



Hello, I'm Peter Reszka, chairman of the Town of Hamburg planning board. On behalf of our board, I'd like to offer the following information about who we are and what we do. Our mission is to help ensure our Hamburg community, "the Town that Friendship Built," remains a great place to live and work. We are committed to ensuring the land-use planning process in our town furthers this mission by improving our community.

It is a privilege to serve you, and we welcome your input and ideas about any projects before us. The following frequently asked questions (FAQs) should answer the most common questions about our board. If not, please feel free to contact me, or any member of the town Planning Department, directly at 649-2023.

Peter

Some FAQs about the Hamburg Planning Board

Q: What does the planning board do?

A: The Town of Hamburg planning board is responsible for decisions on land-use planning in our town—specifically, subdivision plat approval, site plan review, advice toward revision of the Comprehensive Plan, and the granting of special-use permits. The board is an "approval" board, meaning its decisions are independent of those of the Hamburg town board. The board meets twice each month, at 7:00 PM, in Room 7B of Hamburg Town Hall.

Q: Who is on it, and who appoints them?

A: The planning board consists of up to seven members, each a resident of the Town of Hamburg and appointed by the town board to serve for a term of seven years. At meetings, the board is supported by the planning department secretary, a planning consultant, an attorney, a town engineer, and a liaison member of the town board.

Q: How do I find out what projects are being considered by the planning board and what the board has discussed and taken action on at past meetings?

A: Both the agendas for upcoming meetings and the approved minutes of past planning board meetings are posted by date on the town's Web site at http://www.townofhamburgny.com/Agendas_and_Minutes.html. If you do not use the internet, all planning board public hearings are announced in the legal notices of the town's two publications of record: *The Hamburg Sun* and the *Lackawanna Front Page*. Also, these newspapers often publish our meeting agendas and provide coverage of planning board meetings. You may also visit the Planning Department office, in the basement of town hall, to obtain a copy of an agenda or minutes.

Q: I have a piece of residential property in Hamburg that I'd like to build on. Do I need planning board approval?

A: Maybe. Generally, if your land is zoned as a residential building lot and your single-family or duplex project meets all applicable codes, you probably will not need any planning board input. However, if your project involves splitting off (or "subdivision") of part of your property, you will need to apply for subdivision approval from the planning board. And almost all multi-family or business development projects will require planning board approval. But at a minimum, you will always need a building permit. So if you are contemplating building or remodeling, your first step should always be to visit the town Building Inspection and Planning Departments, which are located together in the basement of town hall, to discuss your plans. The staffs of these departments can give you a full explanation of any approvals your project might need and help you pursue them as cost effectively and quickly as possible.

Q: Why is the town building a shopping center or housing development near my home?

A: It's not. The town does not solicit development projects. Almost all projects within the town are proposed and built by landowners or private developers, not the town. These projects must meet all applicable federal, state, and local ordinances, codes, and regulations in order to be approved—which is what the planning board helps ensure.

Q: But why is the planning board allowing that shopping center or housing development to be built near my home? I don't want any more development in my neighborhood.

A: Development is always solely the decision of the landowner and no one else. Every property owner has the right to develop his or her property as he or she sees fit—subject to the law. The planning board is tasked with helping ensure that all projects it reviews meet all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations regarding development in Hamburg. The planning board does not "allow" or "disallow" projects; rather, it helps ensure that the laws and regulations governing development in Hamburg are met to best serve Hamburg and its residents.

The town's zoning code specifies exactly what kinds of land uses are permitted on any given parcel, and the town's Comprehensive Plan provides guidance for how our town should zone property.

Q: I have questions or concerns about a development project being proposed in the town. May I attend planning board meetings to learn more and ask questions or offer comments?

A: Absolutely. The planning board encourages anyone interested in learning about a project to attend any of its meetings. The earlier you are involved, the easier it is to ensure your input is integrated into the planning process.

Q: Are all planning board meetings open to the public?

A: Yes. The planning board meets and conducts all its business only in fully open meetings. If you cannot attend a meeting, detailed minutes of all discussion and decisions made at every planning board meeting are published. The public is always welcome to attend both our work session meetings (on the first Wednesday of each month) and our regular meetings (on the third Wednesday of each month).

Q: I'd like to comment on a proposal before the planning board. How can I do so?

A: Public comments—either written or verbal—are always welcomed by the planning board. Written comments should be addressed to the board and submitted directly to the Planning Department, where they will be copied and distributed to the entire board. And while verbal comments are invited at our monthly regular meeting, public comment is normally restricted at our work sessions, unless a scheduled public hearing is being held. But anytime you choose to speak about a project before us, we ask only that you provide your full name for the record, limit your comments to approximately two minutes, and focus just on the specific project at hand.

Q: May I contact planning board members personally regarding questions or concerns I have on a specific project?

A: No. To ensure fairness and complete transparency to all involved, planning board members only discuss details of any project in public, during their bimonthly meetings. Again, you are always welcome to attend these meetings and share any comments you might have with the board publicly at our regular meeting each month.

Q: Is the planning board part of the ZBA?

A: No. The town zoning board of appeals, or ZBA, is an entirely separate entity from the planning board, although the planning board often works on projects involving review and approval by both the planning board and the ZBA.

Q: What's the Comprehensive Plan?

A: The *Town of Hamburg 2007 Comprehensive Plan Update* is the primary resource document that guides the Hamburg town board in determining whether a parcel of land is zoned correctly. The plan is reviewed and updated about every five years to make sure it accurately reflects the needs of the town for planned, effective development that will enhance, protect, and preserve our community.

Q: What do all those acronyms and abbreviations stand for, like SEQRA, EAF, EIS, SPDES, and negative dec?

A: Sorry, but we often use acronyms and shorthand when discussing projects, not realizing that others might not know what they mean. If you are ever unclear on terminology used at a planning board meeting, simply raise your hand, and the chairman will define a term or clarify an issue for you. For the record, SEQRA (pronounced "seeker") means New York State Environmental Quality Review Act; EAF means Environmental Assessment Form; EIS means Environmental Impact Statement; SPDES (pronounced "speedies") means New York State Pollutant Discharge Elimination System; and a "negative dec" is short for a "negative declaration," meaning an action is free of any significant environmental impacts.

Some Recommended Reading

For additional information about the planning process in Hamburg, we recommend the following:

Subdivision of Land, Chapter 230 from the Code of the Town of Hamburg (General Code Publishing Corp.)

The Town of Hamburg 2007 Comprehensive Plan Update (by Wendel Duscherer Architects & Engineers, Amherst, New York, October 2007)

The Short Course: A Basic Guide to Planning Boards and Zoning Boards of Appeals in New York State (by Harry J. Willis, David Church, and James Hotaling, New York Planning Federation, Eighth Printing, 2009)

All You Ever Wanted to Know about Zoning... (by James A. Coon and Sheldon W. Damsky, Esq., New York Planning Federation, Fourth Edition, 2004)

Each of these documents should be available or obtainable through inter-library loan at your local library.



This publication has been provided as a public courtesy by the
Town of Hamburg Planning Board, 6100 South Park Avenue, Hamburg, New York 14075.
For additional information about the planning board or land-use planning issues within the town,
you may contact the town Planning Department directly at 716-649-2023.