

Plandome Heights to consider giving Planning Board powers to trustees

By **Rose Weldon** - January 19, 2021 ←



The Village of Plandome Heights is considering abolishing its Planning Board and transferring its powers to the Board of Trustees. (Photo courtesy of Google Maps)

A proposed alteration to the code of the Village of Plandome Heights would eliminate the municipality's Planning Board and transfer its powers to the Board of Trustees.

"The Board of Trustees has determined that the best interests of the Village and its residents are served by transferring the powers of the separate Planning Board of the Village to the Village Board of Trustees ... and abolishing the separate Planning Board," the text of the proposed change reads.

Jim Madison, the Planning Board's president, said in a phone interview that he had discussed the issue with Mayor Kenneth Riscica in the past and that he was in favor of the change. ←

"I'm in total agreement that it be done," Madison said. ←

The text of the law to change the code cites the infrequency of the Planning Board's use among the reasons for its elimination.

"It's a relatively inactive committee," Madison said. "I think I've been on this board for 15 years, and we've had three issues that have come before it. And two of them weren't even in our village; they related to properties that were adjacent to our village."

Only four properties in the village exist that could be subdivided, he said.

"One of [the properties] doesn't have the frontage," Madison said. "So if you need a variance, that would not be our committee anyway. The other two, one of them is the synagogue, which is unlikely to subdivide. And the other two are private. It isn't a very active activity, and there's not a lot of potential for activity."

"We were basically incurring costs in our village for issues [where] the jurisdiction should have been elsewhere, in my view," he added.

Due to the lack of frequency of meetings and "minimal need" for the Planning Board functions, the bill says, the members of that board "do not have the opportunity to become familiar with current property and zoning issues within the Village or in neighboring jurisdictions, but are burdened by the obligation to satisfy annual training requirements which are rarely put to use."

"At the same time, the Board of Trustees finds that such familiarity does exist with the members of the Board of Trustees, who meet regularly to address the many issues that arise in the Village, including those that pertain to property and zoning issues," the text states. "Furthermore, in a small Village like Plandome Heights, there is an inherent difficulty in identifying and securing residents who are ready, willing, and able to serve the Village in a voluntary, uncompensated role such as that of [a] member of a separate Planning Board, and the interests of the Village are not served if such individuals do come forward and volunteer, only to serve on a Board that meets as infrequently as the Village's separate Planning Board."

"It's relatively difficult for volunteers to make really, really well-informed decisions because the issues are pretty technical," Madison said. "[These issues are] being discussed by the Board of Trustees. And they're active in what's going on in the village, they have more context in dealing with what's going on in the village. So I think it fits better naturally that that be moved within the Board of Trustees."

Madison said he had not discussed the issue with the other members of the board. Efforts to reach the four other members of the Planning Board for comment were unavailing.

A public hearing on the topic is planned for Feb. 1. If passed, the local law enacting the change in code would take effect immediately.

Interested parties may attend remotely via Zoom videoconference on Feb. 1 at 6 p.m. Information on how to participate in the public hearing will be available on the village

website, www.plandomeheights-ny.gov, two hours before the meeting, according to the village's legal notice.

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