

**CITY OF BELFAST PLANNING BOARD MEETING
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11th, 2024 6:00 PM
COUNCIL CHAMBERS IN BELFAST CITY HALL**

**APPROVED MEETING MINUTES
ADOPTED (January 8, 2025), VOTE (4-0)**

The Belfast Planning Board met in person in the Council Chambers of Belfast City Hall to conduct the December 11th, 2024 Board meeting.

The meeting was streamed live on the city website (cityofbelfast.org), and it could be seen on BEL-TV.

The video recording of the meeting serves as the official record.

PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order & Roll Call. – 6:02 pm

Present: Geoff Gilchrist, Chair, Lewis Baker, Secretary, and David Bond, regular members.

Absent: Pippa Jollie and Gianne Conard, regular members, and Shannon Shimer and Biff Atlas, associate members.

2. Adoption of Agenda.

Moved by David Bond to approve the agenda as presented.

Seconded by Lewis Baker.

Voted to approve 3-0.

Director of Planning and Codes, Bub Fournier asked if the order of reviews this evening could be switched. There were no objections from the Board to switching the order of reviews.

Voted to approve agenda amendment 3-0.

3. Review of Meeting Minutes.

Moved by Lewis Baker to approve the November 13th, 2024 meeting minutes as written.

Seconded by David Bond.

Voted to approve 5-0.

4. Development Review – Site Plan Amendment #1 – Maine State Credit Union

15 Belmont Ave

Map 5, Lot 16-H

Jeff Allen, PE of AE Hodsdon Consulting Engineers, on behalf of Maine State Credit Union, is proposing to demolish the existing structure, formerly Bell the Cat, and then construct a completely new 2-story 6,200sf (3,100sf per floor) building. The Planning Board previously approved a renovation and site improvements to support a 560 sqft new office space, a drive-by

ATM and a drive-thru window in a space formerly occupied by a restaurant. This new proposal is an amendment to the previous approval. The Planning Board will review the Site Plan Amendment and Use permit application and determine the compliance with standards identified in the City Code of Ordinances, Chapter 90 Site Plan, Chapter 98 Technical Standards and Chapter 102 Zoning.

4.1 Staff review of site history.

Bub Fournier, Director of Planning and Codes, gave a brief explanation of the proposed project. Bub noted this evening we will be reviewing a Site Plan Amendment, as the Board may remember this project was recently reviewed for a change of use from Bell the Cat to the Maine State Credit Union. Bub noted that as the Applicant was going through their due diligence with the building regarding the proposed renovation, it appears they determined they would be better suited to start from scratch with a new building. Bub expressed that the building will be a slight change to their proposal, and they have described the ways in which the project will change in their application, however, the project did not warrant a full new site plan application – as the nature of the project remained the same. Bub noted Staff has provided the Board with draft findings and conditions, the Applicant has provided their application and supplemental information, and the Applicant is in attendance at this evening’s meeting.

4.2 Applicant presentation.

Jeff Allen of AE Hodsdon Consulting Engineers, on behalf of the Applicants, introduced himself and gave a brief presentation on the proposed project. Mr. Allen indicated in previous reviews, the original plan was just going to be an addition to the existing building, however, after pricing, it was most effective to demolish the building and build brand new with a facility that will specifically suit the Applicant’s needs. Mr. Allen noted a majority of the site and programing will largely remain the same, some notable changes would be the removal of the right turn only off Route 3 with the potential of creating pedestrian access in its place.

The Board asked the Applicant to clarify details on if any of the existing parking area would be removed, specifics of pedestrian access and type of maintenance concerns, existing sidewalk network on Route 3, current pedestrian access to site, and if there would be EV charging stations in the parking lot. The Board noted that the City is encouraging more sidewalks and more pedestrian and bicycle path connectivity as a part of a long-range plan for the City and that there have been recent improvements that enhance that type of connectivity along Route 3. The Applicant responded to Boards inquiries.

4.3 Public Hearing – 6:17 pm.

Notice of the public hearing was published in the Midcoast Villager and abutters letters were mailed. No written comments were received prior to the meeting and presented to Board, and no one spoke at the public hearing.

Public Hearing closed – 6:18 pm.

4.4 Planning Board review, discussion and possible action.

Bub Fournier, Director of Planning and Codes, began the review of the Findings of Fact. Bub noted he highlighted the high points and main areas of change to review but would be happy to review any other areas Board wished to review further. Bub read through the description of the project, as the project scope changed and expressed description of zoning remained the same. Bub noted the Site Plan criteria the main changes related to: highway and public road traffic data analysis, reduction in impervious surfaces thus no change to stormwater management, new exterior lighting proposed, landscaping requirements and buffer areas, and off street parking reduction. Bub noted with the Supplementary District Regulations for Route 3 the main changes were: indication that the design met the nonresidential design requirements, curb cut and site access modifications, intent to reduce lighting glare from headlights towards Fairgrounds Road. In summation, the main areas of discussion with the Board that resulted in finding modifications included clarification of landscaping intent within the parking area, creating opportunity for future EV charging stations, incorporating a pedestrian access where the former Route 3 curb cut existed (still exists today prior to start of work), and the importance of visibility and lighting in relation to the pedestrian access to the site.

The Board asked the Applicant to clarify details on: location of catch basins in parking lot in relation to stormwater management, existing site lighting, description of proposed new lighting for site, future projects of this nature and Intown Design Review involvement, possibility of EV charging station on site, maintenance of surround roads, ownership questions around cross-easement access to site within subdivision, importance of pedestrian access incongruent with recent pedestrian infrastructure improvements in nearby area, and lastly pedestrian access visibility on site. Applicant and Staff responded and engaged in Board discussion.

Bub Fournier, Director of Planning and Codes, began the review of the Conditions of Approval and noted aside from the description of the project, most of the Conditions have remained the same. Bub noted the additional conditions that were to be added by the Board which included: including a conduit run for future EV charging stations, the landscaping intention for the Applicant to provide a vegetated strip between the building and parking area and within two end cap islands within the parking area, and that the Applicant will work with the Code Enforcement Officer to provide pedestrian access off Route 3 into site and that the access is to be well lit. There was no further discussion and/or questions from the Board.

Moved by David Bond to approve the Findings of Fact as written and amended.

Seconded by Lewis Baker .

Voted to approve 3-0.

Moved by David Bond to approve the Conditions of Approval as written and amended.

Seconded by Lewis Baker.

Voted to approve 3-0.

Moved by David Bond approve the Site Plan Amendment #1 and Use Permit as presented with amendments as discussed.

Seconded by Lewis Baker.

Voted to approve 3-0.

**5. Development Review – Site Plan Amendment – Blue Sky Towers III, LLC
22 Wright Brothers Drive
Map 4, Lot 3**

Blue Sky Towers III, LLC, Applicant, is proposing a change of ownership of the development rights to construct a cell tower on the Belfast Municipal Airport property near the end of the abandoned runway. The proposal includes a previously approved project to construct a 150 ft. tall monopole cell tower, a 50ft x 50ft fenced-in area, an access drive off Litter River Drive, and various telecommunication equipment on the tower and the ground. The Board will review the proposal in regard to their previous approval, Chapter 90 Site Plan, and Chapter 102, Zoning, of the City Code of Ordinances.

5.1 Staff review of site history.

Bub Fournier, Director of Planning and Codes, gave a brief explanation of the proposed project. Bub noted this evening that the Site Plan amendment was recently reviewed the early summer. Bub noted the cell tower would be placed on airport property, thus tonight's review will be simply a review of change in applicant. Bub noted, the Board will specifically look at the financial and technical capability of the new owners and details regarding that have been provided within the Application material. Bub noted the Applicant is present at the meeting today to speak and within the packets draft findings, conditions of the specific amendments have been included as well as the previous approval for comparison.

5.2 Applicant presentation.

Gordon Smith, Attorney at Verrill Dana in Portland, representing Blue Sky Towers, introduced himself and gave a brief presentation on the proposed project. Mr. Smith noted that the entirety of the project details remains the same and the City has consented to lease the site to Blue Sky Towers, which has also been supported by Ken Ortmann, Airport Manager. Mr. Smith indicated that Verizon as a company has moved away from permitting and owning such entities and wanted Blue Sky Towners to own and operate and then Verizon will lease from Blue Sky. Mr. Smith elaborated on the technical and financial capacity of Blue Sky – the company has hundreds of towers across the county and specifically in Maine, was founded in 2019 but the company is led by those who have decades of experience in the cell tower industry. Mr. Smith noted with regards to financials there is material within the application that notes the generous line of credit and additional line of equity for the execution of the project.

The Board asked the Applicant to clarify details on the name of the company and location of corporation and if there was a cost estimate for the project provided. The Applicant responded to Boards inquiries.

5.3 Public Hearing – 6:58 pm.

Jeff Burgess, Belfast, spoke at the public hearing and expressed his concern about the cell tower. In summary his concerns revolved around, lack of being originally contacted, why the proposed location is necessary (i.e. to cover dead spots), the height of the proposed tower, understanding of how this benefits the city, and concerns of sight of tower and its blinking lights from property.

Notice of the public hearing was published in the Midcoast Villager and abutters letters to residents within 1000 feet were mailed. No written comments were received prior to the meeting, Mr. Burgess stopped into the Planning and Codes Office to discuss prior to the meeting, and one person spoke at the public hearing.

Bub Fournier, Director of Planning and Codes, spoke with regards to noticing requirements, specifics of the current review, and understanding of financial benefit to the airport operations and maintenance. The Board made a few comments about cell towers in general.

Public Hearing closed – 7:05 pm.

5.4 Planning Board review, discussion and possible action.

Bub Fournier, Director of Planning and Codes, began the review of the Findings of Fact and Conditions of Approval'. Bub noted he will just be speaking about the minor changes and that all other findings and conditions from the original approval remain in place. The main findings that were amended include: the name nomenclature for the new owner within the project description, the Planning and Codes staff procedures for noticing and review purposes, and within Chapter 90 Site Plan – Section 90-43(b) (10) Financial and Technical Capacity. Bub noted if there were another change in project ownership prior to the execution of the project, it would need to come back to the Planning Board to be further reviewed. Bub briefly spoke about the procedures required for the performance guarantee requirements.

The Board asked the Applicant to clarify details on the requirements of authorization to execute this project, status of lease agreement, general concern of locating cell towers at airports, and additional permits required. The Board and Staff engaged in further discussion.

Moved by David Bond to approve the Findings of Fact as written.

Seconded by Lewis Baker .

Voted to approve 3-0.

Moved by David Bond to approve the Conditions of Approval as written.

Seconded by Lewis Baker.

Voted to approve 3-0.

Moved by David Bond approve the Site Plan Amendment as presented.

Seconded by Lewis Baker.

Voted to approve 3-0.

6. Other Business

Bub Fournier, Director of Planning and Codes, noted the city is working through a specific grant application for a potential city improvement project, and the grant application requires a signed letter from the Planning Board; this requires a motion being made to approve having the Chairman of the Planning Board to sign on behalf of the Planning Board.

Moved by David Bond approve the Chairman signing the letter on the Planning Board's behalf.
Seconded by Lewis Baker.

7. Planning and Codes Department Report. – Bub Fournier, Director

Nordic Update: Bub noted that he emailed the Planning Board the Notice of Decision from the Zoning Board of Appeals regarding Planning Board Permits for Nordic. Bub expressed a big credit to the permitting etiquette of this Board and their thoroughness. Next appeal is regarding the CEO Decision and that will occur in January.

Updates from the Planning and Codes Office: Work in office is steady, things tend to quiet slightly during this time of year. Bub noted there are various larger projects underway and/or just getting started, notable projects include: 74 High Street – Brownfields Grant pending, permitting of 3rd house at the Litter River Subdivision, Heat Pump Installation at the Library through Efficiency Maine's program in support of municipal retrofits, Wight Street work is completed – seeding to be completed in Spring – ribbon cutting just held on site, and Open House for 115 Congress scheduled for Monday, November 16th at 10am.

Updates of various meetings within the City:

- Highland Estates and Seacoast Housing Communities intend to be sold to a developer in Florida, and there is an open learning session regarding this at the Belfast Free Library on December 20th. These communities represent a sizeable part of the housing structure in Belfast – approx. 90 dwellings/lots.
- Joint council meeting with the Harbor commission about cruise ships occurred – request to stop large cruise ships from coming to Belfast. Ordinances to support this to follow within Chapter 30 Marine.
- Recent presentation with the Pedestrian Transportation and Accessibility Committee regarding the Active Transportation and Accessibility Plan that has been in the works since summer – the presentation included a look at the draft recommendations for spot projects within the City and existing city features that could be further enhanced.

Bub noted the upcoming meeting dates: (2nd and 4th Wednesday of the Month)

January 8th, 2025

January 22nd, 2025

Bub engaged in discussion with Board regarding Ned's recent video about the Wight Street project and Cable TV provider updates to fiber (fee schedule and network).

8. Adjournment. – 7:29 pm