



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, February 11, 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 Ralph Monaco, George Sexton, and John Bairos. Also in attendance were Town Planner John Guskowski, Economic Development Coordinator Susan Malan, Zoning applicant Francis D'Mello, and Planning Commission appointee Erin Bogan.

2. **Approval of Minutes: December 17, 2015**

Motion to approve minutes of December 17, 2015 by Ralph Monaco, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried, with John Bairos abstaining.

Chairman Kerr noted that the January 14, 2016 meeting did not have a quorum and no action was required on minutes from that meeting.

3. **New Business**

a. **Hunter's Trail Extension Subdivision – Mylar Filing Extension Request**

John Guskowski stated that the initial 90-day period to file formal subdivision mylars for Ed Cook's approval will expire on March 9, but the Commission has the ability to grant up to two more 90-day extensions. Mr. Cook requested the first of these via email.

Motion to approve 90-day extension of mylar filing by Ralph Monaco, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.

b. **Zoning Amendment Referral: Retail Uses in Business District**

John Guskowski and Susan Malan introduced this referral, which would allow a retail owner to locate a business within the Business District on Plains Road of up to 1800 square feet as-of-right (via administrative approval) and up to 5000 square feet via Special Exception. They noted that the Business District and Light Industrial District along Plains Road had excluded retail uses as a way to avoid "strip mall" development, but a number of pre-existing and use-variance-

enabled retail business were on Plains Road already, including Porky Pete's, Essex Mail Mart, and Cliff's Meats. Chairman Kerr noted a letter of support for the proposal from the Economic Development Commission.

Ralph Monaco noted that the Plan of Conservation & Development (PoCD) encouraged more mixed-uses and vibrant economic activity in the Route 9 Gateway area, and in the specific property in question – the former Riverside Press building – the abutting properties were not likely to be negatively affected by a retail use. Chairman Kerr noted that the Commission and the PoCD were generally supportive of allowing smaller-scale retail in this area, though he also would have preferred a more up-to-date zoning map with which to understand the geographic scope of the proposal. John Guskowski stated that he believed the PoCD was generally supportive of a wider variety of uses in this area, but also that design and visual impact of the uses should be more tightly regulated to ensure the character of the neighborhood is protected and enhanced.

Chairman Kerr noted that the Commission had reached consensus to submit a favorable comment to the Zoning Commission, with support for a smaller maximum footprint and with notes concerning both the need for design standards and questions about the outright prohibition on adult uses and pawn shops.

c. UConn Landscape Architecture Senior Studio Project - Discussion

John Guskowski introduced the proposal, stating that Dr. Peter Miniutti of the Landscape Architecture Department at UConn was offering design services for communities as projects for his senior students. He suggested that this could be a good opportunity to attempt to harmonize the many diverse projects and initiatives in the Route 9 Gateway area, including the Essex Station multi-family proposal, potential expansion of the Steam Train, the Essex Place senior housing, redevelopment plans for Witch Hazel, and the overpass area re-painting and landscaping. He pointed out that despite the density of these activities and the proximity of the properties, very little coordination and communication occurs, which is an excellent side benefit of a student-led study. This would be a project for this current semester.

Motion to authorize John Guskowski to work with UConn Landscape Architecture students to conduct a design study in the Route 9 Gateway area by Ralph Monaco, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.**

4. Old Business

a. Plan of Conservation & Development Implementation

Chairman Kerr discussed the completion of the PoCD and the list of potential projects in the Implementation Matrix, and how with a continued lull in proposed development, it is a good time for the Commission to select some priorities. He asked John Guskowski for his thoughts. John suggested that a great many of the items in the matrix address, either directly or indirectly, the need to overhaul and update the Zoning Regulations. Issues like mixed-uses, design standards, encouragement of affordable housing, and density all have their root in the Zoning process. Further, the Zoning Commission has begun undertaking a review of the Regulations. Chairman Kerr asked John Guskowski to draft a memo to the Zoning Commission requesting a spot on an upcoming Zoning agenda to introduce the PoCD priorities and ask that Planning be an active part of the Zoning revision process.

Ralph Monaco noted the numerous references to street trees, planting improvements and landscape in the PoCD and suggested that the Planning Commission reach out to Tree Warden Augie Pampel for a discussion. John Guskowski will invite him to an upcoming meeting. Ralph also asked about the status of the Pratt, Read piano factory, and John Guskowski discussed the current owner and the numerous times the property has changed hands over the last decade. He suggested that an upcoming round of the state's Historic Brownfield Redevelopment grants would be a good opportunity to move this project forward.

Chairman Kerr suggested that the Town's wastewater management capacity warranted some attention, and John Guskowski noted that the WPCA has in place funding for a long-overdue updated to the Wastewater Facilities Plan and is working on an RFP for consultants. Chairman Kerr requested that John Guskowski prepare a memo to the WPCA supporting this concept and requesting that the Planning Commission be an active participant in the development of the Plan.

John Guskowski suggested that the numerous references to the Traffic Authority in the PoCD could begun to be addressed by an expansion of the Authority's membership, which is currently the Board of Selectmen. There was a general discussion about the work of the Authority, the Public Works budget, and how transportation or roadway projects get prioritized. John Guskowski will research the Town's existing Traffic Authority ordinance and look at other small town approaches to membership and decision-making on transportation and traffic matters. John Guskowski also noted a number of current initiatives such as Centerbrook Main Street grant application, Safe Routes to School project, and the UConn initiative are already implementation tasks underway.

By consensus, the Planning Commission identified Zoning Regulations, Traffic Authority, WPCA Facilities Plan, and Pratt Read brownfields as key "first step" implementation tasks.

Chairman Kerr also recognized and introduced Erin Bogan as a new appointee to the Planning Commission as an alternate, to be approved at Town Meeting on February 17. Erin gave a bit of background on herself as an Essex native and recent first-time homebuyer in Ivoryton and her eagerness to participate with the Planning Commission.

John Bairos suggested having a working Implementation Matrix documented that could be updated with progress on individual action items.

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 on the RiverCOG meeting, discussing the need for greater participation at meetings, the development of a new agricultural website for Middlesex County farms, and the regional PoCD initiative.

c. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

The Planning Commission has no active representative to the EDC.

d. **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Kerr noted that with several resignations and changes to the Chairmanship, all of the liaison positions (Wetlands, RiverCOG, EDC) will need new Commissioners. This will be discussed next month when the full Commission is appointed and seated, but asked Commissioners to consider volunteering.

e. **Planner's Report**

John Guskowski stated that the Essex Station multi-family application and Cumberland Farms renovation are both pending a public hearing on February 22nd. He asked if the Commission would like to submit a brief note for the public record. The Commission by consensus agreed that a short memo supporting the addition of residential density and particularly affordable housing at Essex Station was supported by the PoCD. John Bairos led a discussion about the encouragement about good design and pedestrian friendliness at the Cumberland Farms, and the Commission agreed that a short memo recommending appropriate design be submitted as well.

6. **Correspondence & Invoices**

Chairman Kerr noted the invoice from CME Associates and John Guskowski clarified the different line items and services provided under this invoice.

Motion to approve payment of invoice by Ralph Monaco seconded by George Sexton.
Motion carried unanimously.

7. **Adjournment**

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

Respectfully submitted,

John Guskowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
02/12 2016 at 2:25 P.M.
Yvonne M. Royal
ESSEX, CT TOWN CLERK *asst*