



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, July 10, 2014

7:30 p.m.

Essex Town Hall – Auditorium

DRAFT MINUTES

1. **Call to Order and Seating of Members**

Chairman Tom Danyliw called the hearing to order at 7:30 p.m. Seated for the hearing were Vice Chairman Linda Herman, regular members Carla Feroni, and Alan Kerr. Seated for member Ralph Monaco was Bob Laundry. Also in attendance were alternates John Ackermann, Town Planner John Guskowski, Economic Development Coordinator Susan Malan, and approximately 12 members of the public. Member Ralph Monaco arrived at approximately 7:35.

2. **Approval of Minutes: June 12, 2014**

Motion to approve Minutes of June 12, 2014 by Carla Feroni, seconded by Alan Kerr. Motion carried unanimously.

3. **New Business**

a. **Public Forum on Plan of Conservation & Development Update – Centerbrook**

Chairman Danyliw introduced the topic and stated that the Commission was interested in public input on the pending update to the Plan of Conservation & Development (PoCD), and this evening's session would focus on the Centerbrook area. A member of the public who had participated with some of the Centerbrook Visioning efforts stated that traffic through the core of Centerbrook was very bad, and far too many heavy trucks were using Centerbrook and Westbrook Road as a cut-through from Route 9 to I-95. She suggested closing Exit 4 on Route 9 as a solution.

Susan Malan updated the Commission on the work of the Centerbrook Visioning group and specifically the pedestrian environment focus. The group took a site walk and assessed the sidewalk and roadway conditions between the Train Station and Essex Elementary School. The final meeting of the Visioning group will be August 7, and a formal report would follow with recommendations for the PoCD. John Ackermann stated that the Visioning group was doing a very good job, and agreed that the group wished to establish a strong Main Street feel through the core of Centerbrook.

b. **Open Space Acquisition Proposal – “The Preserve”**

Chairman Danyliw introduced the request from the Board of Selectmen to participate in the acquisition and protection of “The Preserve.” There will be a Town Meeting on July 16 to decide on the expenditure of \$200,000 from the Open Space Acquisition Fund to

permanently protect the Essex portion of the property. Per Ordinance, the Planning Commission's endorsement is required for the expenditure.

Motion to approve the expenditure of \$200,000 from the Open Space Acquisition Fund to support the permanent protection of "The Preserve" by Bob Laundry, seconded by Carla Feroni. Chairman Danyliw asked if there was discussion or questions.

Alan Kerr asked if this would reflect the total cost to the Town. Kate Brown from Trust for Public Lands (TPL) introduced herself and her organization's role in the project. TPL will seek to buy and hold the total property while the funding for preservation is assembled. The total project is just over \$8 million. The State has agreed to contribute \$3 million, and this week Old Saybrook voters agreed to contribute \$3 million. The Essex component will be approximately \$700,000, of which \$200,000 may come from the Open Space Fund, and the Essex Land Trust is applying for a separate grant of \$400,000. The remaining funds will be sought from private donations. Thus far, the total project has committed about \$1.4 million in private donations.

John Ackermann asked about project time frame, and Kate Brown responded that they are seeking to close by the end of December 2014. She discussed the history of TPL's work around the country and in Connecticut. Linda Herman asked about the difference between holding the development rights and owning the property. Kate Brown explained that the State and Old Saybrook will jointly hold the portion of the land in Old Saybrook, but the development rights will be extinguished. She also noted that the Essex portion is being treated separately to maximize opportunity to receive grants on the entire project.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. Old Business

a. PoCD Updates and Next Steps

John Guskowski stated that the Centerbrook Visioning report would be ready by mid-August, so the discussion on this area should be kept open for the next meeting. Chairman Danyliw asked the Commission what other focus topics should be discussed at upcoming meetings. John Guskowski suggested that the Conservation Commission and Essex Land Trust should be invited for a discussion about conservation priorities, the Economic Development Commission should be invited for a focus on business development, and perhaps the Zoning Commission should be invited for a discussion as well. Carla Feroni stated that a discussion about Sustainability and resilience to climate change should occur, and this should be an important part of the Plan. Linda Herman and John Ackerman stated that the matter of Open Space Tax Abatements needed to be addressed and a new policy adopted. John Guskowski suggested that this issue could be rolled in to the discussion about conservation land priorities. John Ackermann suggested potential experts could be brought in to help the Commission understand the issue.

b. Ivoryton MSIF Grant Update

John Guskowski stated that the project Steering Committee interviewed the four consulting engineers/landscape architects on the project in June, and decided to proceed with Anchor Engineering from Glastonbury. They have submitted a proposed contract to the Town, which is being reviewed by the Finance Director and Insurance

advisors. It is hoped that the project can proceed and survey can begin before the end of July. Carla Feroni stated that she hoped the Commission could review the preliminary design when it was available, and John Guszkowski assured the Commission that they would have input at that phase.

4. Report of Committees and Officers

a. **Report from Inland Wetlands Representative**

John Ackermann stated that he had been unable to attend the last meeting of the Wetlands Commission.

b. **Report from RiverCOG Representative**

Alan Kerr stated that the Regional Planning Commission did not meet out of consideration for the recent passing of Executive Director Linda Krause. Carla Feroni stated that there would be a memorial service for Linda on July 14 in Mystic.

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

Bob Laundry stated that the EDC had sent a letter to the Zoning Commission requesting that they make another attempt at drafting signage regulations, and recommended using Stonington's regulations as a good model. He also stated that they had been discussing the Centerbrook project and the Ivoryton Farmers' Market grant. He also noted that the Essex Island Marina was up for sale and there would be an auction in August. Susan Malan noted the prior month's discussion on the Gateway area and how the State of Connecticut had been doing a poor job of maintaining the aesthetic appearance of the property within their right-of-way of Route 9. She suggested that the EDC and Planning Commission should both write letters to the Board of Selectmen encouraging them to work with the State to improve this. Chairman Danyliw stated he would work with John Guszkowski to write a letter on the Commission's behalf.

d. **Chairman's Report**

Chairman Danyliw had no additional report.

e. **Planner's Report**

i) South Cove Hills Subdivision Conservation Land: John Guszkowski referred to documentation in the agenda packet concerning clearing that has occurred within the conservation easement area of Lot E1 at South Cove Hills. The conservation easement language requires the Planning Commission to enforce the easement. Both he and ZEO Joe Budrow visited the site and took photos, which indicate that the clearing activity has occurred in apparent violation of the easement terms. There was discussion among the Commission of who is responsible for maintaining the easement. If there is a homeowners' association in place, it is likely that this group would be responsible, along with the individual property owner whose lot is encumbered. Susan Malan stated that the Conservation Commission may have notes on this property or previous easement inspections. Linda Herman stated that the Fire Department may have participated in the clearing to better access the cistern. Carla Feroni stated that she thinks the Commission should receive a more formal report of findings from John Guszkowski or Joe Budrow, and then could act to forward a letter per the easement terms to the responsible party. John Guszkowski stated he would contact the Fire Department, research the existence of the property ownership, a homeowners' association, or a responsible LLC, and prepare a letter of findings.

ii) Bokum Road Area Zoning Districts: John Guskowski discussed a recent meeting with property owners of land down Bokum Road, situated in between Essex Meadows and Essex Glen. The owners would like to develop some active adult (55+) condominium housing on this property, and are trying to figure out the appropriate zoning approach. Both Essex Glen (Active Adult) and Essex Meadows (Life Care) are within zoning districts that were customized for those respective developments. Their terms, however, are somewhat in conflict with additional development in the area. The owners' attorney will likely be proposing some additional amendments to enable this development. John Guskowski and Linda Herman both stated that they hoped some mixed-income development could be included.

6. Correspondence & Invoices

Motion to pay invoice from CME Associates by Bob Laundy, seconded by Ralph Monaco. Motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Danyliw then polled the Commission on their preference and availability for a meeting in August. A sufficient number of Commissioners stated that they would not be available, and there did not seem to be pressing matters that would require a meeting, so Chairman Danyliw stated that the August Planning Commission meeting would be cancelled.

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Linda Herman, seconded by Carla Feroni. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

John Guskowski
Town Planner (Consulting)

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
07/14 2014 at 9:07 a.m.
Yvonne M. Kasal
ESSEX, CT TOWN CLERK assist