



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, March 9, 2017

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 George Sexton and Ralph Monaco. Alternate Erin Bogan was seated for Member Tom Danyliw and Alternate Jane Siris was seated for Member John Bairos. Also in attendance were Janice Atkeson and Peter Coombs of EEAH, Attorney John Bennet, and Planner John Guskowski. Member John Bairos and Alternate Gary Riggio arrived at approximately 7:38 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes: January 12, 2017 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve minutes of January 12, 2017 by Ralph Monaco, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.

3. New Business

- a. **Zoning Amendment Referral – Application #17-2, Modifying Section 71A, adding single-family dwelling as allowable accessory use in Waterfront District**

Attorney John Bennet represented the applicant before Zoning and explained the basis for the proposal. A regulatory change in 2007 created a nonconformity for three residential structures (including the applicant) that were absorbed into the Waterfront District. At the time of this zone change, residential uses were not allowed in the Waterfront District. The proposed corrective amendment is intended to be focused narrowly on just those three residences that were affected by the 2007 change and would allow the applicant to merge the residential lot with the larger commercial use but retain the mix of uses on a single parcel. Chairman Kerr asked whether the amendment could be written more broadly to allow more multiple uses in the District. Jane Siris asked whether it was a good idea to block residential uses in this District. Chairman Kerr, Erin Bogan, and John Guskowski agreed that residential as a generally allowed accessory use in the District made sense and was supported by the Plan of Conservation & Development.

Motion to issue a positive report on the proposed amendment by Jane Siris, **seconded** by George Sexton. Chairman Kerr asked about recommending eliminating the 2007 date component of the amendment or making a broader statement to encourage mixed uses. Jane Siris thought that quoting the specific section of the PoCD would be appropriate in the Planning comment. **Motion carried unanimously.**

b. Discussion with Janice Atkeson, Essex Elderly and Affordable Housing (EEAH)

Jane Siris introduced Janice Atkeson, who had been very active in the area of affordable housing in Essex and suggested that the Planning Commission could learn from the struggles and success of the Essex Place development. Janice Atkeson presented a brief overview of the work of the government-linked Essex Housing Authority and the nonprofit Essex Elderly and Affordable Housing, Inc. and their combined efforts to manage Essex Court and develop Essex Place. She discussed the need for affordable housing, particularly for elderly residents, and the funding of the undertaking. She noted that the Town's Zoning Regulations were not prepared for the management of these projects. Her major concern about additional development in Essex is that there are very limited availabilities for property. There needs to be a combination of affordable land and large enough size to accommodate a project that would justify funding assistance, which need to be at least 50 units. The Commission had a general discussion about CGS Section 8-30g, the Town's current affordable stock, and the possibility of a moratorium.

Chairman Kerr stated that the Planning Commission continues to struggle with a clear purpose or next steps on the affordable housing conversation. Janice Atkeson suggested fixing the Zoning Regulations and undertaking a property search for future projects. Ralph Monaco sought clarification from Janice Atkeson about the management and financing structures for the two HHA properties. Jane Siris asked about some of the other properties that were considered during the Essex Place investigation. Janice Atkeson recommended additional site investigation and the development of partnerships with housing groups such as the Women's Institute. Erin Bogan stated that affordable options for all ages were also critically needed in Essex. Chairman Kerr thanked Janice Atkeson for her insight.

4. Old Business

a. Housing Needs Survey Discussion

John Guskowski reintroduced the draft survey, which would be distributed via SurveyMonkey to obtain feedback from the Essex public on opinions concerning housing opportunity. Ralph Monaco suggested distribution of hard-copies as well, in places such as the Library and Town Hall. George Sexton and Jane Siris suggested the Library could also send out the link via their email list. Chairman Kerr determined that the Commission had reached consensus in support of distributing the survey in its latest form.

b. PoCD Implementation and Zoning Working Group Participation

John Guskowski stated the Working Group was continuing its work at reorganizing and simplifying the current Zoning Regulations, but the last meeting was postponed. He repeated his concerns about the purpose or effectiveness of this effort, but stated that he would continue to participate. It is possible that the Zoning Commission could be targeting a public hearing on the revisions for May, 2017.

5. **Report of Committees and Officers**

a. **Report from Inland Wetlands Representative**

The Planning Commission has no active representative to the Wetlands Agency.

b. **Report from RiverCOG Representative**

Alan Kerr reported that the RiverCOG meeting was not held for lack of quorum.

c. **Report from Economic Development Commission Representative**

George Sexton reported from the EDC on a number of business developments, including the closing of the Christmas Barn, the pending opening of The Essex, a new restaurant on Main Street in Centerbrook, the potential for an antiques shop at 45 Main Street, Ivoryton, the renovations of Colonial Market, and the pending opening of Cannoli on the Run. He also noted that demolition had taken place at the Essex Station project and is pending for the Cumberland Farms. Finally, he stated that the Essex Boat Works was planning to open an approximately 50-seat restaurant at their property.

d. **Planner's Report**

John Guskowski reported that he had been working on the replacement of the Walnut Street Bridge, which should begin construction in June. The TAP grant submitted for sidewalk construction on Plains Road was scored highly by the RiverCOG and funding should be available in the next two years. Preliminary designs for the STEAP-funded sidewalk work on Main Street in Centerbrook should be completed shortly. The land use office will be converting to a Municipality-based online permit tracking system this spring. John Guskowski participated in a Partnership For Strong Communities seminar in January on the effects of local Zoning on affordable housing availability, and also that potential legislation to increase the cap on CT-DEEP review of community septic systems was having a public hearing on Monday.

6. **Correspondence & Invoices**

John Guskowski noted the copy of a letter to Gordon Kirkman from Woodwin Development, who is being sought by the Town to quitclaim an ancillary piece of land that was part of the Clark's Pond Lane subdivision but never deeded to the Town. There was no additional correspondence.

7. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn by Ralph Monaco, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.** Meeting was adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Guskowski
Consulting Town Planner