

Energy Sustainability:

Supplemental Chapter to Town of Essex Plan of Conservation and Development (2005)

Overview

“Sustainability” as a concept is the logical progression of the conventional idea of “stewardship,” or the careful, long-term management of the community’s land and resources. It provides for a careful balance of conservation while allowing for healthy economic development and growth. Activities can be described as sustainable if they can be maintained over time without depleting the natural resource base. Overall, a successful approach to sustainability provides a high quality of life for all residents in a way that maintains and enhances the ecological process upon which that life depends.

For the Town of Essex to successfully move into the future and ensure a continued quality of life and character, a continual re-examination of behaviors and policies relating to conservation and development should be undertaken. This examination should include an assessment of ways to develop cleaner energy sources, reduce current levels of consumption and waste generation, and implement development practices that are friendlier to the natural environment.

In 2008, the Essex Board of Selectmen, acting with the support of the Essex Citizens for Clean Energy, approved a resolution to join the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) and its program “Local Governments for Sustainability.” The overall objective of this program is to reduce municipal, business, and residential greenhouse gas and air pollution emissions throughout the community while simultaneously reducing our dependence on the burning of fossil fuels to produce energy.

Following up on this initiative, in 2009, the Planning Commission created an ad-hoc “Energy Sustainability Subcommittee” to make recommendations for municipal improvements that could be incorporated into the Essex Plan of Conservation and Development.

Implementation

- 1.** Continue support of ICLEI goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 10% below 1990 levels by 2020 and to 80% below 2001 levels by 2050.
- 2.** Pursue additional funding opportunities and set municipal funds aside to support home- and business-owner implementation of energy efficient technologies and building upgrades.
- 3.** Require municipal building projects to exceed energy efficiency standards of the State Building Code and to meet guidelines of LEED certification.
- 4.** Encourage Planning and Zoning Commissions to incorporate energy efficiency and other sustainable practices into Zoning and Subdivision Regulations.
- 5.** Pursue funding and set aside municipal funds to incorporate sustainable energy upgrades such as geothermal heating/cooling, photovoltaic solar panels, wind turbines and/or fuel cell technology into municipal facility construction or improvement where feasible.
- 6.** Explore methods of promoting innovative wastewater recovery, use of heat exchangers to waste heat, and the recycling of graywater for non-potable purposes.

7. Consider the acquisition or conversion of municipal vehicles to alternative fuel sources such as liquid natural gas, hybrid engine technologies or biodiesel.
8. Modify Zoning and Subdivision Regulations to promote more compact, efficient development and the orderly flow of transportation as well as enabling pedestrian and nonmotorized transportation options.
9. Work with regional groups to promote expanded public transportation, including passenger rail and the use of multi-modal facilities.

Ivoryton Center Revitalization:

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Overview

As one of the three historic villages of Essex, Ivoryton has a rich industrial and cultural heritage, and holds unique community and architectural character. Since the closing of the Pratt, Read & Co. piano factory in the 1950's, Ivoryton has undergone a slow decline in economic vitality. Seeking to recapture and enhance the vibrant village center that is home to the historic Ivoryton Playhouse, the Planning Commission established an ad-hoc subcommittee in 2008 to study the area and make recommendations. A full report was developed and submitted to the Planning Commission in July, 2009. Analysis of Ivoryton Center focused on three key areas:

- A. Economic Revitalization** – The study found that the variety of uses in Ivoryton Center was both healthy and desirable, including residential, retail, office/commercial, arts, food/beverage, and public uses including park, post office and library facilities. A continued strengthening of this mix, with the addition of more retail/residential combinations and the redevelopment of several parcels would greatly benefit the area. Implementing Zoning Regulations and other municipal policies to help encourage and enable this appropriate development and redevelopment should be a top priority.
- B. Sewage Disposal** – The lack of sewer lines or the availability of a proximate area for a large-scale community wastewater disposal facility is the most significant structural barrier to redevelopment of Ivoryton. Most properties in Ivoryton either do not meet current health codes for wastewater disposal or just barely comply, with no opportunity to expand or intensify use. A full redevelopment of Ivoryton Center, including the Pratt, Read & Co. Piano Factory, could mean wastewater flows 3-5 times current levels, which is not possible with current system availability. A Town-led process to link properties together in a standard or alternative community wastewater system is needed to help move Ivoryton forward.
- C. Parking Availability** – As a traditional village center that developed both before the advent of the automobile and the advent of zoning regulation, it is not surprising that most commercial, retail, and multifamily properties in Ivoryton do not have enough parking to meet Zoning requirements. More troubling, most of these properties do not have enough parking to meet current peak demand, let alone the potential parking demand for a fully-redeveloped Ivoryton. Better managed on-street parking, the relaxing of zoning requirements and allowance of shared parking areas will help in the short term. In addition, the creation or location of several smaller parking areas can be cobbled together to assist current and growing demand. The establishment of a permanent public parking area will assist in the long-term with the redevelopment of Ivoryton Center.

Implementation

- 1. Adopt Ivoryton Center Zone regulations to encourage a mixed-use center, relax setbacks and parking requirements, and encourage compatible development and re-development (Responsible body: Zoning Commission)
- 2. Undertake a landscape improvement and street-tree planting program to develop a “complete” streetscape along Main Street (Responsible body: Tree Warden and ZEO)

3. Explore a public-private partnership to redevelop the vacant property adjacent to the existing service station, including the creation of a office/retail building fronting Main Street and a public parking facility to the rear. This exploration would include any necessary environmental testing and analysis of development feasibility. (Responsible body: Board of Selectmen and Planning Commission)
4. Explore and pursue community wastewater disposal that will allow properties in Ivoryton Center to tie in and fully develop properties. Study can be partially funded by leveraging an existing \$17,000 in DEP funds with a minimum \$13,000 municipal match. Explore potential public-private partnership with Pratt, Read & Co. facility and other potential larger users of wastewater system. (Responsible body: Board of Selectmen, WPCA, Planning Commission)
5. Develop a permanently-available municipal parking area either to the rear of the lot adjacent the service station or on a portion of the Moeller Instrument Company property to allow for “park once and walk” access to the Ivoryton Playhouse and most other retail/office/food facilities in the Village center. (Responsible body: Board of Selectmen and Planning Commission)
6. Investigate other shared parking options with Ivoryton Village Restaurant, Ivoryton Fire Company, Ivoryton Inn, Burdick property, and Pratt, Read & Co. piano factory property. (Responsible body: Board of Selectmen and Planning Commission)
7. Promote Ivoryton Center as retail and tourist destination. (Responsible body: Economic Development Commission)