

**TOWN OF ESSEX
81 MAIN STREET CONFERENCE ROOM
PLANNING COMMISSION
DRAFT MINUTES
APRIL 10, 2025**

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

PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDING VIRTUALLY: None.

PC ABSENT: Dustin Brusio.

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

OTHERS PRESENT IN ROOM: Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Charlie Cole, Fire Chief; Colleen Ballard, Executive Director Essex Rescue; David Skopin; Lois Whitmore; Marybeth Redmond; Joe & Diane Percy; Robert Lalancette; Andrew Seaver; Chris Lundbert; and Duane Millar Barlow.

OTHERS VIRTUALLY: Cheryl ?; Sharon Zukowski; Rory ?; Patty Davis; Lisa Goodrich; and EM?

AGENDA ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Knox called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ADDITIONS/ CHANGES: None.

AGENDA ITEM 3: APPROVE AGENDA: Board Member Duke Moved and Board Member Carroll Seconded a Motion to approve the agenda. The Motion passed 6-0.

AGENDA ITEM 4: PUBLIC TO BE HEARD FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA:
David Skopin, 11 Skyline Drive, Essex, VT, was reviewing the zoning regulations to determine who is an "interested person" when applications are reviewed. He asked about the appeal process and how early the Board can deny a development application. He stated that the PC was given the task of regulations to provide a safety net by looking at the regulations and tightening them up.

AGENDA ITEM 5: BUSINESS ITEMS:

Item 5a: **Women's Correctional Facility – Town Services Input**

Fire Chief Charlie Cole, Police Chief Ron Hoague and Colleen Ballard, Executive Director (ED) of Essex Rescue provided their thoughts, comments and questions about allowing a correctional facility in Essex. It is reported that they were still in the fact-finding portion as they are still waiting for answers to previous questions asked and presented to the state.

PD Chief Hoague informed the PC that he does not expect a women's prison to impact the Essex PD as the State Police is tasked to investigate all state facilities. He noted that Essex PD may be tasked with serving court paperwork. He noted that during his

employment with St. Albans, he did not ever respond to the South Burlington facility. The PC asked his thoughts about security. He felt assured that the existing complex security was adequate to keep those locked up and to remain locked up for their sentence.

Colleen Ballard's initial concern was for reimbursement. She stated the South Burlington facility's reimbursement rate is at the Medicaid rate, however the State now pays full transportation fees. She reported the cost is approximately \$900.00 just to have an ambulance respond, and 300 calls were made last year. She noted that the state mentioned the new facility would have its own infirmary instead of pushing calls out to Essex Rescue and if this does not happen it will have a big impact on rescue.

Charlie Cole explained how calls and responses get dispatched, noting that the fire department goes to all emergency calls. He compared a possible correction facility to be like any commercial building occupied with residents. He was not as concerned about the lesser emergency calls as they would have a medical staff on duty, however they would be called for any trauma or emergent medical event. He noted that the Fire Department can't charge a fee and won't be funded. He has less concern with fire as the building would be fully sprinklered and the prison cells won't have cooking amenities, which makes for less likely "false alarms."

A brief discussion ensued on traffic. Chief Hoague noted that the employees would be working in shifts and estimated a total of 100-150 trips. Chief Cole noted that you will see more traffic at shift changes. He felt the facility should be on a bus route and noted that food deliveries would also add to traffic.

Planning Commissioner Duke asked if the bus routes were going to continue. Sonnick replied that bus route #10 (Essex/Williston) will continue, however the route out to Jeffersonville is gone.

Executive Director Ballard noted that Essex Rescue is always the fallback if they are not able to staff a licensed nurse.

The PC accepted public input on this discussion.

Lisa Goodrich stated that Ms. Ballard's comments mentioned her concerns and she also stated that when she spoke with a state representative, they stated they were hopeful of finding people to work. She stated that some of the issues are not about the physical environment, but rather about the working environment. She stated that men are calling themselves women and they are not able to do the same job as you can with a woman, and this would not be conducive for rehabilitation. She does not fault the State of VT to want improvements for inmates and workers.

Maybeth Redmond, 11 Marion Ave., Essex, VT, stated that her understanding was the building design concept and amenities will appeal to employees as it would be a much better environment, while noting the current facility is dismal. She noted that the re-entry program is set up more as a college dorm with a pleasant environment than the current prison.

Chris Lunberg, 135 Chapin Road, Essex, VT, noted that existing health care offices are still struggling to find staff. He understood that the system for rescue is “first comes first serve.” He asked if there is a call at the prison for a fight versus a resident having a heart attack, the prison would get priority. E.D. Ballard stated that rescue would be diverted to the more serious call.

Diane Percy, 8 Hillside Circle, Essex, VT, stated that correction personnel stated that the proposed prison stated that it would house low level offenders. She stated that she went to the state website and observed it had felony categories listed as 1, 2, 3, 4 or misdemeanors. Chief Hoague noted that it is jargon the correction department uses and that most inmates are there for felonies. He would expect a variety of offenders at the So. Burlington facility, however you don’t see women murderers as it is mostly less violent crimes. She also asked if a prison would get a tax credit from the Town, like Suzanne’s Place on Susie Wilson Road.

Chief Cole stated that he and others were not present to sell the facility and wanted people to know it would be a maximum lockdown facility. Ms. Percy again suggested that people go to the prison’s website to see the data of who is currently being held in the So. Burlington facility.

Chris Lundberg asked if a biological male who is trans would be housed in the women’s facility. Chief Hoague said, “yes.”

PC Duke asked if there was anything to prevent the state from changing its mind so that it would not be just a women’s facility. MaryBeth Redmond stated the concern remains for just a women’s facility.

Andrew Seaver, 14 Hillside Circle, Essex, VT, stated that he listened to the legislature regarding prisons and the state was supposed to answer questions the Town, one being if it made sense to put men alongside with women. He stated there was no guarantee this would not happen. He does not trust the state. He finds it frustrating that the town is chasing after the state even with zero answers to questions previously submitted. He asked the status of said replies. He asked if the state would try to bring in revenue from other prisons if the facility is not full. He asked what the guarantee is to get revenue.

Joe Percy, 8 Hillside Circle, stated that a part of the February 6th meeting had many officials from the state present. He stated that the state could buy land elsewhere in the state if Essex were to say no to the prison. He asked for confirmation about how rescue gets reimbursed for its calls.

Cheryl VE, requested that the state be asked if they will include prisoners detained by ICE.

Robert Lasalee, West Sleepy Hollow Road, Essex, VT, reviewed comments submitted from the Economic Development Commission

Item 5b: Discuss formation of working groups

The Planning Commission discusses forming working groups to address two main issues: steep slopes and buffer zones in the RPD (Rural Planned Development Industrial) area. Trevor volunteers for the steep slopes team, while Georgia and another member agree to work on buffers. The commission plans to involve other committees and community members in these groups. They discuss the importance of reviewing and potentially strengthening buffer regulations, particularly the 50-foot buffer that is often waived. Community members emphasize the need to consider residents' quality of life, environmental impacts, and the original intent of the RPD regulations. The commission agrees to check in on the working groups' progress at the next meeting.

The PC developed the following working groups:

- Team Steep Slopes to investigate regulations and best practices for steep slope development.
- Team Buffer to research the history, purpose, and potential improvements for buffer zones in the RPD-I zone.

Items 5c: CCRPC Draft Future Land Map and

Item 5d: CCRPC Draft Housing Targets/ Review Essex Targets

The discussion of the future land use map for Chittenden County focused on Essex. The map categorizes areas based on density and planned growth, with darker pink areas indicating more dense development and green areas representing forest blocks and habitat. The town needs to provide feedback on the map by mid-May.

The group also reviews housing targets set by the state, with Essex classified as a suburban town expected to accommodate 38.2% of new housing units by 2050. The discussion touches on the need for affordable housing and considerations for different demographics. Lastly, the meeting covers the tier system for Act 250 exemptions, with Essex potentially opting into Tier 1B status for certain areas, which would exempt smaller housing developments from Act 250

The Planning Commission to consider the town's capacity to handle Act 250 responsibilities if Planning Commission to consider the town's capacity to handle Act 250 responsibilities if opting for Tier 1A status.

Sonnick to seek clarification on whether Essex can opt into Tier 1B status for specific areas rather than all eligible areas and to investigate what aspects of Act 250 review are not currently covered by town regulations.

The Planning Commission to review and provide feedback on the CCRPC draft future land use map by the next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6: MINUTES: MARCH 13, 2025

Vice Chair Lavigne Moved and Commissioner Schumacher Seconded a Motion to approve the minutes with the following change:

Line 157, change “Essex and felt that it was ingenuous” with “Essex, but she said that”

The Motion passed 6-0.

AGENDA ITEM 9: OTHER BUSINESS: Sonnick informed the PC and audience that the Economic Survey for the Economic Study was online and reminded the PC to take it or to take a hard copy that was placed at the table as you enter the room. She reported that it could be dropped off at the town office or the town library.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION

By: _____

Joshua Knox, Chair