

ESSEX TOWN PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES
OCTOBER 26, 2023

PLANNING COMMISSION (PC) PRESENT:

IN PERSON: Dustin Bruso, Chair; Johnathan Schumacher; Georgia Lavigne; and Alternate Paula Duke, voting member for this meeting.

VIRTUAL: Joshua Knox, Vice-Chair.

OTHERS PRESENT:

IN PERSON: Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; and Kent Johnson, Planner.

VIRTUAL: Sharon Kelley, Zoning Administrator; Dawn Hill-Fleury; Gina Halpin Barrett; Lorraine ZaLoom; and Ken Signorello.

Chairman Bruso called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m., noting the Commissioners in the room and that Vice-Chair Knox was in attendance via Zoom; and that no one from the public was present in the room.

AGENDA ITEM 1. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES: Chairman Bruso confirmed with staff that there were no changes to the Agenda.

Chairman Bruso MOVED and Commissioner Schumacher SECONDED a Motion to accept the Agenda. The MOTION passed 5-0.

AGENDA ITEM 2: PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Lorraine ZaLoom expressed her concern about struggles of single mothers, etc, who cannot afford to buy a home due to the amount of check money they bring into the household. She questioned if Essex was going to quantify rent-to-own. She was happy for Paula Duke who was appointed Alternate Planning Commissioner. Chairman Bruso noted that Paula would be a voting member for this meeting as Commissioners were absent.

Ken Signorello thanked the Community Development Director for his attendance at the Chittenden County Management Conference and stated it was “an eye opener” and wished the PC members could have attended.

AGENDA ITEM 3: TOWN PLAN WORKSHOP: Katherine Sonnick noted the areas that changed in the Draft Town Plan that resulted from the previous PC workshop. Sonnick noted the changes that the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) requested be made to the Plan so that the Draft was in-line with its ECHO Plan. Sonnick suggested that if the Town were to obtain a ‘Town Center’ designation from the state and change from ‘Metro’ to even a higher density, maybe the CCRPC would consider changing its Plan.

The Chapters under review are as follows:

Introduction.

Chapter 1- The Action Plan.

Chapter 2- Essex as a Community.

Chapter 3- How we Relate to the Land.

Chapter 4- Serving the Community.

Chairman Bruso asked if there were plans for a housing study. Kent Johnson replied yes, it is on the Housing Commission's workplan for next year. He stated that they would be looking at a housing mix and compare with income so that they can target changes.

Chairman Bruso asked Lorraine ZaLoom if this was what she had in mind for the study. Zaloom stated that she was hoping they quantify the numbers as she keeps hearing, over and over, "people can't afford to live here." Chairman Bruso confirmed this was an action item in the Draft Plan.

Chairman Bruso asked the PC if they were satisfied with the changes and move the document to a public hearing. Sonnick noted that the document has been warned for a public hearing and before they move the document to the Selectboard, she will need to provide the Selectboard with a presentation of the Plan.

AGENDA ITEM 4: APPROVE 2024 TOWN PLAN DRAFT FOR PLANNING COMMISSION PUBLIC HEARING:

Commissioner Schumacher MOVED and Alternate Commissioner Duke SECONDED a MOTION to move the Draft Town Plan for a Public Hearing with the Planning Commission. The MOTION passed 5-0.

Chairman Bruso asked for the Public Hearing target date. Sonnick replied November 16, 2023.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Approval of Minutes September 28, 2023:

Alternate Commissioner Duke MOVED and Commissioner Schumacher SECONDED a Motion to approve the September 28, 2023 minutes with the following change:

Lines 104-105: Change to read, "Vice-Chair Knox agreed to edit the Education section of the Draft Plan as it read too boisterous." **The MOTION passed 5-0.**

Alternate Commissioner Duke MOVED and Commissioner Lavigne SECONDED a Motion to approve the October 12, 2023 minutes as written. The MOTION passed 5-0.

6. OTHER BUSINESS:

A brief discussion took place on the timing of starting another round of zoning updates. This resulted from changes the State adopted as a result of Act 47. It was agreed to start workshops on this matter in January or February of 2024. Chairman Bruso stated that staff will control the timeline on when to start the new round of amendments.

The meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION

By: _____
Dustin R. Bruso, Chair