

TOWN OF ESSEX
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
August 11, 2022

Note: *This meeting was in-person and virtual on Teams.

PLANNING COMMISSION (PC) PRESENT:

VIRTUAL: Josh Knox, Vice-Chair & Acting Chair; Dustin Bruso, PC Chair (arrived at approximately 6:10 p.m.); and Tom Furland

IN PERSON: Jonathan Schumacher; and Patty Davis

OTHERS PRESENT:

IN PERSON: Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; Sharon Kelley, Zoning Administrator; and Paula Duke.

VIRTUAL: None.

The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. Acting Chair Knox informed the PC that Chairman Bruso had a work issue arise and that he would be in attendance as soon as possible. Knox ran the meeting and called out who was present virtually and in the room.

Election of Officers & Approval of PC Operating Procedures: Continued to next meeting when all Commissioners were present.

AGENDA ITEM 1: Public Comments: None.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Discussion: Proposed Draft Zoning & Subdivision Regulation Changes

Katherine Sonnick noted that the packets had Zoning & Subdivision proposed amendments, including a summary of changes, which makes it helpful to the PC as it shows where in the documents the proposed changes are located. Staff noted that some of the changes result from statutory requirements as well as maintaining a 'List for Future Amendments'.

Staff and the PC walked through some of the changes and discussed why some of the changes occurred. An example used was the Planned Unit Development Section was returned to require a minimum of 6 lots versus the existing 2 lot minimum; and it was noted that a section was added to the 'Violation and Enforcement' section which allows the zoning administrator to reject new permits or applications if there are outstanding violations.

Staff asked the PC if they had a chance to review the proposed changes and if they had a concern with the proposed changes. Each Commissioner stated that they did their review and were generally in support of the changes. Commissioner Davis did not understand what 'Essential Services' covered. Staff read the definition located in the Zoning Regulations and advised that often times the definitions come in very helpful. Commissioner Davis did not understand why the ETC|NEXT Plan did not address things such as sewer, water and trees along Route 15. Acting Chair Knox stated that the Plan was a visionary document and not a regulation. Also, he proposed using the language "Better Connected and More Cohesive" for the ETC|NEXT Plan, as that is the goal the PC continues to try to achieve. The PC and staff explained the process to

Commissioner Davis on the water/sewer, etc. Discussions continued with regard to the proposed changes, without major concerns.

Acting Chair Knox & Chairman Bruso stated that they would like to change the process and not go directly to a Public Hearing, rather bring the documents to the Working Groups. They believed this would “jump start” the Working Groups on collaboration and physically give each group an opportunity to review and provide their own recommendations on the documents. It was noted that even if the Groups did not provide feedback, it was an opportunity to get more people from each group, and their followers, to become aware of the proposed changes to the Regulations.

A time limit was discussed for the Working Groups to provide its comments back to the PC. It was determined that the PC would have another workshop for its October 27, 2022 meeting, noting that if it was determined more time was needed for the Working Groups, the PC could reassess at that meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Minutes 8/11/2022:

Commissioner Schumacher MOVED and Commissioner Davis SECONDED a MOTION to approve the 7/28/2022 minutes as written. The MOTION passed 5-0.

AGENDA ITEM 7: Other Business

Acting Chairman Knox noted that it was time to turn its attention to the update to the 2024 Town Plan and suggested a discussion occur at the next PC Planning meeting. He would also like to receive the Working Group comments.

Katherine Sonnick informed the PC that they had a meeting today with Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), as they were awarded the ByLaw Modernization Grant, which attempts to see how to obtain more density for the ETC|NEXT area. Sonnick noted that PW Director Aaron Martin, and Shannon Lunderville, GIS Coordinator was also in the meeting. Sonnick expects to have materials to the PC for its November meeting.

Commissioner Davis asked why the Town did not have an official map. Chairman Bruso noted that we have an official Zoning Map. Davis had more questions regarding planning elements. Sonnick noted that staff welcomes her questions and noted our door is always open.

The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION

By: _____
Dustin R. Bruso, Chair