

TOWN OF ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES
June 22, 2023

PLANNING COMMISSION (PC) PRESENT:

IN PERSON: Dustin Bruso, Chair; and Johnathan Schumacher.

VIRTUAL: Joshua Knox, Vice-Chair.

OTHERS PRESENT:

IN PERSON: Sharon Kelley, Zoning Administrator; Kent Johnson, Planner; Paula Duke; Al Senecal; Nicole Senecal; Margaret Smith; Ken Signorello; Niels Giddins; Betsy Dunn; Steve Dowd; Salley Fleury; Mike Peterson; John Larkin; and Community T.V.

VIRTUAL: Sharon Irene; 802-495-1655 (unidentifiable); Irene Wrenner; Gina Halpin Barrett; Lorraine Zaloom; Patty Davis; Rachel Lizotte; and Dawn Hill Fleury.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Chairman Bruso noted that there was not a quorum as only 3 Commissioners were in attendance, however only discussions could go forward. Bruso informed the people in attendance that they may be missing out on some of the discussion points as charts were up in the room for the public to write down thoughts/ideas and encouraged them to come to events, such as this, in the future as it may be more beneficial for everyone. Bruso noted that Vice-Chair Knox would start off the discussions and Planner, Kent Johnson would facilitate the discussions.

Vice-Chair Knox noted that tonight's purpose was a "Listening Session" so that the Planning Commission (PC) could hear public ideas and suggestions, as well as enjoy some pizza. Knox stated that the PC had several working groups this past winter to work on the Draft Town Plan and the PC was proposing to frame the RPD-I discussions in the same way. He noted that at the last two meetings, the PC heard the following concerns from a few citizens regarding the RPD-I District and the working groups would focus on the following points:

1. Noise, traffic, buffer.
2. Recreation lands, trails and nature of the area.
3. Industrial Impact/Economic Impact.
4. Miscellaneous.

Kent Johnson noted that some members of the Economic Development Commission and the Trails/Conservation Committee were present and asked if this should be the starting point. It was decided to seek their comments during the event and at the end. Johnson added a 5th category to include "Favorite Things".

Sally Fleury noted that citizens refer to the RPD-I zone as "Saxon Hill".

A discussion ensued amongst the attendees, both in the room and virtually, about specific concerns each person had with the RPD-I zone. Johnson stated that all the comments were good and asked the attendees to document their concerns, in a few words, on the sheets on the back wall, noting that each sheet had its own items listed. Kent asked that the people online write their comments in the chat and staff would capture those comments.

The comments included the following:

RPD-I Favorite Things:

- The hill area (90 acres)
- Mountain bike trails
- Walking trails
- Quiet neighborhoods nearby
- Trees
- Buffers (100' and 200' ones)
- The IBM site is a good example of appropriate (visual?) design
- Convenient location
- XC skiing
- Future of the sand extraction area is a good opportunity for improvements
- Natural habitat
- Active forestry generates income
- VAST trails
- Saxon Hill Park
- Ponds
- Wildlife
- Like the citizen involvement
- Corporate drive, business is a good fit
- History (important, interesting?)
- Solar panels
- The RPD-I's aspirational original goals
- Economic potential related to trails

Noise/Traffic/Buffer

- Increasing truck traffic, esp. large trucks – noise, pollution, dust. Also, safety concern of this traffic so close to Sand Hill Park where children go
- The roads are not designed for the large semi-trucks
- Traffic increase
- Air/noise/water pollution
- New roads need to be built to Town standards – designed to handle increased traffic
- Buffers in this zone are larger than any other in Town Plan
- Pedestrian-friendly ways to avoid heavy traffic (like year-round cleared paths along Allen Martin PKWY and serving residents along RT 15)
- Traffic signals are needed at RT 15 & Sand Hill and at RT 15 and Allen Martin (Maybe in the works ... Kent will look into it)

Recreation/Trails/Land Management

- Adventure Park – Mountain Biking
- Open park
- Keep all of the trails
- Thoroughly crafted bike trails involve public investment in maintenance and development
- Since the conserved land has been turned over to the Town recreation has increased for the good of the community

- 95 - Because of ethical development the Town has benefitted from a place for recreation
- 96 - Use as part of a designated trail system from Essex to Jericho, etc. (to cross-Vermont rail
- 97 trail)
- 98 - Thoughtful and professional forest and reforestation management
- 99 - Improve signage (Kent added also online maps)
- 100 - Ensure that attention to wildlife corridors is increased and maintained

101 **Industrial Uses/Economic Impact**

- 102 - The conserved area is too large. Exactly what are we conserving? The area is not
- 103 particularly beautiful. We need to focus on other areas in the Town.
- 104 - If we get the park, a brewery across the street, at a built in easement for the trail that goes
- 105 to the VAST trails
- 106 - Industrial development and uses have increased the tax base for the Town
- 107 - If potential businesses are forced to relocate in other towns because uses are not
- 108 allowed this has a negative economic impact on all the citizens of Essex

109 **Miscellaneous**

- 110 - Air pollution from diesel trucks
- 111 - Solar panels on all flat roofs
- 112 - Better landscaping in front of all buildings
- 113 - Ethical development with the combination of conserved lands and increasing the potential
- 114 uses can benefit the citizens economically and the natural environment
- 115 - No truck idling, esp. at night
- 116 - Road design standards, older roads might not meet current (or future) needs

117 Chairman Bruso thanks everyone for their participation and informed the audience that Town
118 Plan discussions were ongoing, which will include the RPD-I zone. Bruso stated that this may
119 or may not result in changes to the zoning regulations.

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121 The meeting adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

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PLANNING COMMISSION

By: _____
Dustin R. Bruso, Chair