



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, October 13, 2016

7:30 p.m.

Essex Town Hall – Meeting Room A

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Seating of Members

Chairman Alan Kerr called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. In attendance were Members Tom Danyliw and George Sexton. Seated for Member Ralph Monaco was Alternate Jane Siris. Seated for Member John Bairos was Alternate Erin Bogan. Also in attendance was Planner John Guszkowski

2. Approval of Minutes: September 8, 2016 Regular Meeting and September 14, 2016 Special Inter-Board Meeting

Motion to approve minutes of September 8, 2016 by Tom Danyliw, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion to approve minutes of September 14, 2016 by Erin Bogan, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried, three in favor, none opposed and two abstentions (Bogan/Danyliw).

3. New Business

a. Affordable Housing Discussion with Lauren Ashe, Executive Director, HOPE Partnership

John Guszkowski introduced Lauren Ashe and HOPE Board Member Tom Ortoleva and discussed briefly the interest of the Commission in being more active in creating awareness and potential for additional housing opportunity in Essex. Lauren Ashe provided a historic background of the HOPE Partnership and its development of Ferry Crossing in Old Saybrook. She reviewed the definition of affordable housing and the demographic realities of the local residents and citizens that have need of these options. She discussed the ALICE program – raising awareness of “Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed” residents and discussed an upcoming program on November 3 at the Connecticut River Museum.

Tom Ortoleva discussed and debunked four major myths about affordable housing, including: 1) Affordable housing does not have to be ugly or unattractive, pointing out many high quality developments that fit in seamlessly with surrounding communities; 2) Affordable housing does not lower surrounding property values, citing several studies; 3) Affordable housing does not attract undesirable elements, pointing out that applicants for residence are more vetted and there has not been any evidence of increased crime rates; and 4) Affordable housing developments do not negatively impact school systems or populations.

Lauren Ashe and Tom Ortoleva discussed Old Saybrook's process, the creation of Incentive Housing Zones, and a local charrette. The Commission, led by John Guskowski discussed prior IHZ studies in Essex and the potential properties identified as IHZ targets. Tom Danyliw stated that this is a large, long-term initiative for Essex, and there are not really opportunities in Essex comparable to Ferry Crossing. Lauren Ashe discussed the potential of their Affordable Housing Ownership Program (AHOP) which would fix up underutilized homes in need of repair and selling them to affordable housing applicants, noting the bank support with gap financing.

Ralph Monaco arrived at 8:14 p.m.

Lauren Ashe mentioned a potential upcoming housing initiative in Essex, which would involve between 12-15 affordable units in an existing development, but could not provide additional details at this time. Tom Danyliw stated that a standing committee should be established to focus on this issue. Chairman Kerr agreed and requested that an ongoing relationship with the HOPE Partnership be included as part of this working group. Lauren Ashe stated that HOPE was very willing to participate with the Town's initiatives.

b. Review of Open Space Tax Abatement Requests

John Guskowski reminded the Commission of the procedure created by the recent Plan of Conservation & Development relative to open space tax abatement requests (as defined by PA 490) that was adopted at Town Meeting. Any properties not fitting the automatic criteria were able to apply to the Planning Commission during their October meeting for consideration. This year, two applications were submitted, including a 0.45 acre property of Marzi on Westbrook Road and 0.95 acre property of DeVinney on Saybrook Road. The Commission discussed the meaning of "clearly enhancing the open space and conservation purposes of the Plan of Conservation and Development."

Motion to deny both Tax Abatement Requests because the properties in question were not adjacent to existing open space property, were not part of a natural resources greenway corridor, and did not clearly enhance the open space and conservation purposes of the Plan of Conservation & Development by Tom Danyliw, **seconded** by Jane Siris. Ralph Monaco clarified the statutory process and local implementation procedure. **Motion carried unanimously.**

4. Old Business

a. Accessory Apartment Regulations Discussion – Public Hearing Report and Proposed Modifications

John Guszkowski reviewed the changes that he made to the format of the zoning amendment proposal, placing it in the format of the existing regulations and provided a markup and a clean version for the Zoning Commission's review. The Planning Commission, by consensus, approved of these changes and requested that they be forwarded to the Zoning Commission in advance of their October 17 Public Hearing. John Guszkowski noted that he was personally unavailable on the 17th but noted that any of the Commissioners would be able to represent the project. In all likelihood, the Zoning Commission would want additional time to review so that the matter would not be resolved until November. Chairman Kerr stated that he would attend and invited the other Commissioners to join him.

b. PoCD Implementation and Zoning Working Group Participation

John Guszkowski noted that following the Inter-Board meeting on September 14, the Zoning Commission extended an invitation to the Planning Commission to appoint a representative to the Zoning Working Group.

Motion to appoint John Guszkowski to represent the Planning Commission on the Zoning Regulation Working Group by Jane Siris, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.**

John Guszkowski reported on his participation in the previous Working Group and noted his disappointment at the limited charge and mission of the Group, which is merely to clean up and reorganize the Regulations without making substantial change to the philosophical direction, as recommended by the PoCD. Per Working Group chairman Al Wolfgram's request, he prepared a memo from the Planning Commission to the Zoning Commission to suggest that the Zoning Commission reconsider and expand the scope of their Working Group to allow for a complete overhaul of the Regulations. Tom Danyliw noted that the draft memo was very well written and that it warmed the cockles of his heart.

Motion to endorse the memo from the Planning Chairman to the Zoning Chairman concerning the structure and charge of the Zoning Regulations Working Group and to forward it to Zoning by Tom Danyliw, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.**

c. Grant Project Updates

John Guszkowski reported that the STEAP grant to improve the sidewalks and streetscape on Main Street Centerbrook had been awarded, and First Selectman Needleman would be seeking to undertake a design in mid-November following the elections. John Guszkowski noted the possibility of including the Dennison Road/Main Street reconfiguration as part of this Centerbrook enhancement. He also reported that he would be working on a Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) grant that would propose a sidewalk along Plains Road between the Steam Train and Bokum Center.

5. Report of Committees and Officers

a. Report from Inland Wetlands Representative

The Planning Commission has no active representative to the Wetlands Agency. John Guszkowski apologized for his omission of the Wetlands meeting minutes.

b. Report from RiverCOG Representative

Alan Kerr reported that the RiverCOG staff was undertaking an update of the regional Plan of Conservation & Development, focusing currently on housing. He also discussed the ongoing consternation over a federal Department of Transportation proposed rule change for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) that would dramatically reorganize how regional planning is done in Connecticut.

c. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

George Sexton stated that the EDC was strongly in favor of the Planning Commission's position relative to the Zoning Working Group and would like the Zoning Regulations overhauled, noting that the First Selectman had offered funding for outside consulting support of the effort. He also reported that the new package store was well underway at the former Essex Printing building on Plains Road.

d. Planner's Report

John Guszkowski reported that the Land Use Office renovation was complete and the staff would be moving up to the new space next week, commending Gary Riggio on an excellent job. He also noted that UConn Extension was offering Land Use Commissioner training on October 22 and the Town would sponsor any Planning Commissioners interested in attending.

6. Correspondence & Invoices

Chairman Kerr noted the invoices from CME Associates and Dzialo, Pickett & Allen. John Guszkowski noted that some of the planning and legal fees were relative to the filing of the Ed Cook/Hunter's Trail Extension subdivision.

Motion to pay invoices by Tom Danyliw, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.**

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Jane Siris, **seconded** by Tom Danyliw. **Motion carried unanimously.**
Meeting was adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Guszkowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
10/14/2016 at 9:10 A.M.
Jane M. Rozick
ESSEX, CT - ASSIST. TOWN CLERK