

**TOWN OF ESSEX
PLANNING COMMISSION
DRAFT MINUTES
August 28, 2025**

PLANNING COMMISSION (PC) PRESENT IN ROOM: Georgia Lavigne, Vice-Chair; Dustin Bruso; Ian Carroll; and Paula Duke.

PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDING VIRTUALLY: None.

PC ABSENT: Joshua Knox, Trefor Williams, and Jonathan Schumacher.

STAFF PRESENT IN ROOM: Katherine Sonnick, Community Development

OTHERS PRESENT IN ROOM: Lorraine Zaloom; Gina Halpin Barrett, Hubie Norton, Ken Signorello, Bryan Currier, Al Senecal, Margret Smith, Irene Wrenner; Cheryl Van Epps, Sharon Zukowski, Anne Miller; Lisa Goodrich, David Goodrich.

OTHERS VIRTUALLY: Natalee Braun, Lois Whitmore

AGENDA ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER: Vice Chair Lavigne called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ADDITIONS/ CHANGES: Katherine Sonnick requested that Item 6b. be moved to 6d.

AGENDA ITEM 3: APPROVE AGENDA: Board Member Bruso Moved and Board Member Carroll Seconded a Motion to approve the agenda. The Motion passed 4-0.

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

Ken Signorello expressed concerns about the exclusion of Conservation and Trails Committee responses from the meeting packet. Irene Wrenner noted the large number of letters received regarding the proposed women's correctional facility, with some frustration about an irrelevant study and letters included. Lois Whitmore requested a moratorium on waivers, emphasizing the need for a unified and holistic approach to address transportation issues before further development.

AGENDA ITEM 5: MINUTES, July 10, 2025: Board member Bruso Moved and Board Member Carroll Seconded a Motion to approve the July 10 minutes. Discussion ensued with Board Member Duke suggesting some changes. The Minutes were approved 4-0 with the changes suggested.

AGENDA ITEM 6: Zoning Roundtable:

Vice Chair Lavigne summarized the zoning roundtable process, explaining that this was a new way to discuss community requested Zoning Regulation changes. The plan is to allow the public to discuss their recommended changes and allow for public feedback that will be delivered to the full Planning Commission (PC) who would then decide

whether to move forward with the zoning change. Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director, passed out a sheet of paper to all present that would allow everyone present to fill out their thoughts about the importance and urgency of each of the issues discussed during the meeting. These would be shared with the full PC.

Item 6a: Fences

Hubie Norton discussed the need to revise and clarify Essex's fence regulations, which were deemed inconsistent and lacking in specificity. Participants discussed the importance of balancing property owners' rights with community interests, considering factors such as safety, aesthetics, and the character of neighborhoods. They explored examples from other towns for best practices and highlighted the need to address issues like privacy, noise, and light pollution. Attendees were encouraged to email their thoughts to Katherine Sonnick.

Item 6b: Uses in the RPD-I

Al Senecal, property owner in the RPD-I explained that he had requested in 2021 that the Planning Commission consider allowing additional uses in the PRD-I. He provided a copy of the I1 district allowed and conditional uses, with highlighted uses that are not currently allowed in the RPD-I. He noted that he was open to other uses as well. The participants debated the appropriate types of industrial and commercial development allowed in this district, with concerns raised about buffer zones and environmental impact. They also discussed a previous legal settlement that transferred some land from private to public ownership, which established the current zoning regulations.

The public discussed potential new uses for the RPD-1, with a focus on adding value to the tax base while minimizing traffic and environmental impact. Lisa Goodrich suggested cooperative housing as a solution for young families and seniors. It was explained that this was previously rejected by a Town vote. The group agreed to consider new uses like restaurants and an indoor recreation facility, while opposing trucking warehouses and junkyards. Ken Signorello emphasized the need for negotiation and fair trade-offs between different interests. The conversation ended with a request for residents to submit ideas for new uses to the planning commission and to email them to Katherine Sonnick.

Item 6c: Purpose of the Zoning Regulations Section 5.6

Sharon Zukowski explained on the purpose and implementation of Zoning Regulations, particularly Section 5.6, which requires site plans to conform to the Town Plan. She explained that the Town Plan is visionary and aspirational and the Zoning Regulations are meant to implement its goals and objectives. She emphasized that the Town Plan is not a regulatory document, but rather a guiding document for the Zoning Regulations. The discussion highlighted the tension between general conformance requirements and specific regulatory details, with some participants suggesting the need for more specific implementation of the Town Plan in the Zoning Regulations.

Item 6d: Home Occupations

There was discussion about providing more guidance on what types of businesses are permitted, with a suggestion to use the use table for the district and consider the impact on neighborhood character.

Ken Signorello discussed temporary signage. The Economic Development Commission is working on an ordinance to regulate these types of signs, which are currently governed by Zoning Regulations. It was suggested to add language to the Zoning Regulations that would allow temporary signage to be regulated by Town ordinance once it is passed, rather than having to wait for the Zoning Regulations to be updated.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

PLANNING COMMISSION

By: _____
Georgia Lavigne, Vice Chair

A video recording of the meeting is available to view on the Town's YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/@essexvt>