

CONSERVATION & TRAILS COMMITTEE (CTC)
Essex Town Office, 81 Main Street, Essex Junction, Vermont

Approved Minutes Tuesday 10/11/2022

Attending: Alan Botula, Chair; Shannon Jackson, Ken Signorello, Steve Dowd, Rusty Brink, Betsy Dunn; Clerk, Darren Schibler, Staff Support; Chuck Vile Tree Warden

Absent: Mike Spaeder Vice Chair, Lauren Gaffney Cohen, Erin DeVries

Members of the public: Jean MacBride Essex Reporter

Meeting called to order at 6:38 by Alan Botula

Agenda Item 1. Public Comment

No comments

Agenda Item 2. Agenda changes or approval

Ken made a motion to move agenda item 5 Development Review to number 4 Shannon 2nd that with an amendment to make the change permanent. Discussion for the rational was often we aren't able to get to the development review section. Vote was 6/0 in favor

Ken made another motion to recognize a public official. Rusty 2nd it Voted was 6/0 in favor Darren spoke about his new position with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. He said it was a very hard decision to make. The members of the committee spoke about what he has meant to them to have his leadership. We had some cake to celebrate with him.

Agenda Item 3. Short Items

1. **Minutes** of the 9/13. Were reviewed and approved 6/0. Thanks to Steve Dowd for taking the minutes.
2. **Fall Clean up debrief:** Shannon was lead on this We had 34 people there to help with the project. A great turn out! There were boy scouts with their leader , People from the Essex Rotary, and others that had heard about the project from poster and social media and brought their families to help out. We pulled more Buckthorn and traversed the brook and cut back limbs that were hanging over the trails. It was very successful. We are hoping to include more trails in Essex next year.
3. **Trail Mapping:** Darren put up the List of trails. We all chose trails we were interested in. We were encouraged to pick 1-2 the listing is updated in the google drive. The goal is to have a description of each trail with the corresponding map for the public. In the trail description include parking access, photos, season concerns,

degree of difficulty and types of activities that can occur on the individual trail. And how accessible it is for the handicapped.

4. **Town Plan work group.** Ken and Alan are serving on this subcommittee of the Planning commission. This group is looking to see what is lacking in the current Town Plan and needs to be added to the town Plan for 2024. They are asking each committee or commission to bring 5-7 priorities back to their next meeting. Currently our Town plan does not comply with Act 171 passed in 2016 by the legislature. Betsy we need to find ways to conserve and protect our forests, connectivity and our watershed. Instead of fragmenting our forest use the sewer core that has plenty of room for development and growth. Alan said we need to have a robust public outreach on this topic. Face to face meetings with HOAs. Ken wants to find sites around town for these meetings to facilitate people attending the meetings. Find out what the residents value in the town. For instance, do they like the schools, library, recreation availability. Do they value having our forests and trails? What would they like to have in town that is not currently offered. Once these meeting have occurred make a listing of 5-7 priorities and present them for the work group.

Agenda Item 4. Development Review

1. **22 Corporate Drive.** This is in the Saxon Hill section of town Darren presented the project. It this area is considered a light industrial site. The area of development is at the end of the cul-de-sac. They are altering the current warehouse size. there are a few issues for our committee. They need a sidewalk on the south portion of the street They have agreed to this. Betsy also asked about the light pollution. They will use downward focused lighting, shrouded lighting, maximum illumination to be safe and use LEDs. Betsy asked if the lights could be motion sensitive to decrease use of electricity as well reduce light pollution. Ken asked about the landscaping. It was noted that the parking lot has more than 20 spaces which meets the criteria for a landscape island. Ken asked about Stormwater runoff. It was explained that they are mitigating this with a swail and drainage into a large wet land. Darren will follow-up on that.
2. **Essex Way Event Center.** The Inn At Essex is building an Event Center mainly for weddings. They are putting in more landscaping and taking out a current road. Betsy asked if they are doing any sound abatement. Especially with the senior homes adjacent to the proposed building. Darren said that sound might be an issue with the Woodland Homes section on Essex way. He will check with the builder.

Agenda Item 5 Planning

1. **Zoning and Subdivision.** The Planning commission would like all the committees to review the changes that they are considering. Darren did a walk-through of the changes. They are considering changing the PUD zoning. This for new development primarily. Some of the changes are dictated by New state laws and a need to clean

- up a large list of technical corrections. It will promote infill housing in areas designated for growth. From a conservation perspective Special planning and new developments have an increase to a minimum of 6 units. This will create more flexibility with lot sizes, smart growth. It's an incentive-based program. It will protect open spaces, setbacks, clustering, and more efficiencies.
2. **PUD-1** . They would like to allow firewood processing. this change will also affect utilities such as natural gas, water/sewer, electricity. It will allow congregate housing as conditional use. (Where there is a shared kitchen and dining room) this will affect transitional housing, group homes, senior living, mobile homes. It will give builders more flexibility in how they build. They will have to meet density requirements.
 3. **Farm and open lands Contract.** Darren explained that this is basically a tax stabilization program. It is very much like the state's Current use program. To be enrolled in either program you must have 25 acres or more, not including the homestead It is an incentive for residents with forest or farmlands not to develop the land. There is a 50% reduction of their town taxes if they are enrolled. Currently there are only 9 enrolled in the program. Plus, the town is not currently checking on compliance. Unlike the Current use program, they do not have to log to be in the programs long as they are working to ecologically conserving the land. Also, in the current use program if they sell the land, there is a large penalty. In our program if they desire to sell the town gets first dibs on purchasing it. Ken thought we might be able to retailer the program. Thinking about one of the articles in the reading file, regarding how to feed the residents, maybe we could use the land for farming. Betsy asked of we could change the amount of land required to be in the program. The state has a 25-acre minimum. Maybe we could change ours to 10-25 acres. This might get more landowners into the program and have land that would not be developed. We would need to incentivize the program such as: if you actively farm the land or do something to mitigate stormwater. Or allow the town to have an easement so that we can connect two separate trails. This would have to go to the Assessor and Chittenden County Forester for a review and if they agreed to the Selectboard for consideration. Ken wanted to know if you can be in both programs
 4. **Work Plan review.** We reviewed the projects that are dormant and realigned the spreadsheet. They are now grayed out. Those we are currently working on were reprioritized. Steve is very concerned about the water quality of Indian Brook. That we have cyanobacteria in the water this late in the season seems very odd. Betsy also asked about Talc levels. The reason for the request is that Talc is a contributing factor in Breast cancer. Could that be included in the assessment? Next month Erin is due to present a plan for the committee on water quality. We all I feel that the Adopt-A-Tree program is completed. But the execution is not. We still must enroll residents into the program. Alan and Steve are making stakes and signs to make the public more aware. Steve said he has talked with the Essex CTE program on forestry, and they can supply us with 20 trees per year. The issues are of irrigation and continued watering during the summer months that students are not engaged in the program. Please check the spreadsheet to see the realignment.

Agenda Item 6. Reading file

- 1. Member comments. Act 179.** Will allow more flexibility in housing. Currently in town centers apartments can be 2 bedrooms. With this change, they can be up to 4 bedrooms.

Landscaping standards. Essex Street tree master plan is not up to date. Betsy asked if there a minimum size for a green belt? There is no standard in Essex when we were assessing the trees for removal in Essex last winter Chuck and I found many that were not a size that promoted healthy growth of our street trees. Darren thought having the trees not in the green belt was probably the right choice. It would provide shade to the sidewalks. Ken thought with a wider berm(green belt) the trees would be in the right of way and the cooling would be for the road way. Also having the sidewalk further from the road would make it easier for the road to be cleared and have no impact on the sidewalk cleaning. And obviously make the growth of the trees better. A lively discussion followed. The final question became: Does a road need to be 30 feet of pavement? This will have to go to the Selectboard. With 12 foot lanes and 10 feet for the berms would be good for everyone. We need to consult with public works.

- 2.** Rusty asked for a list of potential donors to the conservation fund

Motion to adjourn at 8:43 vote 6/0 in favor