TOWN OF ESSEX
81 MAIN STREET CONFERENCE ROOM
PLANNING COMMISSION
DRAFT MINUTES
JANUARY 9, 2025

PLANNING COMMISSION (PC) PRESENT IN ROOM: Joshua Knox, Chair; Georgia Lavigne, Vice-Chair; Jonathan Schumacher, Clerk; Ian Carroll; and Dustin Bruso.
PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDING VIRTUALLY: Trefor Williams.
PC ABSENT: Paula Duke.

STAFF PRESENT IN ROOM: Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; and Sharon Kelley, Zoning Administrator.

OTHERS PRESENT IN ROOM: Chris Gendron, Consultant; Gail Henderson-King, Consultant; Irene Wrenner; Lisa Goodrich; and Andrew Seaver.

OTHERS VIRTUALLY: Kent Johnson, Planner; Tom Yandow; David Goodrich; Tabrena Karish.

AGENDA ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER: The meeting came to order at 6:05 p.m. Chairman Bruso immediately resigned his position as Chair, citing that as it is a new year with a new mission.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Commissioner Bruso turned the gavel over to Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director, who immediately asked for nominations. As the Vice-Chair and Clerk may be interested in the other positions, it was decided to re-elect the entire slate of officers. Joshua Knox and Georgia Lavigne resigned their positions as Vice-Chair and Clerk, respectively.

Commissioner Bruso nominated Joshua Knox as Chair, Georgia Lavigne as Vice-Chair and Jonathan Schumacher as Clerk. The PC approved the nominations 6-0.

AGENDA ITEM 3. ADDITIONS/ CHANGES: Katherine Sonnick noted that there will not be an Executive Session as noted as #11 on the Agenda.

AGENDA ITEM 4: APPROVE AGENDA: Chairman Knox Moved and Vice Chair Lavigne Seconded a Motion to approve the agenda with the changes previously noted. The Motion passed 6-0.

AGENDA ITEM 5: PUBLIC TO BE HEARD FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA: None.

AGENDA ITEM 6: PRESENTATION-80-90 UPPER MAIN STREET PREFERRED MASTER PLAN:

Consultants Chris Gendron of Stantec and Gail Henderson King, Architect, displayed the most preferred Master Plan proposal for the Town Center to be located at 80/90

Upper Main Street. Gendron stated in 2023 the Town purchased two lots containing 32-acres, of which 15 to 16-acres are developable. The goal is to accommodate a new Town Center to include a town hall, library, fire station, community center and recreation lands. Some lands are also proposed to be sold for residential housing. Gendron noted the most updated proposal resulted from several meetings, including the Selectboard, PC, staff members, committee members and the public.
As a result, the plan being discussed was the most favorable as it contains “lots of greenspace” and a recreation field, which was very favorable. Gendron pointed out that they still need to plan for with regards to stormwater treatment.

Gendron noted that the proposal included two round-abouts, which was discussed with the State. Gendron reported that the State believes the round-abouts will work. Commissioner Carroll asked if round abouts would back up traffic. Gendron stated that a traffic study will be one of the next steps. Commissioner Williams stated that round-abouts are supposed to be more sufficient. Sonnick stated that VTrans felt a round -bout would work. Commissioner Bruso stated that if there is no traffic light, it will not allow for pooling of traffic and vehicles will not be able to get out of side streets. Commissioner Williams stated that the existing lights are not coordinated and if this were done, traffic would be more efficient.

Lisa Goodrick asked if the library would have an elevator. Gendron replied that all buildings will have an elevator.

Lynn Smith stated that handicap access is near and dear to her as she has a handicapped child. She felt a 3-building concept, with multi-uses within, “is a nightmare for the handicapped.” She noted that the High School does not even have a handicap curbcut. Smith asked if the buildings could connect with a covered walkway as it takes a lot of work to put coats on to go from Building A to Building B.

Gendron noted one area on the plan that shows 100 parking spaces, and that parking would be allowed on the street. Katherine Sonnick noted that the proposed soccer field would not be full size.

Commissioner Schumacher is in concurrence with others, more parking is needed. A brief discussion ensued regarding parking garages.

Commissioner Carroll asked if parcels to be sold could be shrunk down to allow for additional parking. He also questioned the purchase of the house across Route 15. S. Kelley noted that building was on a footprint lot only.

Irene Wrenner noted that the State has had problems with salting underground parking garages and the repair costs have been detrimental.

Andrew Seaver stated that issue with a parking garage is dependent on the contractor, noting that some existing underground garages have been built wrong. Seaver noted that the Essex Senior Housing was built on a slab and they don't have the same kind of issues with the underground parking.

Gendron noted that a challenge is that the area is not flat. Commissioner Bruso questioned why propose a use if there are concerns due to limitations.''

Gendron discussed Phasing, noted that the 'blue' phase is the 1st step of development, including roadway, landscape, utilities, and stormwater. The Orange phase is for a private developer and the 'red' phase is a private developer for parks and recreation. Commissioner Bruso stated that parking needs to be considered in all phases.

Stantec is to refine the 80-90 Upper Main Street project plans based on feedback, including addressing parking concerns and accessibility issues.

Planning Commission members were reminded to attend the public open house for the 80-90 Upper Main Street project on Wednesday, January 15th between 5-8 PM.

<u>AGENDA ITEM 7: REVIEW AND APPROVE OPERATNG PROCEDURES</u>:

A brief discussion ensued regarding Section VI(B) of the Operating Procedures wherein it allows a member to participate by video conference. Commissioner Bruso stated that all members should be required to always keep themselves on video or allow a member to provide a reason as to why they are unable to do so. He suggested they strike the allowance of a commissioner attending via telephone. The Commission also determined that the public should only be on camera when they are making a comment. After discussions, the Commission agreed.

Commissioner Williams

They also deliberated on the conflict-of-interest policy, deciding to strike the term "perceived" and replace it with "potential" to clarify the disclosure process. The revised operating procedures were then adopted with a unanimous vote. The conversation ended with plans to continue discussing the work plan in its next session.

Commissioner Bruso Moved and Commissioner Carroll Seconded to approve the Operating Procedures with the following change:

Line 118:
Line 396: delete "conflict or perceived" and replace with "potential".

<u>AGENDA ITEM 8: DISCUSSION-WORK PLAN</u>:

Katherine Sonnick reported some of the topic for the upcoming Work Plan include:

- Regional Planning Commission to present on the future land use map at the next

Planning Commission meeting in February.

- Planning Commission to begin work on zoning updates, including changes related to Act 47 and Act 81 (forest block and habitat connection), child care, and other small modifications.
- The team is preparing for the implementation of Act 250, which involves updating the ecosystem plan and land use map.
- The Energy Committee is working on an updated energy plan.
- Consideration of implementing an official map to guide future development.
- Planning for the future of 80-90 Upper Main Street. Consideration to change zoning regulations to allow for a correctional facility in other districts wherein the State owns lands.

AGENDA ITEM 9: MINUTES: DECEMBER 12, 2024

Commissioner Bruso Moved and Commissioner Schumacher Seconded a Motion to approve the minutes with a grammatical change. The Motion passed 6-0.

AGENDA ITEM 10: OTHER BUSINESS

The Planning Commission was reminded to attend the public open house for the 80-90 Upper Main Street project on Wednesday, January 15th, between 5-8 PM.

Katherine Sonnick encouraged the PC to attend Town Meeting and be available at the table set up for Planning & Zoning prior to the meeting. Sonnick also asked that the PC send her ideas for the table.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD

By: ______________________________

Joshua Knox, Chair