



Wenham Town Department Profiles: Planning / Permitting

Website: Planning Board
http://www.wenhamma.gov/boards_and_committees/planning_board.php
Zoning Board of Appeals
http://www.wenhamma.gov/boards_and_committees/zoning_board_of_appeals.php
Conservation Commission
http://www.wenhamma.gov/boards_and_committees/conservation_commission.php
Permitting/Inspectional Services
http://www.wenhamma.gov/departments/building_department.php

Department Head: Emilie Cademartori (Planning/Land Use)
Number of employees (FTE): 3.0
General functions: Land use, planning, inspectional services and permitting
Important numbers to call to reach them: 978 468 5520 ext. 4 (Permitting) & ext. 8 (Land Use)
Annual budget: \$113,996 (Land Use & Planning and Permitting & Inspectional Services)

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

I have worked in Wenham for 8 years. I started working part-time for the Conservation Commission. I now also staff the Planning and Zoning Boards. Previously, I worked at the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, serving the nine communities in the Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program. I also served as Environmental Planner for 3 years in Brookhaven, New York.

Our department mission is twofold. We handle all land use approvals, including conservation, special permits, subdivisions, site plan review, and variance requests. Our priority is to preserve the character of the Town - the built and natural environment – consistent with Massachusetts General Law, Town Bylaws, and Town Zoning Bylaws. Additionally, the Permitting Office processes all Building, Electrical, and Plumbing permits and performs all inspections in a timely manner to ensure compliance with Massachusetts State Building Code and Town Zoning Bylaws.

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

Land use permitting can be overwhelming to property owners. Depending on the nature of the project, there can be numerous requirements to meet in order to attain the necessary approvals. We help everyone from homeowners, real estate professionals, attorneys and developers to understand what steps they need to take to have their project approved. We also answer general questions about allowable uses, zoning compliance, and existing environmental conditions and constraints, especially with regard to wetland resource areas.

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

It is always great when someone simply tells us that we were helpful or that their experience in Wenham Town Hall was better than in other area communities. It is satisfying to see a project all the way through the process, from the initial concept to completed construction.

What are some common challenges?

On larger projects, it can be challenging to balance the applicant's goals with potential impacts on neighbors, the environment, and Town services. We strive to bring all applicable Town boards and departments together to permit the best project possible. Unfortunately, there are times when, in spite of everyone's best efforts, a party may still not be satisfied with the outcome. It is important for residents to understand that, in some instances, the rights of the property owner / applicant ensure that their project is permissible, even if there are some elements of the project that may not be ideal.

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

I work with the Town Clerk, the Assessor, the Town Administrator, the Fire Chief, the DPW Director and the Water Superintendent on a daily basis. The nature of our interactions depends on what projects I am working on. It might be a question about the location of a water service so I can help a resident identify where to build their new addition or determine where the hydrants should be located in a new development.

Many land use permit processes legally start and end at the Town Clerk's office, and all of my board's meeting agendas are posted through the Clerk as well. I think Wenham is unique in that 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 look forward to adding a full-time Permitting Coordinator to our staff. There are so many aspects to this important position; my hope is that the new employee is up to speed by the end of the calendar year. We will also be upgrading our permit tracking software as part of our continuing efforts to better organize our records. We are in the final steps of updating the written regulations for each of the land use boards which will provide clarity for both applicants and board members alike.

The Town will be seeking state grant funding in order to update our Open Space and Recreation Plan. A current plan is important for long range strategic planning and can be critical to funding open space protection efforts and recreation improvements.

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

When in doubt, just ask! Do not hesitate to ask for help as we have a lot of information available and are here to provide it to the public. Most inquiries can be handled right away, either in person or on the phone. However, if you have a complex project or need more detailed information, it is helpful to call ahead and make an appointment. This is especially true when multiple departments need to be consulted.