



## **BASS RIVER TOWNSHIP**

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### **PLANNING / ZONING BOARD MEETING MINUTES - DECEMBER 18, 2024**

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December 18, 2024 minutes taken by Laura Moyer - dictated but not read.

Notes from PB Meeting Dec 18, 2024

Chair Cindy Ruffo: Call to Order at 7:01pm followed by Flag Salute and reading of Sunshine Law

Roll Call/Present:

Rick Adams

Jane Allen

Cindy Ruffo

Abigail Spagnola

Robert Neuweiler

Richard Steele

Mary DeLois

Stacy Turlish

John Ewert

Carrie Crowley

Roll Call/Absent:

Winfield Allen, Jr

Planning Board Attorney: Justin Strausser for Christopher Norman

Planning Board Engineer: Frank Little present

Planning Board Secretary: Natalie Lewis

Approval of Minutes for Nov 20, 2024

Motion: Jane Allen

Second: Mary DeLois

Abstain: Robert Neuweiler, Stacy Turlish, Abigail Spagnola

All others Approved; None Opposed; Motion Carried

Chair Ruffo opened discussion on Cannabis Regulatory matters by reminding all present that the Planning & Zoning Board will abide by all Pinelands Commission and Bass River Township Commission Ordinances. She asked members to review the draft of Classes that were emailed late this afternoon from Mr. Norman. These are updated from the ordinances that had been emailed earlier.

Mr. Neuweiler: At the time the NJ Governor approved cannabis for recreational use, the township did not have a lot of taxable businesses, so our commissioners were open to see how cannabis might fit into our community, which is generally opposed to development. Our intention is to keep this a rural, bucolic area, where people value their privacy. We determined it would be a wise investment to allow agricultural aspects of cannabis. There would be a fixed number of growing permits, and possible dispensaries would be discussed in the future.

Mrs. Ruffo: All those initial discussions took place prior to any State Ordinances or regulations, and the Pinelands Commission advised us to hold off until those were in place, so that we will be in compliance when we create all our local ordinances. That is what we are addressing right now. We are here to discuss and develop our ordinances based on current regulations, all of which are subject to Pinelands Commission review and approval, before we can finalize any ordinances.

Some discussion about agricultural growing and transporting versus manufacturing and processing. Evan Manaresi of 49 Ishmael Road and Joe Mauro of 18 Old New York Road were invited to participate in the Board discussion since they are experienced in cannabis licensing and regulations.

Mr. Strausser: Manufacturing and processing are Industrial land uses, not agricultural. Transporting agricultural product is a normal part of agriculture.

Mr. Adams: We need to determine which zone the two existing cannabis properties are in.

Mr. Manaresi: My property on Ishmael Road is Forest Zone and not under Pinelands oversight.

Mr. Mauro: I'm not sure what my zone is, but the township approved my location as agricultural.

Mr. Neuweiler: We have a Zoning Map, but we will need block and lot to specify which zone each one is in.

Mr. Little: I advise you to take time to review the information that Mr. Norman provided and other existing regulations as you make your decisions. Put together a Draft Ordinance, and I will send it to the Pinelands Commission BEFORE the first public reading. You don't need to put in every road. Trim it down to one or two zones.

**A motion was made** by Mr. Neuweiler to Open the Meeting to the Public. It was seconded by Mr. Ewert. All were in favor, none opposed, and the motion was carried.

Mr. Manaresi: I appreciate our town's culture, and that is a reason I want to contribute value with my business. I was the first person in 2020 asking the council about cannabis licensing and growing. I have been through the process, and I will be happy to help with any questions people might have about it.

William Van Orden of 5881 Route 9: Where exactly will the dispensary be?

Mrs. Ruffo: We don't know. That is what this discussion is the start of.

Bonnie Adams of Lovelands Lane: This is very important to our town. Cannabis growing and manufacturing is also at Tabernacle. At the last Bass River Township Commissioners meeting, we accepted an application from "NJ Pure." Where will that district be?

Lekha Tull of NJ Pure: I did not apply for a license to SELL, only for a Class 1 & 2 license.

Mr. Adams: When the Resolution at the Commissioners Meeting was passed, it seemed like everything was in order. Prior to me as Mayor, I was under the impression that only two licenses are permitted in Bass River.

Mr. Neuweiler: When cannabis first started, the State lagged on further instructions. There is more information available now. The public will have their say in straight forward Land Use discussions and resolutions that we are developing now. We don't know if the State allows for more than 2 licenses. That is something we will be looking into.

Mr. Manaresi: The Township Resolution that was previously passed allowed for all cannabis licenses except for retail. A more recent Resolution passed that allows up to 1 retail. Township Zoning Ordinances allow for agriculture in ALL Zones. There is no limit on cultivation sites and no limit on number of agriculture sites. Bass River has to issue a Letter of Support that its ordinances will likely approve the business before applicants can pursue NJ State licenses and Pinelands Commission approvals. Applicants must have license and approvals from the State and Pinelands before they can begin any cannabis production.

Mr. Adams: Bass River Attorney, Chris Norman, said that technically, the two current cannabis businesses should not be growing right now.

Mr. Manaresi: I have been working on this for three years. We already submitted license applications, and you recently said we need to pay licensing fees set by township ordinance.

Mr. Strausser: There needs to be a State Zone designation for cannabis.

Mr. Neuweiler: WE said it's agricultural and gave them approval. That gives them the right to continue.

Mr. Manaresi: We may be under a "different" level of scrutiny, but I strongly believe you should not shut down an agricultural business that will benefit this town and the people in it.

Mr. Adams: We have to do the work of getting our ordinances set up that will give us clear regulations and fees, and that's what we're here to do in this discussion.

Mr. Strausser: The State requires getting approval from owners of neighboring properties.

Mr. Mauro: We got approval from our surrounding neighbors.

Ashley Cramer of 5 Adams Ave: Currently there is no number restriction on how many or where?

Mr. Adams: Correct.

Ms. Cramer: And there is 1 Retail allowed, but it doesn't say where?

Mr. Little: Usually, that would be in a Retail Zone.

Mr. Neuweiler: We are working on determining a spot for that retail now.

Mr. Adams: We have to be fair to the residents, if they don't want it next to them, we will probably deny it.

Mr. Manaresi: Four years I have been working on this business, going through all the proper regulatory procedures. I have had no income from this business in 4 years. It WILL BE a prosperous business, and we will be paying 2% of our sales off the top to the town. The licensing fee you are going to charge us should be based on the amount of sales, but there's not any structure to the licensing fee you are proposing right now. This is the only business in the country right now that has the potential to make significant new monetary contributions to the communities it is in.

Mrs. Adams: Four years ago, there weren't any guidelines in place. Today cannabis is more popular, and I have seen with people I know, that it is a benefit to many people. We just need to discuss what works for our town.

Mrs. Allen: We are here to discuss where to grow it, and where to have a retail business. Are we going to form a committee, or continue to discuss it at these meetings?

General discussion about what to do, with consensus that a Zoning Map that shows blocks and lots is the most necessary tool to have available for future discussions. There is a Zoning Map from 2023's Master Plan Review & Report that our Tax Assessor updated with new block and lot designations. It is currently in a review process with the State of New Jersey. There is no estimate of when the map will be approved, and it is not currently available to be viewed by township officials or the public.

Mr. Little: We need to ZONE it so we can put an Ordinance in place.

Mrs. Ruffo: The existing two businesses would be grandfathered in, because they were approved in the beginning. Going forward, we should have it in writing to not allow any further cannabis businesses until we have ordinances in place.

Mr. Manaresi: I want to clarify that all NJ Pure got was a Letter of Support, that the town will allow if it meets ordinances, not an approval for a license.

Mr. Little: I issue Zoning Permits only if an ordinance allows it.

Mr. Van Orden: If I don't want it next to my house, that's a NO. It's wrong. This is a Zoning meeting, we're a small town, it's not right to have it growing out in a Residential Zone.

Mrs. Ruffo: It's not in an open field, it is inside a secured building.

Catherine Porter of 134 North Maple: I'm not against the business, but is this new person, NJ Pure, going to be grandfathered in?

Mrs. Ruffo: No. Only the previous two. We'll determine the zones before we approve any more.

Jack McKernan of 31 East Greenbush: These two that are already approved had to ask their neighbors, and got approved.

Mrs. Turlish: What about trucks going in and out? Are there ordinances about transportation?

Mr. Manaresi: We are agriculture, we do wholesale distribution. Transportation of agricultural produce of any kind is allowed.

Mr. Van Orden: How far out does the neighbor circle go?

Mr. Manaresi and Mr. Mauro don't remember from 3 years ago, and the engineer, attorney and members of the board do not know. They will find out for future reference.

Mr. Neuweiler: If any of those neighbors within the limits don't want it, it would come before the Planning Board, and we may not approve it.

Ms. Cramer: Mr. Mayor, you told me to come to this meeting to ask about the paving of Adams Avenue.

Mr. Adams: Yes, and I have an answer for you. It will go out for bid and paving will begin in July or August of 2025.

Mr. Little: We are talking to DOT (Department of Transportation), because they are funding the project. We are applying for grants and mapping it out. We may need to move poles to get to the 12'-16' width that will be required. We will be going door to door to talk with each of the residents as we get closer.

Robert Mathis of 201 Country Lane, Port Republic: The township has vacant land for sale by bid on the website. Block 120 Lot 8 was foreclosed on in 2011 by Bass River. Burlington County records say there is no clear deed. How can I get a clear deed if I bid on this property? When does the bidding process end?

Mrs. Ruffo: This is not a Planning Board matter. This would be best brought before the Commissioners Meeting, where the Township Solicitor will be present to answer those questions.

**A motion was made** by Mrs. Allen to Close the Meeting to the Public. It was seconded by Mr. Adams. All were in favor, none opposed, and the motion was carried.

**A motion was made** by Mr. Adams to Adjourn the Meeting. It was seconded by Mr. Neuweiler. All were in favor, none opposed, and the motion was carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm.

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