

**TOWN OF ESSEX
PLANNING COMMISSION
DRAFT MINUTES
MAY 8, 2025**

*Note: These minutes may be amended prior to the meeting.

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

PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDING VIRTUALLY: None.

PC ABSENT: Dustin Brusco and Jonathan Schumacher.

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

OTHERS PRESENT IN ROOM: Eileen Shaughnessy; Eileen Kausermann; Wendy James; Su Ughetti; Diane Percy; Joe Percy; Robert Lanancette; Irene Wrenner; David Skopin and Brian Clifford.

OTHERS VIRTUALLY: Lois Whitmore; Lorraine Zaloom; Hadley ?; Gina Halpin Barrett; Cheryl Ve; Patty Davis; Maya Balassa; Marybeth Redmond; Natalee Braun; Rachael Lizotte; and Maya Balassa.

AGENDA ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Knox called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ADDITIONS/ CHANGES: None.

AGENDA ITEM 3: APPROVE AGENDA: Board Member Duke Moved and Board Member Lavigne Seconded a Motion to approve the agenda. The Motion passed 5-0.

AGENDA ITEM 4: PUBLIC TO BE HEARD FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA:

David Skopin, 11 Skyline Drive, Essex, VT, confirmed that it was the PC to make changes to the Regulations. He stated that many citizens are not happy with the current Zoning Regulations and he hopes the PC takes public comments seriously.

Robert Lalancette, 295 West Sleepy Hollow Road, Essex, VT, noted that Page 16, Section 6.2 of the Town Plan discusses the following items and asked the PC if they plan to reduce erosion for the Alder Brook watershed when considering future development; provide a definition of the 60/40 in the RPD-I zoning district; and refer to Chapter 1 Action 2.1 of the Town Plan regarding design construction.

Ian Carroll, speaking as a member of the public, informed the public of the 3rd annual Big Beautiful Fun Run which is held at Essex Middle School. The run provides a 1.2K and a 5K walk or run and includes rollers. In addition, there will be a touch-a-truck; Palmer's ice-cream, etc. He stated that this is a non-profit event to support families in crisis and provided the details of the event.

AGENDA ITEM 5. BUSINESS ITEMS:

- Review Comments from Public Works (PW) on the Women's Correctional Facility (WCF)–Town Services Input (Reference PW Memo dated April 24, 2025). Katherine Sonnick reminded the PC that at a prior meeting, questions were gathered, asked and not answered from the representatives regarding the WCF. Sonnick reported that PW provided answers on the impact to infrastructure, traffic, water/sewer, etc, in a Memo dated April 24, 2025, as follows:
 1. What are the specific carrots that the Town would/could get from the state.
 2. Can you provide your feedback about the sewer impact.
 3. What are your thoughts about the peak trip traffic numbers.
 4. Do you have any other thoughts or questions for them.

Sonnick stated the hope is to review the questions and determine if the answers are okay or if it creates more questions for the State.

Other topics for discussion included:

- Update from Steet Slopes working group on regulations and best practiced for steep slope development.
- Update from Buffer working group on researching history, purpose and potential improvements for buffer zones in the RPD-I zone.
- Update on review and feedback for the CCRPC on the draft future land use map, housing targets and tier 1A and tier 1B status.

The following public members participated in the PC discussions: Joe Percy, 8 Hillside Circle, Essex, VT; Cheryl VE (did not provide address); Wendy James, 4 Cedar Ct., Essex, VT; Ilene Chanace, Gardenside Lane, Essex, VT; Su Ughetti, 8 Bashaw Dr., Essex, VT; Irene Wrenner, 15 Thrush Lane, Essex, VT; Lorraine ZaLoom, 74 Center Rd., Essex, VT; Rachael Lizotte, 2 Sage Circle, Essex, VT; Marybeth Redmond, 11 Marion Ave., Essex, VT; Patty Davis, 9 Hillside Circle, Essex, VT; Brian Clifford, 6 Tanglewood Dr., Essex, VT; David Skopin, 11 Skyline Dr., Essex, VT; Gina Halpin Barrett, 157 Sand Hill Road, Essex, VT; Robert Lalancette, 295 W. Sleepy Hollow Rd., Essex, VT; and Duane Barlow (no address provided.)

The meeting involved discussions about the agenda for the upcoming town planning commission meeting, focusing on the need for stronger regulations and the potential impact of future developments on the town's infrastructure. The attendees also discussed the proposal for a new prison facility in Essex, Vermont, and the potential for the town to pursue Tier One B status. The conversation ended with discussions on the development process, the challenges faced by a project called Pinewood, and the importance of understanding the topography and soil maps in planning growth areas.

The town discussed potential infrastructure improvements and incentives if the women's correctional facility were located in Essex. Public Works suggested upgrades to North Williston Road, the intersection at River Road and Sandhill Road, and the wastewater treatment facility.

The demand for water and wastewater for both sites was discussed, with the Colchester Road site needing an extra allocation. The Selectboard would need to expand the sewer core map to accommodate the Colchester Road site. The possibility of the State paying for more capacity at the wastewater treatment plant was raised as a potential incentives.

The meeting focused on discussing the potential locations for a new facility, with a particular emphasis on the River Road and Colchester Road sites. The River Road site, owned by the State, was identified as a more advantageous location due to its proximity to the sewer core. However, the Colchester Road site, not in the sewer core, was highlighted as a significant issue. The possibility of having two facilities in the town was discussed, but it was noted that any changes would need to go through a planning process. The meeting also touched on the importance of maintaining sidewalks, especially with the potential loss of Crossroads. The ownership of the sites, with both being state-owned, was clarified, and the history of the River Road site's purchase was mentioned.

The meeting involved discussions about the construction of a correctional facility and its potential impact on the community. The attendees expressed concerns about the lack of time constraints for the project, the need for state involvement, and the potential for public works to improve the area. There were also concerns raised about the safety of a proposed bike path, the need for transportation for visitors to the facility, and the potential for light pollution from the facility. The attendees also discussed the potential for the facility to impact the local environment and human resources. The conversation ended with a call for consideration of the impact on residents living near the proposed facility.

The meeting involved discussions about zoning changes and the potential construction of a new facility. The State has requested a zoning change to allow for the construction of a women's correctional facility. The planning commission is currently in the fact-finding stage to determine if they want to make this zoning change. The process involves public hearings and potential changes to ordinances. There is also a possibility for residents to weigh in on the decision via petition. The State has been working on answering questions about the project, but some concerns were raised about the speed of the process and the potential impact on the community.

The meeting focused on the proposal for a new prison facility in Essex, Vermont. Community members expressed concerns about the location, potential impact on the

town, and the state's ability to maintain the facility. They also discussed the need for better infrastructure, such as sidewalks, and the importance of considering the needs of local residents. The state's willingness to answer questions and provide information was acknowledged, but there were concerns about the state's priorities and the potential for a stalemate in the decision-making process. The conversation ended with a call for the planning commission to take their time and consider all aspects before making a decision.

The meeting focused on discussing the issue of steep slopes in land development. The current zoning law limits development to 20% slope, but some developers have requested waivers. The group discussed the potential of changing the zoning law to limit development even more on steep slopes. They also discussed a past case where a developer was granted a waiver for a project with significant steep slopes, but the project was eventually withdrawn. The group agreed to revisit the issue next month with a potential model regulation for consideration.

The meeting also focused on the development process and the challenges faced by a project called Pinewood. The project initially received a 7-0 vote, indicating conceptual approval, but it was not a final approval. The Planning Commission suggested that the project could work if the developer could resolve certain issues. The project is currently in a limbo between the sketch and preliminary stages. The attendees also discussed the need for more specific regulations to reduce the number of waivers granted. The conversation ended with a discussion on the importance of considering past developments and current situations when modifying regulations.

In the meeting, Cheryl VE and Lorraine Zaloom discussed the importance of understanding the topography and soil maps in planning growth areas. They highlighted the need for a topographical overlay to prevent flooding and environmental impacts. Lorraine also suggested that the town plan should be supported and that some of its themes should be prioritized. Patty Davis recommended a course on Biofinder map for better soil interpretation. Gina Barrett-Halpin suggested that the meeting notes should be made available to the public before the meeting. The group also discussed the importance of considering slopes near waterways.

The meeting focused on discussing waivers for 20% slopes and the potential for the town to pursue Tier One B status. Gina Barrett suggested that waivers for 20% slopes had been approved in the past and offered to send this information. The team also discussed the village center and the need to change its boundaries to match the designated village center. They also discussed the interim exemption map and the potential for the town to pursue Tier One B status, which would exempt certain parcels from Act 250. The team considered areas for potential exemptions, including mixed-use areas, the transit route, and parcels along Route 15.

In the meeting, the attendees discussed the delineation of specific boundaries for a project. They considered the possibility of having two meetings a month and agreed to move the discussion about the project to the top of the agenda for the next meeting. The attendees also discussed the potential expansion of housing stock and the need for topographical overlays. They agreed to revisit the topic in June, with a focus on areas that are not currently developed.

The next steps are as follows:

- Commissioner Williams to prepare a model regulation for steep slopes and present it at the next meeting.
- Katherine Sonnick and Maya Balassa (CCRPC) to create a draft overlay map of potential Tier 1B areas for the next meeting.
- Planning Commission to review and discuss the Tier 1B designation areas at the top of the agenda in June.
- Planning Commission to consider adding topographical overlays to the future land use map.
- Planning Commission to discuss the possibility of having two meetings per month at the next meeting.
- Planning Commission to review other zoning regulations at the June meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6: MINUTES: MARCH 13, 2025 & OTHER BUSINSS: Continued to next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION

By: _____

Joshua Knox, Chair