



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, February 13, 2020
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 for the meeting were Members George Sexton, Erin Bogan and Gary Riggio. Seated for Member Ralph Monaco was Alternate Hope Proctor. Also in attendance was Alternate Jane Siris and Planner John Guskowski. Member Ralph Monaco arrived at 8:15 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes – January 9, 2020 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve minutes of January 9, 2020 by Gary Riggio, seconded by George Sexton. Hope Proctor noted that the word “parking” was missing from a sentence in Item 3a. Motion to approve minutes as amendment carried unanimously.

3. New Business

a. UConn Student Presentation on Essex Village Parking/Circulation

Chairman Kerr recognized the students from the Civil and Environmental Engineering program at UConn who had been working with the Economic Development Commission, in a continuation of a project that began in the spring of 2019 on improvements to the parking and pedestrian management in Essex Village. There were multiple goals of the study, including public safety, pedestrian friendliness, and a “refresh” of the Main Street corridor. The proposed approach will be “tactical urbanism” that makes cosmetic changes in a non-permanent way to roads and intersections. They showed a video example of an intersection conversion to a pedestrian-friendly traffic circle in Sao Paulo, Brazil and discussed the resulting safety statistics.

In the case of Essex Village, the tools that would be used were temporary devices such as sidewalk chalk, portable benches, traffic cones, planters, etc. The goal would be to solicit public participation both in the set-up and implementation and surveys. The demonstration period is projected to be 30-60 days, ideally this spring. The specific design plan elements would add textured crosswalks and pedestrian bump-outs at the traffic circle at the head of Main Street (Essex Square) – which would also create more flexible public space for seating, art, plantings, or performance space. The second proposed component would add an angled parking arrangement in a “chicane” technique that alternates sides of the road, as well as more pedestrian crossing between the head of Main Street and Ferry Street. The third proposed component would add a sidewalk on Ferry Street and crosswalk, with additional angled parking on one side of the street. Because materials are limited and largely could be accomplished with town forces and volunteers, the cost to the Town would be minimal. The total timeframe of the quick-build, including set-up and break-down, would be approximately eight weeks. They solicited questions from the public.

Chuck Atwood noted that he was unfamiliar with any accidents on Main Street, but there were larger trucks with trailers that needed access to Main Streets and was unsure of how they could navigate the chicane parking. The students explained that there would be an open center lane and would be sufficient. Another resident asked about truck deliveries and how angled parking would accommodate longer trucks. The students replied that this would be one of the items to track during the experiment. Chief Aaron Schumacher from the Essex Fire Department asked about review of the design by the Fire Company. He was concerned that fire hydrants not be blocked. The EDC and Town Planner John Guskowski reviewed the process and how the ultimate decisions to authorize the experiment was with the Board of Selectmen in their capacity as the Traffic Authority. Chief Schumacher recommended 25' in front of fire hydrants. Jane Siris clarified the type of paint, and asked about strategies on soliciting volunteers. She also asked about the choice of angled parking vs. speed bumps or tables. She was uncertain as to why the parking changes were needed. The students discussed the hazards of car door opening and bicycles. Hope Proctor expressed concern with speed on Main Street and bike safety. Joe Montana stated that traffic calming and pedestrian safety improvements were good ideas, and walkways on Ferry and Pratt Streets were very important. He was less certain about the aesthetics of angled parking and accident rates. The students discussed how the character of the Village was a key focus and priority. EDC Chair Janet Peckenpaugh discussed the parking concerns of current shop owners. Erin Bogan commended the students on their efforts and ideas. She thought the experiment was an excellent way to test theories and see about improving sight lines and traffic comfort. Chief Schumacher stated that his experience showed more accidents around angled parking than parallel parking.

Chairman Kerr stated that he thought the discussion was very important and he was eager to see the experiment move forward. He reviewed the proposed timeframe with the students, which ideally fits within the spring semester at school. He thanked the students for their excellent work. He asked that the Commission consider advancing this

Motion by Hope Proctor to request that the Board of Selectman implement this traffic and pedestrian enhancement experiment following consultation with fire, police, public works, and appropriate safety officials, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.

b. **Zoning Referral – Proposed Map Amendment, changing 20 Main Street, Essex from split VR/EV Zone to EV Zone**

Hope Proctor recused herself from the discussion. John Guskowski presented an overview of the proposed change to the Zoning Map, which would unify the property at 20 Main Street under single zoning district and allow for some additional construction on the property. He discussed how a split zone forced development into the restrictions of the more conservative of the two districts. Attorney Terry Lomme, representing the applicant, discussed how the split zone creates the inability of the property to add an in-law apartment because of the more conservative coverage ratio. The property in question at 20 Main Street does not front the water and would not affect access to the cove. A variance on the property failed to be approved, and so they are seeking to unify the property within the EV Zone. Jane Siris asked about the different setbacks, which are lesser in the EV Zone. She also discussed that the intent of the EV regulation would encourage more activity in the front of the site, and not the rear of the property. Attorney Lomme noted that accessory structures and dwellings had increased setbacks.

John Guskowski discussed how the Planning Commission has generally approved with placing properties within single zones, and in the PoCD, encouraged a larger amount of activity within the key Village areas. Attorney Ed Cassella, representing the neighboring property owners, requested that consideration be given to the neighboring properties when considering the PoCD. The potential development would have the effect of creating more density around the neighbor's property, affecting views. He argued that accessory apartments would be more appropriate within the existing house or existing garage. The Commission had a discussion about existing setbacks and nonconformities. Resident Chuck Atwood warned against precedent setting, particularly for properties that both front on Main Street and have access to the cove. Jane Siris thought it would be a problem to rezone the lot and didn't have a problem with the split lot. John Guskowski discussed that the lot wasn't truly split because the more restrictive regulations controlled. He led a discussion about the effect of the nature of the "comment" or "finding" that the Planning Commission makes relative to Zoning Commission's decision. There was discussion led by the Attorneys about the PoCD and the intent of the placement of the zone lines.

Chairman Kerr sought consensus from the Commission on the general approach of harmonious development with the PoCD.

Motion by Erin Bogan to find the proposed map change harmonious with the Plan of Conservation & Development, supporting goals of housing expansion and meeting the vision of Essex Village, seconded by George Sexton. Gary Riggio stated that he was uncertain about deciding the matter without more discussion. Chairman Kerr was generally in favor, while understanding the concerns of the neighbors. George Sexton agrees that it is a difficult decision but stated that it fits within the goals of the PoCD. Gary Riggio clarified that this was a single-lot decision. **Motion carried unanimously.** Chairman Kerr requested that John Guskowski draft a memo of comment that reflected some of the additional concerns of the Commission on this matter.

4. Old Business

a. PoCD Implementation - Route 9 Gateway Development Node

John Guszkowski presented the draft regulations for the proposed Gateway Node, which was patterned closely after the two other Node proposals for Ivoryton and Bokum. The Gateway Node referenced the historic uses of the steam train and the Witch Hazel Factory as an architectural palette. The potential use table and the acreage standards were modified for the Gateway, and there was an increased focus on wayfinding and “welcoming” design. Hope Proctor discussed the gas station and nonconforming uses. The Commission discussed maximum heights and the current context. Hope Proctor asked about the strength of design standards and the two-step overlay approval process. Jane Siris recommended removing the phrase “traditional village character.” Erin Bogan asked about minimum acreage and property aggregation.

Motion by Hope Proctor to charge John Guszkowski with preparing the overlay node as an amendment application to the Zoning Commission, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.

b. River Road Sidewalk and Bridge Needs – Next Steps

John Guszkowski discussed the bridge and sidewalk project and how the Town hoped to seek grant funds to help with the sidewalk project as it decided on bridge estimates. The Commission had a general discussion about project costs and the value of adding the sidewalk. Jane Siris and Gary Riggio wished to know more about the total project expense to the Town and how funding would be assembled before proceeding.

John Guszkowski stated that he would seek more specific numbers on both the sidewalk portion of the project and the entire project cost.

5. Report of Committees and Officers

a. Report from RiverCOG Representative

Chairman Kerr noted Sandra Childress’ report of the most recent RiverCOG meeting in the Commission packet and discussed the update to the Regional PoCD.

b. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

George Sexton reported on several recent developments, including: the sudden closing of Colonial Market; the departure of Bowtique; the interior renovation to Ivoryton Café; the departure of Kate Shea; how the Red Balloon building is being demolished and used for parking and septic expansion, and the former Olive Oyl’s may become a sandwich bistro; Los Charros will be opening for lunch; the Essex Chocolatier closed; and the Leatherman will be a small retail and apartment space.

c. **Planner's Report**

John Guskowski reported on several matters: the River Road bridge conditions discussion with the Selectmen and CME/CHA bridge engineers; the work on the update to the Town's Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan as part of the overall regional NHMP; and the application status of the first two Node Overlay regulations with the Zoning Commission. Chairman Kerr directed John Guskowski to request a withdrawal and resubmission of these applications to get them on an appropriate statutory time clock.

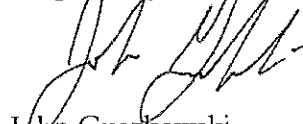
6. **Correspondence & Invoices**

There were no items of correspondence or invoices.

7. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn by George Sexton, seconded by Hope Proctor. Motion carried unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 9:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



John Guskowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
02/19/20 at 2:35 p.m.
James M. Rogie
ESSEX, CT -- ASSIST. TOWN CLERK