



Wenham Town Department Profiles: Planning

Department Head: Margaret R. Hoffman, AICP
Number of employees (FTE): 1.0
General functions: Planning, Conservation and Zoning (Land Use)
Phone Numbers: 978-468-5520 ext. 8
Annual budget: \$62,235.00 (Salary and Expenses)

Who are you (past work experience, years of municipal service, time in Wenham, etc) and what is your department (mission)?

I started working for Wenham in July of this year. I began my career in Municipal Planning over 12 years ago as an Assistant to the Planner in Hanover, Massachusetts. I worked in Hanover for over 10 years in a variety of planning capacities and obtained my AICP Certification. I then served as Principal Planner in the City of Quincy for the past few years. I recently moved to the North Shore with my family and feel very fortunate to be working for the Town of Wenham.

Our department mission is to help facilitate the work of the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Conservation Commission. We help the Boards administer the local Zoning Bylaws, the Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land, and the Wetlands Protection Bylaw. We also ensure adherence to Massachusetts General Laws. Our goal is to help the residents and potential developers navigate through the permitting processes, including scheduling public hearings before the different Boards and Committees. Our Department is also responsible for updating our GIS Maps and working with CAI Axis on the Town mapping system.

What are some of the most common tasks you assist the public with daily?

The majority of our work is to help the public maneuver through the permitting process with each of the land use Boards. We answer questions from residents and the public regarding things like subdividing their land, adding accessory dwellings or structures, what work can be done within proximity to wetlands and questions about the Zoning Bylaws for the Town. We also work closely with developers as they move through the process of trying to get approvals for larger developments in Town. We often get requests for public records that we have stored in our office. We also schedule and facilitate many public meetings. Much of our time is spent preparing for these meetings and making sure that the Boards and Commission have all of the relevant information in order to make their decisions.

What are some of the more rewarding elements of the work your department carries out?

Helping residents navigate their way to a successful project is a very rewarding part of the work in a small town like Wenham. It's always great when someone tells us that we've been helpful, but just getting to know the people of the community is the best part of the job. In Wenham, you have a very active group of citizens that serve on Boards and

Committees. These people often put the needs of their community ahead of their own needs and I find that commendable. Being able to help them do their job is one of the best parts of the work I do here.

What are some common challenges?

Helping the people of the Town manage expectations with what is reasonable for the community as a whole can always be challenging. The Town is working hard to maintain its rural character but still faces the challenges of a tight housing market and affordability issues. There are also many constraints regarding the location of wetland resource areas here in Wenham. Making sure that people understand the constraints that the Boards are under can be challenging. Adherence to the laws that the community as a whole has created can often seem like a burden but most applicants understand that there are limits to what can be allowed.

In what ways do you work with other town departments daily?

I work with most of the departments in Town on a regular basis. The Town Clerk helps schedule meetings and posts the notices for public hearings as well as helps me to find information about projects that have been developed in the past. I also work with the Water Dept., DPW, Fire and Police when we have projects that need to be reviewed before they can be issued Special Permits or approval from the Boards. I also work with the Permitting Department and the Building Inspector as the local Zoning Officer. His information regarding the interpretation of the local Zoning Bylaws is invaluable as I try to help residents and developers work their way through the permitting process. Most of the department heads are in very regular contact with one another. It facilitates a high level of communication and results in better service to Town residents.

What are your goals for the department over the next year?

I am working with Town Counsel and the Planning Board to update the Rules and Regulations Governing the Subdivision of Land and with the Town Administrator and Town Clerk to recodify all of the Town's Bylaws for consistency. An Open Space and Recreation Committee has just been appointed and I will help to get that committee organized so that they can begin working on an updated Open Space and Recreation Plan. I will also be supporting the work of the newly formed Economic Development Committee.

The Wenham Pines project was submitted recently to the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission. Located on the Flynn golf course property, this is a fairly significant development for Wenham and I hope to facilitate a fair, thorough, and expedient permitting process.

What's the best way for the public to give you feedback and to get the assistance they need from you?

They can call me at the office anytime during office hours or by email. I'm most often at my desk or possibly out on a site visit but will return calls as soon as possible. If there is a large project that someone wants to discuss, they can schedule a time to come in and sit with me, and other Town departments if necessary, prior to submitting formal applications to any of the Boards that I support. As a relatively new addition to Town Hall, I welcome feedback of any kind so that I can get your perspective on what's important to the community.