

Town of Essex
Architectural Design Review Subcommittee

Tuesday, October 4, 2011
7:30 p.m.
Essex Town Hall – Meeting Room B

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chair Neil Nichols called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. In attendance were Neil Nichols, Jane Piro, Janice Atkeson, Tom Rutherford, and Hope Proctor. Cotty Barlow, John Beveridge, Bill Jacaruso and Tom Danyliw were absent.

2. Approval of September Meeting Minutes

Motion was made by Jane Piro and seconded by Janice Atkeson to approve the minutes of the September meeting. **Motion carried.**

3. Commercial Focus group update and discussion of top line feedback.

Comments from the commercial focus group were discussed. One statement was that only 2 large parcels remain to be developed so there is not great concern for design standards. Design review is viewed as punitive and overly directive. Janice Atkeson took away that there is a huge informational task ahead. Jane Piro noted comments that the 30' height restriction is not high enough for residential or commercial. Hope Proctor disagreed and asked if there was discussion on coverage, which is more restrictive than height. Height, coverage and volume were all part of the discussion.

Tom Rutherford raised the question as to whether it is a zoning issue or a design issue. Right now there is little support for residential design review, but there is support for commercial guidelines. It was felt that zoning regulations are not specific enough and developers have to "guess" what Zoning will like. Zoning is felt to be counterproductive.

Design review and its impact in several communities was discussed particularly Nantucket and Madison.

The presentation emphasized that one size does not fit all.

4. Thoughts in regard to Zoning Regulations from Herb Clark

The possibility of updating zoning regulations was discussed at the commercial focus group. There are too many holes, and if a proposal is ambiguous or turned down then a variance is requested. "Hardship" was discussed. The regulations shouldn't tell what can't be done, but rather what would be preferred. A suggestion was to have a point person, a person that would provide guidance to a builder.

5. Update on request to renumber the 1978 Connecticut Registry of Essex Village Historic Buildings report

John Guskowski is working on this.

6. Discussion on Format, Content, List Selection and Schedule for Town Elected and Appointed Focus Group. Review letter for Town wide meeting and schedule same.

The six recommendations from this Committee and the process for each were reviewed. These will be turned over to the Planning Commission for their consideration.

#1 – Implement a Commercial Design Review Process for new buildings and substantial renovation. If there is an advisory group for commercial it could also be available for residential.

A Handbook for Design Examples, a help desk, or gatekeeper could be available to architects and builders. This would help to eliminate interpretation. This would be advisory.

#2/3 – Restore the current height cap of 30' to previously allowed 35' above the mean grade level. Allow exceptions for building replicas of our heritage. Architects and commercial owners brought up the height issue. Coverage ratios don't seem to accomplish what they were designed to do. Updated and more tailored regulations are needed. Hope Proctor will work on the coverage issue.

#4 incorporate the Gateway Conservation District and Heritage District into our zoning regulations and agree upon designated areas. Implementing the Gateway District is an important step in preserving our architectural heritage.

#5 – The Delay of Demolition Ordinance as it is written is not an effective tool to prevent loss of important architectural structures. To preserve our architectural heritage there should be an explanation for the requested demolition and a proposal for the replacement structure before a permit is granted. Currently, the town requires a 90-day delay and the fine for violation is \$100. There should be mandatory notification of abutters. The delay period should be extended to 180 days, the fine increased, and the applicant should go to Zoning to explain the scope of the work.

#6 – Implement a National Register listing for Ivoryton as an honorary designation. The consultant who identified 100 key structures that represent our architectural heritage recommended this initiative. This would require the support of Planning, Zoning, the Selectmen for a grant to prepare the application and a town-wide vote for approval. Willingness on the part of focus groups was noted, and

encouragement from the consultant, make this viable. There is lack of understanding of what this is, but there are benefits for property owners.

These recommendations will be discussed at the Planning Commission meeting. A letter for the town meeting will be drafted. It was suggested to hold the town meeting at the Centerbrook Meetinghouse. The letter will go to newspapers and the town website.

Motion to adjourn by Hope Proctor and seconded by Tom Rutherford at 9:00 p.m.
Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra Meinsen
Recording Secretary