



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, May 14, 2020

7:30 p.m.

Meeting Held Via GoToMeeting Video Conference

Meeting Recording:

<https://transcripts.gotomeeting.com/#/s/b6af658538f3d6a10e775046734bd2d50a4c468bd57fddb69e0e18cc9a8a1e43>

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, via videoconference, for the meeting were Members George Sexton and Ralph Monaco. Seated for Member Gary Riggio was Alternate Jane Siris. Seated for Member Erin Bogan was Alternate Hope Proctor. Also in attendance were Planner John Guskowski and members of the Essex Land Trust. Members Erin Bogan and Gary Riggio (technical difficulties) joined the meeting after seating of the Alternates.

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

Motion to approve minutes of April 9, 2020 by Ralph Monaco, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.

3. New Business

a. Preliminary Discussion on Property Acquisition Process – Essex Land Trust

John Guskowski introduced Essex Land Trust (ELT) board members Bob Nussbaum, Paul Greenberg, and Chet Arnold to discuss a potential acquisition that may require the involvement and participation of the Planning Commission. Paul Greenberg stated that the ELT had been targeting the Higgins property for many years. This is two parcels on either side of Route 153 just across the Westbrook line, totaling about 48 acres, adjacent on both

sides to other conservation land. The ELT had some promising conversations with the property's current steward, and they will be proceeding to gather appraisals, surveys, and conduct preliminary negotiations. The hope is that much of this work can be in place prior to the July deadline for submission on State DEEP open space grant applications. The ELT hopes to combine DEEP grant funds, ELT funds, and Town of Essex open space land acquisition funds to make this purchase. Paul Greenberg reviewed the property's positive attributes and how it rated very highly by their criteria and the Plan of Conservation & Development. He clarified that he did not need any Commission action at this time, but would likely be seeking a letter of endorsement and a tentative commitment of Town open space funds at the June meeting.

The Commission asked questions about the project, including possible access to Birch Mill Pond, which is just off of the property, the possible value of the acquisition, which could be in the \$400-500,000 range, parking for visitors, the status of the current house on the property, and crossing of Route 153 between the parcels. Chairman Kerr polled the Commission, who were unanimously in support of this project proceeding. John Guskowski clarified that the current Town open space account balance was \$148,800, but an additional \$15,000 would be added to the account in the new fiscal year. Paul Greenberg suggested tentatively that the request to the State would be approximately \$200,000, with potentially \$125,000 coming from the Town and the balance provided by ELT.

Chairman Kerr thanked the ELT representatives and encouraged them in their progress in advance of the June meeting.

4. Old Business

a. PoCD Implementation – Next Step Priorities

Chairman Kerr asked the Commission their thoughts on priorities for implementation. Jane Siris led a discussion about the National Register of Historic Places designation for Essex Village. John Guskowski stated that much of the background work had been done in documenting the historic resources, and that a nomination could be prepared. Jane Siris and Hope Proctor volunteered to help John Guskowski with this process.

Erin Bogan asked about the status of the Nutmeg Network and high-speed data access in Essex. The Commission had a general discussion about internet availability, and John Guskowski stated he would check on the Town's data management system and priorities. Chairman Kerr asked about the Clean Energy Committee, which had morphed into the Sustainable Essex Committee, and their goals for reducing energy consumption by 20%. John Guskowski stated he would reach out to the Committee and invite them to a future meeting.

Ralph Monaco asked about the sidewalk connection between Bokum Center and Centerbrook on Westbrook Road. John Guskowski stated that survey and preliminary engineering had been done, but the road has a narrow ROW and some ledge constraints. He will invite Bob Doane to a future meeting to discuss the possibilities of a sidewalk project, which is currently behind Plains Road and River Road on the Town's priority list.

Chairman Kerr asked about Ivoryton wastewater options and on-site treatment in the village areas. John Guskowski stated that he would follow up with WPCA and First Selectman Needleman on the status of a wastewater cost estimate and current policy.

5. Report of Committees and Officers

a. Report from RiverCOG Representative

Chairman Kerr noted Sandra Childress' report of the most recent RiverCOG meeting. John Guskowski stated that the COG's regional PoCD process was slightly delayed but their consultant and staff would be visiting with each of the Town's Planning Commission to coordinate goals.

b. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

George Sexton reported that as of yet, the Town had not lost any businesses to the COVID-19 crisis. The Town's reopen advisory committee would be assisting with business reopening starting May 20, and several restaurants would be implementing outdoor dining. He noted, in response to a question from Jane Siris, that construction was underway for the residential development at Spencer's Corner.

c. Planner's Report

John Guskowski reported on the update to the Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan and noted the poll posted on the Town Planning web page. He discussed the bridge condition assessments that CME's bridge team was assisting with, and reported that he had been coordinating with the Zoning and Public Health directors on outdoor dining regulation and permitting.

6. Correspondence & Invoices

There were no items of correspondence or invoices.

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Ralph Monaco, **seconded** by Hope Proctor. **Motion carried unanimously.** Meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



John Guskowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
03/15 2020 at 3:55 pm
James M. Rogie
ESSEX, CT - ASSIST. TOWN CLERK