



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, May 11, 2017

7:30 p.m.

Essex Town Hall – Auditorium

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, Tom Danyliw, and John Bairos. Alternate Erin Bogan was seated for Member Ralph Monaco. Also in attendance was Planner John Guskowski. Member Ralph Monaco arrived at approximately 7:48 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes: April 13, 2017 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve minutes of April 13, 2017 by Tom Danyliw, seconded by George Sexton. Chairman Kerr noted that in Old Business 4a, the phrase "Over 200 responses was..." should read "Over 200 responses were..." and that in Old Business 4b, the phrase "...there is really no new news..." should read "...there is really no news..." Motion to approve minutes as amended carried unanimously.

3. New Business

There was no new business

4. Old Business

a. Housing Needs Survey - Progress

John Guskowski updated the Commission on the survey, which now has approximately 300 responses. He reviewed the general responses, which indicated that the Town is largely in agreement that there should be more housing opportunities in Essex, particularly to provide residences for young professionals and young families. There were no shocking nor surprising results in his opinion. John Guskowski suggested leaving the survey open for another few weeks and then presenting the results at the June Planning meeting, inviting the Selectmen, Zoning, EDC, and the Housing Authority to join for the presentation.

Chairman Kerr revisited the topic of next steps, given the limited authority of the Planning Commission and the multiple facets to the process of housing development. Tom Danyliw proposed raising public interest and awareness through “straw man” proposals for affordable housing. John Guszkowski raised the potential of an ad-hoc Committee, in the mold of the Ivoryton Center Study, to make specific recommendations for action. The Commission conducted a general discussion about the scope and authority of such a Committee. Ralph Monaco stated that economic development professionals and staff should be involved. Chairman Kerr stated that it was very important to have buy-in from various groups and the community. John Bairos stated that the survey results presented an opportunity to give an ad-hoc Committee a charge. The Commission discussed waiting until the final survey results and presentation to establish a Committee, but Chairman Kerr indicated there was no need to wait.

Chairman Kerr created an Ad-Hoc Committee of the Planning Commission to Investigate Ways to Promote Greater Housing Diversity in Essex and charged the Committee with delivering a report of its findings to the Planning Commission

The Commission discussed the participation on such a Committee, which should include real estate professionals, builders or other development professionals, affordable housing specialists, and planning and economic development staff. Chairman Kerr did not name a Chairman yet, and asked the Commissioners to consider sitting on the Committee as well as forwarding names for potential participants to John Guszkowski.

Erin Bogan stated that an important housing consideration is not just the development of new housing units, but the rehabilitation and fixing up of current dilapidated housing that is in need of revitalization. The Commission discussed various “carrot” and “stick” techniques for approaching this issue, and agreed that the Ad-Hoc Committee should consider this as well.

Chairman Kerr asked John Guszkowski to prepare a presentation on the survey for the next meeting and invite members of Boards of Selectmen, Zoning, EDC, and Housing Authority.

b. Zoning Revisions Subcommittee – Update and Discussion

John Guszkowski stated the Working Group was preparing to complete its work on the “clean-up” of the Zoning Regulations, which would be rolled out next week (Wednesday, May 17) and then presented to the Zoning Commission for receipt. Following that, a public hearing would be scheduled and the revisions would be referred to the Planning Commission for comment. He repeated his concern that this revision did not change the substantive direction of the Regulations, but noted that he had not seen the final proposed revisions yet.

Tom Danyliw referenced the Plan of Conservation & Development’s call for a comprehensive revision to the Regulations that included mixed-use zoning, increased densities, wider provision for affordable housing, design standards, and other elements. He asked whether the proposed amendments will address them. John Guszkowski stated that he hadn’t seen the final proposal, but based on his participation in working group meetings, it was very unlikely that these were addressed. The effort was more of a cleanup, not an overhaul. Tom Danyliw stated that should that be the case, the Planning Commission would be well within its authorities to issue a strongly negative referral comment.

John Guszkowski noted the recent Zoning minutes and pointed out the continued lack of resolution on the Planning Commission's Accessory Apartment proposal, which had initially been taken up by the Zoning Commission last summer. There had been no explanation for its repeated failure to act on this matter. The Commission discussed communicating its dissatisfaction on this matter with the Zoning Commission, including a potential note from all members of the Planning Commission. Chairman Kerr determined that a memo should be written from Chairman to Chairman, expressing concern that the Accessory Apartment matter had not been resolved and requesting a response.

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 held, but quorums were difficult to achieve, given that several municipalities had not appointed representatives. Essex needs to appoint an alternate. The COG is updating their regional Plan of Conservation & Development and was seeking input, looking for "pop-up" events to discuss regional development with members of the public.

c. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

George Sexton reported from the EDC on a number of business developments, the former Bennie's store being under contract, the scheduled demolition of Cumberland Farms to begin in July, the Essex Boat Works restaurant proposal pending before Zoning, and the Middlesex Hospital moving some new services into the vacant clinic on Route 153. He also noted that Valley Regional High School is investigating bringing in paid-tuition students from outside the region, including potentially foreign students.

d. Planner's Report

John Guszkowski reported that he had been working on the replacement of the Walnut Street Bridge, for which construction bids are due next week and then should begin construction in June. He had also worked to prepare and submit two grants in April – one (STEAP) for the upgrading of emergency management telecommunications equipment and the other (SHIPP) for an updated Harbor Management Plan and environmental investigation in the River and Coves.

6. Correspondence & Invoices

There was an invoice for CME Associates, and a letter from a property owner providing information about a property on Saybrook Road for which an open-space property-tax abatement had been sought.

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Erin Bogan, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.
Meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Guskowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
05/12 2017 at 11:45 A.M.
Spence M. Fogiat
ESSEX, CT - ASSIST. TOWN CLERK