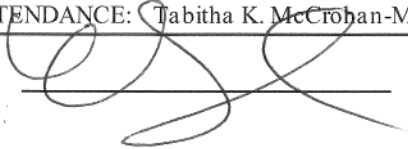
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	<p>on new infrastructure and funding, while the “low” scenarios reflect what can be supported by the current system.</p> <p>The group shifts to how market demand should influence which districts move first and what uses they emphasize. TA Chabot and the consultants note that light industrial and flex-space uses may draw interest and tax revenue faster than restaurants or small retail, so there is a trade-off between pursuing the more visibly attractive commercial vision and the “low-hanging fruit” of light industrial demand. They discuss that light industrial or flex buildings—often with office space on an upper floor—could be appropriate in parts of the Myricks area and other highway-oriented locations, while more neighborhood-facing sites (village, riverfront, Padelford) could focus on retail, services, food establishments, and smaller-scale housing. This leads into a brief review of existing residential permissions in the special business/general business districts (two- and three-family and small multi-family by special permit) and an interest in cluster-style, smaller units to diversify the housing stock without overwhelming infrastructure or changing character.</p> <p>The conversation then turns to timeline and public process. The Riverfront District is likely a longer-term effort, while nearer-term zoning work will probably center on the general business district expansion, and minor zoning bylaw changes. They stress the need for a clear roadmap so zoning articles don’t get ahead of public understanding. For outreach, there is consensus to hold an open house once the draft plan and visuals are ready, ideally close to a Town Meeting where some of the first bylaw changes might be considered. Early June is mentioned as a likely window, possibly tying the event to existing community activities on the Town Common to boost attendance. The consultants commit to a quick turnaround on updated drawings and a refined recommendations list, and TA Chabot suggests using these materials, along with the town’s website and social media, to start steady public education leading up to any future zoning warrants.</p> <p>2. Board to discuss potential recommendations of the Berkley Planning Board for Annual Town Meeting warrant articles, including zoning-related items and other matters as appropriate. Review of matter; votes may be taken.</p> <p>The conversation references the proposed General Business expansion map that will be attached to a warrant article, clarifying that the entire affected lot will be rezoned and that the article will explicitly reference the survey plan so voters understand the exact boundaries. Town staff and board members note that these initial bylaw and map changes are intended as incremental, practical steps that fit within the broader Economic Development Plan—tightening up use controls, expanding General Business where appropriate, and positioning the town for later, more comprehensive overlay work (village, riverfront, Myricks) once the plan is finalized and public outreach has ramped up.</p> <p>3. Board to discuss potential next steps and priorities for implementation of the Economic Development Plan, including coordination across boards and departments, grant opportunities, and public engagement strategies; review of matter; votes may be taken.</p> <p>Limited discussion surrounding prioritization of the Riverfront District’s implementation for formal submission to the Community One Stop. No formal vote taken, expression of interest submission was reviewed briefly.</p>	<p>Discussion Only</p>
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Jennifer Vincent, Chairwoman

Tabitha McCrohan, Member

Mark Horsfall, Member



Matthew Chabot, Town Administrator