



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, June 11, 2020

7:30 p.m.

Meeting Held Via GoToMeeting Video Conference

Meeting Recording:

<https://transcripts.gotomeeting.com/#!/s/e8569a88572f17000cf08ff033b24b548974ddfb325ebac9206ca409aefc5b30>

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, Ralph Monaco, and Erin Bogan. Seated for Member Gary Riggio was Alternate Jane Siris. Also in attendance were Alternate Hope Proctor, Planner John Guszowski and members of the Essex Land Trust, members of the Sustainable Essex Committee, and Town Engineer Bob Doane.

2. Approval of Minutes – May 14, 2020 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve minutes of May 14, 2020 by George Sexton, seconded by Janè Siris. Motion carried unanimously.

3. New Business

a. Request for Support on Property Acquisition Process – Essex Land Trust

Chet Arnold and Bob Nussbaum from the Essex Land Trust updated the Commission on their pursuit of acquisition and preparation of the Higgins property along the Essex/Westbrook line on Route 153. Since the May meeting, there had been no substantive progress made in negotiation for acquisition, and the owners of the property are still considering their options. Chet Arnold was uncertain if the Land Trust would be able to move negotiations forward enough in advance of the DEEP Open Space grant application

deadline, but asked if the Planning Commission would be willing to provide a letter of support regardless. The Commission reiterated their support for the project.

John Guskowski noted that he had a brief conversation with the executor of the Higgins estate and discussed the process of dividing the property among heirs, if that was the desired pathway.

Motion to provide a general letter of support to the Essex Land Trust for the efforts to acquire and preserve the Higgins property by Jane Siris, seconded by Ralph Monaco. Motion carried unanimously.

b. Discussion of Priorities with Sustainable CT Committee

Stacy Abbott and Michael Long from the Sustainable Essex Committee discussed their progress with the Planning Commission, including receiving Bronze Certification from Sustainable CT in the fall, and planned to seek Silver Certification this year. They have been making measurable progress in developing a methodology to measure solid waste volumes, so that they can track future progress in reducing solid waste volumes, increasing recycling, and reducing town energy consumption. They are seeking to fund the installation of a dual Electric Vehicle (EV) charging station, which is approximately \$14,000, which could be cost-shared via an "IOBY" (In Our Back Yard) matching grant. The proposed locations were behind the Post Office in Essex Village; in the Town Hall parking lot; or in the public parking lot at the Ivoryton Park adjacent to the Playhouse. The Commission discussed the merits of each location, and came to a general consensus that the charging stations were targeted to Town visitors and should thus be located in higher tourist or visitor destinations. The Post Office lot and Ivoryton lot were prioritized. The Commissioners also suggested reaching out to larger property owners like Essex Station, Valley Railroad, Industrial Park owners, or Essex Meadows to encourage additional EV charging stations.

Michael Long described an ongoing series of public presentations and educational lectures that was organized by Sustainable Essex, including sessions on plastics recycling, household waste reduction, and Long Island Sound water quality. More sessions were planned, and the Committee welcomed input on potential future speakers or areas of focus. Chairman Kerr expressed interest and support for programs on solid waste reduction.

John Guskowski asked the Committee if there were specific areas of focus where they hoped to achieve additional points to count toward Silver Certification. Stacy Abbott discussed Section 4, dealing with Sustainable planning and resilience planning. She requested the Commission's assistance in reviewing the criteria and action steps to identify any tasks already completed or easily achieved. John Guskowski asked about the social equity tasks of the Committee, and Stacy Abbott discussed the engagement of an "equity coach" provided by Sustainable CT and how they were seeking to reach out to marginalized populations to help determine needs. Hope Proctor asked about solar installation on Town properties, and Stacy Abbott said that the Town's relatively few properties had been assessed, and Essex Elementary School was really the only town building suitable for a larger installation, which had been accomplished. Municipal energy usage has been reduced by 13%.

Chairman Kerr thanked the Committee members and pledged the Commission's support in assisting with documentation of Planning tasks for the next round of certification.

c. Westbrook Road Sidewalk Discussion with Bob Doane

Town Engineer Bob Doane provided an overview of the possibilities and challenges of installing a new sidewalk on Westbrook Road between Centerbrook and Bokum. This is an approximately 4200 linear feet corridor with an inconsistent ROW width and some property-line, topographic, wetlands and ledge issues. The east side of the road would be more amenable to a sidewalk of 4-5' in width, but the combined challenges made it a complex and expensive project, which is why it had not moved forward. John Guskowski discussed the relative sidewalk priorities, which included Plains Road (currently slated for funding), Westbrook Road, and River Road. Jane Siris discussed the value of sidewalks relative to other funding priorities around Town. Bob Doane and the Commission discussed the safety concerns for pedestrians on Westbrook Road, which has poor sight lines and higher travel speeds. John Guskowski discussed the overall goals for community connectivity between Villages. Erin Bogan raised the possibility of an alternative connector along a ROW between the Essex Station apartments and Essex Savings Bank that leads into the Industrial Park. Chairman Kerr stated that the Commission should be actively involved with establishing a more defined list of priority projects for funding.

d. Wastewater Management Update – First Selectman Needleman

Chairman Kerr noted that both First Selectman Needleman and Health Director Lisa Fasulo had been unable to attend this evening's Commission meeting, but would attend an upcoming meeting to provide updates. John Guskowski read an email from the First Selectman about the Town addressing the most significant outstanding septic issues, including at the Griswold Inn and the Ivoryton Center properties. The Town was not under any consent orders, and had absorbed the function and authority of the former WPCA into the Board of Selectmen. Chairman Kerr stated that this discussion would be tabled for the time being.

4. Old Business

a. PoCD Implementation – Next Step Priorities

Chairman Kerr stated that Commission would review the Sustainable Essex spreadsheet of tasks, focusing on Category 4 regarding sustainable planning and would make recommendations. The discussion of wastewater system expansion would be tabled until the First Selectman and Health Director were available to participate.

5. Report of Committees and Officers

a. Report from RiverCOG Representative

Chairman Kerr noted Sandra Childress' report of the most recent RiverCOG meeting, which included updates on the construction slated for the Haddam Swing Bridge and the Village of Tylerville, as well as progress on the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development.

RiverCOG was seeking a combined meeting of the Essex, Chester, and Deep River Planning Commissions in August to coordinate goals.

b. Report from Economic Development Commission Representative

George Sexton reported that the EDC had not met in the past month, but noted that the construction of apartments at Spencer's Corner had begun; the Serene Kitchen has opened on Essex Island; that Black Jack's restaurant would be closed until September or October; and that the pottery studio on North Main Street became the first business casualty of the COVID shutdown.

c. Planner's Report

John Guszowski reported on the update to the Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan, for which the first draft should be available soon; that Spencer's Corner progress is underway but that the HOPE Partnership is looking for assistance for several external projects, including parking lot reconstruction, lighting, and sidewalks; the potential Regional PoCD coordination with Deep River and Chester; the potential merger with the Zoning Commission; and the research into the Essex Village National Register of Historic Places project. Finally, he reported on some of the statewide zoning and social equity conversations that were taking place and how they might become a series of legislative proposals.

6. Correspondence & Invoices

There were no items of correspondence or invoices.

7. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Hope Proctor, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.** Meeting was adjourned at 9:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



John Guszowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
06/15/2020 at 9:45
James M. Rogiet
ESSEX, CT - ASSIST. TOWN CLERK
A.M.