



STAFF REPORT

Order: 2025-15

Proposed by: Town Manager Brian Howard

Introduced by: Town Council President Christos Alexopoulos

Date referred: April 14, 2025

PETITION

To amend the Randolph Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 200 of the General Code of the Town of Randolph, concerning scientific or research laboratories, pursuant to M.G.L. ch. 40A, Section 5.

BACKGROUND

The Town of Randolph is moving forward with efforts to become a Massachusetts Green Community, as have 298 other cities and towns to date. Becoming a Green Community will help the Town become more energy efficient, reduce dependency upon fossil fuels, improve indoor air quality, and save on energy bills, among other benefits. Significantly, Randolph will immediately receive a grant of approximately \$230,000 based upon the State's formula towards implementation of the Town's energy efficiency goals. The Town will also become eligible to receive additional competitive energy efficiency and other grant funds. Some communities have successfully competed for \$1+ million in grant funds over time.

The State has established five criteria to becoming a Green Community. These include:

1. Adopt as-of-right siting for clean energy generation, research and design, or manufacturing;
2. Adopt expedited permitting process for the clean energy uses;
3. Create an Energy Reduction Plan to reduce energy use by 20% in 5 years;
4. Adopt Fuel Efficient Vehicle Purchase Policy; and,
5. Adopt the State's Energy Stretch Code.

The proposed ordinance under consideration by the Planning Board addresses Criterion #1 and #2 above.

Criterion #1

The proposed ordinance will add two new definitions to the zoning ordinance – "Renewable or Alternative Energy" and "Scientific or Research Laboratory". At present, the zoning ordinance references Scientific or Research Laboratory in the use table and elsewhere, but does not provide a definition.

The table of uses is proposed to be amended to distinguish between Scientific or Research Laboratories that are less than 25,000 sf in size and those that are 25,000 sf in size or greater. Per the Green Community requirements, Randolph must show “that a combination of available land for new construction and existing available vacant space in existing buildings can accommodate a facility or facilities of 50,000 square feet or larger in the aggregate” by-right.

To comply with the State requirements, but to also appropriately site a use of this size, it is proposed that the Scientific or Research Laboratory greater than 25,000 sf be allowed by right in the Industrial (ID), Blue Hill River Highway District (BRHD), Great Bear Swamp Highway District (GBHD), and Great Pond Commercial Overlay District (GPCCOD) zoning districts. All of these districts are intended for large scale commercial and industrial uses. Laboratories that are smaller than 25,000 sf would also be allowed by right in these districts. Site plan approval will still be required within these districts.

In addition to the by-right districts, smaller scale Scientific or Research Laboratories would be allowed with a special permit reviewed by the Planning Board in the Crawford Square Business District (CSBD), North Randolph Business District (NRBD), West Corners Business District (WCBD), and Business District (BD). The special permit requirement will allow the Planning Board to provide greater oversight to proposals in these areas.

Criterion #2

Under Criterion #2, the State requires that any application for a Scientific or Research Laboratory for clean energy research and design be acted upon within one calendar year of submission of a complete application. Language has been proposed to establish the one-year timeline in the zoning section that currently relates to expedited permitting for priority development sites. A new subsection C will be added for these clean energy uses.

STAFF DISCUSSION

Becoming a Green Community will provide multiple benefits to the Town of Randolph including access to significant grant funds that can improve town and school buildings. The proposed revisions to the Zoning Ordinance are narrowly written to comply with the State requirements. The Massachusetts Department of Energy (DOE) has reviewed the draft ordinance and provided verbal confirmation that the proposal is consistent with their requirements.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that the ordinance be adopted.