

ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

SPECIAL MEETING

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

7:30 p.m.

Essex Town Hall – Auditorium

Call to Order and Seating of Members:

Chair Tom Danyliw called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Seated for the special meeting were: Chair Tom Danyliw, Alan Kerr, Bob Laundry for Ralph Monaco, Neil Nichols for Carla Feroni, and Claire Tiernan for Linda Herman. Linda Herman arrived at 7:40. Also in attendance was Planner John Guskowski.

The purpose of the meeting was to **review and discuss the Transportation Study** and determine how to go forward with the information. Tom Danyliw opened with comments and shared his perceptions. The Transportation Study made general recommendations that should be broken into pieces and an action plan should be developed.

Linda Herman suggested certain stakeholders take on certain sections. The Study report suggests who may take on some roles. It should be tied into what CRERPA is doing, i.e. bike paths, and connecting towns working towards the same goals. The Traffic Authority is the Board of Selectmen. Tom Danyliw noted that the Planning Commission doesn't have authority nor does it have authority over major capital expenditures. It is necessary to tie this Study together, keep it off the shelf and moving forward.

Neil Nichols asked if there is a priority system in town for roads and highways. If Planning does all this work, it is hoped that the Commission is not spinning its wheels.

John Guskowski supported Linda Herman's recognition of groups that need to be involved, but noted that all items have dollar signs attached. Claire Tiernan recognized the issue of safety involved with the improvements, and suggested determining priority based on that. Tom Danyliw then suggested approaching the Traffic Authority based on that. Bob Laundry asked how this relates to the Plan of Conservation and Development. Can some of this be incorporated? Tom Danyliw feels that the Selectmen should acknowledge and approve some of this.

Linda Herman noted that since this is the middle of a change over with the upcoming election, there is a need to develop communication with the new

administration. Communication among Commissions is essential. The Ivoryton Subcommittee work got shelved for lack of communication and followup, specifically, the traffic and parking recommendations. Linda further recommended sorting the things that Commissions agree on, and don't agree on, immediate actions, and survey Commissions as to what they would like to move forward on. This Study contains some suggestions as to where to go for funding. With the less controversial steps, John Guskowski could play a role in pulling people together. Tom Danyliw suggested using the guide in the Transportation Study for manageable components. The Planning Commission could drive 1 or 2 things, some easier and less expensive items. Alan Kerr recommended starting small and identifying a few small projects. Linda Herman feels if that approach is successful, then more items could be pursued.

Neil Nichols recognized that some items have already been started such as Safe Routes to School. Town crews could do signage. That could be immediate for the Board of Selectmen to commit to. Tom Danyliw suggested going through the Study and identifying tasks that are easily accomplished and low cost.

Neil Nichols then suggested markings and signage. Bob Laundy suggested Gateway since that has recently come up. Alan Kerr asked for clarification of markings. This refers to Gateway Enhancement signage. Tom Danyliw recommended combining Street Sign Design and the Branded Wayfinding Program.

Claire Tiernan was curious as to what the Board of Selectmen think and what their priorities are. Do they have any thoughts that should be considered so this work is not in conflict? They have been asked many times and were invited to this meeting. Linda Herman suggested getting on their agenda. Bob Laundy proposed street closure of the "road to nowhere" off exit 3. EDC recognizes that too. There has been some suggestion of a parking area there. Neil Nichols thinks there could be monies available through a STEAP grant. Tom Danyliw asked John Guskowski if there has been a look at the town sidewalk situation. There has not, to his knowledge. Neil Nichols talked of safety in winter with missing sidewalk areas. Claire Tiernan said there have been additions to sidewalks to near the Piano Factory through a STEAP grant. The Study shows the most dangerous section in town is the Gateway. Cycling routes have been brought up. Is there a reason why Essex hasn't participated in the CT Main St. Center? Other towns have received annual money (CTMainST.org) funded by NE Utilities. Ivoryton and Centerbrook could both be eligible.

There could be a walking group and a bicycling group under this Commission. Ivoryton enhancement was discussed; curb extensions and crossing islands. With recent events, it is more evident that a street closing is critical. It is difficult to cross near the Post Office especially with events and increased activity near Gather. Claire Tiernan feels there should be touting of what has been done such as Safe Routes to School.

The seven areas identified were:
Markings and signage/ Branded Wayfinding
Gateway area and closure of Frontage Rd.
Sidewalks/walking focus group
Biking focus group
Safe Routes to School
Ivoryton crossings
Grove St. traffic calming

John Guskowski feels it is important to establish something more solid and ongoing, make plans for 3,4, and 5 years out, and to encourage the Board of Selectmen to have an ad hoc committee on neighborhood planning, and identify where money will be spent. This can be approached bottom up and top down.

Zoning Commission Chair Al Wolfgram spoke about looking at funding among other groups, sinking funds of the Fire Dept., the Elementary School. In State Statutes, there is reference to establishment of capital improvement plans. The town can approve these. It may be appropriate to put together a capital improvement plan and put it forward. In establishing this, when the budget process starts, the Board Of Selectmen can be asked to initiate that kind of fund. It would be a sinking fund for a group of initial projects. The Board of Finance establishes it, but this Commission can request it to be established based on a safety need. This type of sinking fund would be under the Traffic Authority and they would put together an advisory group, but they are the responsible party. This was a favorable idea.

Residents of Grove St. then spoke. This is one of the narrowest streets in town and has speeding issues and high traffic volume. They want short and long term remedy. It is the top priority within the Traffic Calming section along with North Main St., but there is overwhelming concern on Grove St. The possibility of making it one way was requested in a petition.

Large trucks are problematic and moms and kids cross from the Town Hall lot to the Library. There is fear for any foot traffic on this road. An elevated crosswalk was suggested. On N. Main, New City and Grove St. there were 15 trucks within 2 hours, including gravel trucks. If it were one way, where would the traffic go? Neil Nichols feels that speed bumps are the most effective way to slow traffic but there is little enthusiasm for them.

Al Wolfgram noted that the town doesn't do enforcement. The neighborhood likes the idea of no trucks, but where will they go? It is necessary to determine where they would be rerouted. Grove St. could be a good pilot. The concern is not just children but older pedestrians.

Linda Herman suggested deciding what this Commission wants to do and then get on the Board of Selectmen's agenda and to present it. Al Wolfgram recommended

that the sinking fund request have a dollar amount. Tom Danyliw asked John Guskowski to come up with that amount.

Tom Danyliw summarized:

- the Planning Commission will go to the Board of Selectmen with identified priorities and a sinking fund proposal
- the Grove St. group will be on the Planning Commission agenda
- John Guskowski wants to look into affiliate status for CT Main Street. It could assist the Grove St. group. Parking studies could be funded.
- hold on to the rest of the list until the meeting with the Board of Selectmen.

Al Wolfgram recommended that when meeting with the Selectmen, to have a group of citizens that will develop, review or steer recommendations to the Traffic Authority and coordinate analysis of items and keep it ongoing. John Guskowski will come up with a list of names including Dave Caroline, and individuals of various Commissions.

The next Planning Commission meeting will refine what will be presented to the Board of Selectmen.

The charge of the Grove St. group will be formalized at the next Planning Commission meeting.

Motion to adjourn at 8:45 p.m. by Neil Nichols. Seconded by Linda Herman. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra Meinsen
Recording Secretary