

**TOWN OF ESSEX
PLANNING COMMISSION
DRAFT MINUTES
October 9, 2025**

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

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

PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDING VIRTUALLY: Ian Carroll.

PC ABSENT: Dustin Bruso.

STAFF PRESENT IN ROOM: Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director and Kent Johnson, Planner.

OTHERS PRESENT IN ROOM: Joe Percy; Dianne Percy; Lori and Kip Myrick; Wendy James; Joe Schaffer; Irene Wrenner; Liane Mendez; Johnny Mendez; Ken Signorello; Chuck Vile; Ron Deming; Linda Deming; Nancy Williams; Lisa Goodrich; David Goodrich; Brian Clifford; Andrew Seaver; Karen Crawford; Joe Teegarden; Jason Braun; and Sharyl Green.

OTHERS VIRTUALLY: Town Meeting TV; Rich; rachael; John Morris; and Su Ughetti.

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

AGENDA ITEM 2: ADDITIONS/ CHANGES: None.

AGENDA ITEM 3: APPROVE AGENDA: Commissioner Duke Moved Commissioner Schumacher Seconded a Motion to approve the agenda. The Motion passed 6-0.

AGENDA ITEM 4: PUBLIC TO BE HEARD: Ken Signorello spoke about Susan's Place and misinformation regarding the number of calls per day. While the report was two calls per day, Essex Rescue noted that they do respond two times in one day, but not every day. Mr. Signorello shared the quote: "Susan's place is a transitional housing for homeless, except that people who are in there actually belong in a nursing home care facility." Which he feels is inaccurate and invited his friend Nicole, a resident of Susan's Place, to speak.

Nicole Holly, who lives at Susan's Place with her two children, spoke of her experience living at Susan's Place. She noted that it is not transitional housing, but permanent housing and gave a brief background of how Susan's Place came to be. Ms. Holly went on to say: "Susan's Place also is home to Susan's Pantry, which is a food shelf for residents of all Champlain Housing Trust properties. The claim that the residents who live at Susan's Place all belong in nursing homes or other care facilities is patently false. I know that there are a couple of residents who are up in age and may require response from a place like Essex Rescue, but we also are right next door to at least one nursing home or care facility across the street. And it would be unfair to characterize Susan's Place in the same line. Not only that, but anyone who is elderly and who lives in a nursing home is deserving of human dignity and respect. And Essex Rescue's job is entirely to respond to calls for those issues. And response times are always going to

suck no matter where you live because you never know where someone's going to be called out, it is not specific either to nursing homes or care facilities. There are plenty of children who live at Susan's place who can just as easily get injured as someone who's elderly anyway. Kids are always going to be hurt and need to be seen. So, I just think that it's unfair to characterize Susan's Place in such a negative way, especially since it is actually a place that goes out of its way to help people to better their lives."

AGENDA ITEM 5: MINUTES, September 25, 2025: Chairman Knox noted several changes, submitted by a resident. Commissioner Duke moved to approve the minutes with changes. Motion was seconded by Vice Chair Lavigne. Motion passed 5-0-1. Commission Carroll abstained as he did not have a copy of the minute changes.

AGENDA ITEM 6: BUSINESS ITEMS:

- **Women's Correctional Facility Zoning Change Request**

Chairman Knox read the updated Zoning Request from the State of Vermont which was included in the meeting packet. Knox noted that "this is narrowing down (the request) to the one off of River Road." He noted that over the past 14 months the discussion was focused on two sites and that now the decision tonight is to determine if this request should be moved on to a full public hearing, be amended in some way or to deny the zoning change. If this the Zoning Change is voted up, the request will go to the Select Board. Chairman Knox noted that: "At the conclusion of it being passed, again in this scenario where it's passed, what could happen, and we've heard this from other people, and there was a conference earlier at the beginning of the year, 5% of people, 5% of town voters rather, within 20 days could sign a petition that would put the entire matter as on the town warrant to be voted on by the Poppins assemble." The agenda listed that the Planning Commission will discuss followed by public comment.

Chairman Knox asked fellow Commission to consider "Do we think we're ready to either move it up or move it down? Do we think we need more from someone somewhere? Do we think we have, as I've been calling it, the discovery phase. Do we think we've got all that we're going to get, all that we need from various parties?"

Commission Schumacher commented that he felt he had enough information and was ready to make a decision. Vice Chair Lavigne noted that she "wish(ed) we had heard from business owners, because I feel like that's a missing piece," but felt that she was ready to make a decision tonight. Chairman Knox updated the commission that "even though Commissioner Bruso is not here, he said that he he's fine with us moving on." Commission Williams felt that he'd like to more about the opposition, but that it hadn't been "flushed out more". Commissioner Duke said that she has "not changed from the beginning. The state has way too much wiggle room where they can change things completely from what we think we're going on." Commissioner Carroll stated "I have enough information I feel I can make a decision this evening. I don't think I need to hear more."

Chairman Knox asked: "What are your thoughts on what we have in front of us?"

Schumacher commented that he felt that this was "a zoning request to be examined within the context of town plan." He noted that the public opinions are all over the map. He stated that he

96 is "particularly nervous about changing the use in an industrial zone. I just not sure that that's
97 what we wanted to do as a collective voice." He suggested talking about an overlay or "spot
98 zoning", which he felt was a terrible idea. Vice Chair Lavigne said, "I think I'm probably more
99 open to it than anyone here, but I haven't heard enough to convince me that it's in the best
100 interest of the town." She noted that the commission has "looked through the whole town plan
101 again and it doesn't really fulfill any of the goals. I'm really struggling to get to a yes
102 personally." Commissioner Williams noted that it felt uncertain when he heard that one of the
103 driving factors for this facility to be built was overcrowding, yet the proposed facility is the same
104 size as the one that exist, and the same number of beds. He went on to say, "It just doesn't
105 seem like they have their constitution, and I don't think it's appropriate at this time to make a
106 zoning change." Commission Duke agreed with Trefor and noted that "there are too many ifs
107 and buts and theres. And I have been a victim of that from the state in the past. So, I am
108 suspicious." Commissioner Carroll said, "I feel my biggest issue as all along has been really
109 with the taxation of our first responders, and how they'll be able to absorb the additional work
110 that would come along with this. However, I have not seen any comments from police chief or
111 fire chief in regards to that being an issue. I am for the concept of the prison being established
112 here. I'm not sure that we've had all the information that we that we need in order to say yes to
113 this at this point in time. So, my vote would be against." Chairman Knox continued, "I looked at
114 this by looking at the town plan, specifically the items you have in front of you, the action plan
115 goals, and I didn't view it as is it permissible to do this or is there something saying can't
116 happen. I was looking at our town goals and saying, would changing the zone, presumably
117 with the addition of women's correctional facility shortly after, make it harder or easier to reach
118 a particular goal? And the one that really, really, really stood out is the transportation." Knox
119 went on to read goals 3C, 3D, 3E and 3F from the Town Plan. He commented that at the last
120 meeting the DOC Commissioned was asked to address the transportation issue and that it was
121 a very "fuzzy" response. "I dislike the idea of us changing zoning and locking that in without
122 some assurance that this would happen. Again, I'm not doubting the commissioner's intent to
123 do it. But once the zoning is changed, the zoning is changed. And if then the transportation
124 infrastructure doesn't come through, what we're essentially doing, in my mind, is putting that
125 issue towards the DRB, and we're saying when this proposal come before the DRB, the DRB
126 will figure out whether the transportation will fit." Chairman Knox continued, "I'm where Ian
127 was. Where Schu (Commission Schumacher) was. It's not I'm not against the concept of a
128 prison or women's correctional facility, ... but, I think other things, not just have to be
129 answered, but we have to have assurance and approving, as written, right now we would be
130 locked in. The assurances have to come from the state. ... I want them (the state) to say here's
131 what our transportation plan is given our transportation needs, given your town plan, given
132 your current infrastructure, and where you want your infrastructure to be. I want that to be
133 locked in. Decided before any substantial change." Chairman Knox reminded commissioner
134 that they heard a request at the last meeting from a developer requesting a zoning change in a
135 specific parcel and the commission felt that since the infrastructure wasn't currently in place for
136 that parcel the Select Board would need to look into expanding the infrastructure first to make
137 sure we weren't zoning something that wasn't properly zoned for the infrastructure. "And I feel
138 this is identical. It would be, to my mind, a bit odd to rezone this, without infrastructure
139 assurance, when we told another landowner in town that they needed to have the
140 infrastructure discussion first and have an assurance, have it locked in to make it clear. So that
141 is where I stand at the moment."
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Kent Johnson spoke about the Town Plan and noted that he was looking at transportation similar to what Chairman Knox reviewed. He felt that this could be a good opportunity for Green Mountain Transit to bring out transportation that would serve the facility and the Town could see some benefits. He also noted that additional road connections built as a result of the facility could have added positive transit benefits. There are also mentions in the Town Plan that note increasing resources to address crime, mental health crisis, fire and emergency services that could be benefits associated the facility being in Essex. Johnson noted, "Regarding education there could be ways that CTE in particular, could see benefits from this project depending on what the state's able to offer." He also noted that the draft economic development study discusses a need for workforce support. This facility could support apprenticeship programs and workforce needs. He commented that while there are ways that this could be mutually beneficial for the State and Town, there would need to be conditions in place when the DRB reviews the application to assure the benefits to the Town. Commissioners Duke and Schumacher noted that there would need to be legal assurances of the proposed benefits from the state. Katherine Sonnick reminded commissioners that any "benefits" to the Town would not be discussed or agreed upon until the zoning change has occurred. Duke felt that "That's highly suspicious." Knox said, "At this point, we have to assume that the state has said what they're going to. It has been a year and a half. If they were going to say something else about what is possible and what they could offer, I believe they would have said, "Yes, here's how we can do that list of items that we that we sent questions to them saying, how are you doing this? How to do that?" Yeah, we've had them here. Their answers at this point are their answers. Whatever we wish they would have said, what they actually did say is what they said."

Chairman Knox opened up the floor to public comment.

Cheryl Green from Burlington was the first to speak. "When I started my teaching career in 1969, we as a society were just beginning to welcome children with special needs into schools with other "regular" students. We had isolated this population, othered them, educated them separately, institutionalized them, branded them mentally retarded. A cousin of mine was placed that way decades ago, and I never met her. As educators, we figured out how to be inclusive. We hired special education teachers and assistants who helped out in classrooms or met with small groups of students for an hour a few times a week. As my teaching years rolled out, I became acutely aware of another isolated population. Sometimes I would have a child in my classroom with a parent in prison. One year a child with both parents in prison. I witnessed every day the very particular struggles about the secret that wasn't quite a secret. Some people knew, some didn't. One day, a student named Ricky became so enraged in my Vermont public school class of nine and 10 year olds, I had to quietly coax him into the hallway with me and then hold my foot against the classroom door as we talked so he couldn't get back in. "What's going on with you, Ricky?" I asked. I just found out my father won't get out of prison until I am 19. He yelled, and then he sobbed. So, these are the stories that I'm not hearing in your decision-making process regarding zoning, transportation. Do we want these human neighbors? The system of locking people up, isolating them from their families, as we have learned from many here tonight, and this is from the last meeting, is not the answer. We know how to do this. There are viable alternatives to help a person turn their life around as many have stated this evening, education, restorative justice, community service, adequate housing, support, working through trauma, all are in the mix. I request that you consider these factors

190 along with the other public comments that you received during the public forum September
191 11th, 2025 at the Essex Planning Commission meeting. Thank you.”

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193 Joe Teegarden spoke: “I live at 16 Chelsea Road and I wanted to let you know just first of all
194 I'm in full support of a correctional facility in our town and I came here tonight simply just to tell
195 you that and to walk away, because I have not been any of these meetings in the past to hear
196 what all has been said. But I just want to give you my impression of what I heard today. You
197 guys just from unbiased person out there, not bad idea or anything, but it feels to me like you
198 all have found a way to say no. And whether you have or have not, I don't know. I don't know
199 what's in your heart, but that's what it sounds like to me. Um, this issue is bigger than whether
200 you know a city bus goes by a facility. This is a huge issue, and it's my understanding that if
201 you vote no tonight, this thing dies. Is that the way it is?” Chairman Knox responded that if the
202 commission votes no it would mean that this particular zoning change request would not be
203 reviewed by the commission, but that the State could return with a amended zoning change
204 request. However, that would be up to the State to decide. Mr. Teegarden continued: “So,
205 here's my here's my advice, what that's worth, is that instead of trying to find a way to say no
206 and say no because, why don't you try to find a way to say yes if, and make sure that this goes
207 on to all the people of Essex to learn more about, and then if it comes down to a yes or no.
208 Like you said was the alternative in the end was that as it works through, then you know the
209 town would have to vote and say yay or nay right? If your vote tonight, really in all practicality is
210 going to end this, that's just not right, and I think we ought to find a way to say “yes we will go
211 forward with this if these things happen” and give the people in the town more of an
212 opportunity to learn more about it. I realize that you I heard the 14 month thing. I heard with
213 God that's a long time, and I mean you might be asking where are all the people, where do
214 they care whatever, well I've cared all along, I just haven't chosen to come. I'm here tonight
215 though. I think there are others the same.”

216
217 Jason Braun said: “I didn't really come prepared for anything, I Just wanted to just kind of give
218 you guys, sounds like you you've done a lot of homework which is great. I mean all this and
219 have been listening to everybody. My name is Jason Braun by the way. I live over on Sand
220 Road. So it's kind of near this facility, and I've got a couple of kids that are in school, and they
221 ride their bikes to school, and they walk to schools, and that's pretty close, and that's my
222 concern. It's just, it's pretty close to our residential area there, and it's a really kid-friendly area.
223 They ride their bikes over in that Saxon Hill area off of Thompson Road, and they ride through
224 the woods there, and so do the neighborhood kids. And I'm not concerned about the people in
225 the prison, because they're in the prison. I'm concerned about folks coming to visit the
226 persons, because I've seen other facilities. The areas around the facilities, what that winds up
227 bringing in, sometimes perfectly great people, sometimes it's not, and with our children walking
228 to schools by themselves riding, I see kids every day, I walk my daughter school every day,
229 she wants to walk to school, it's like a mile walk, but it's right along Sand Hill right there, and
230 this isn't far from there, and I'm concerned about the kids. That's just too close to the schools
231 that location, like I'm not against prisons, I mean not by for prison either, you know, we have to
232 we have to have punishment sometimes with things, do I believe in other methods, 100%, but
233 I'm not against the prison being built a better facility, I'm concerned about the location. And I'm
234 just concerned about the kids, and with the schools that are so close by to there, and all the
235 kids that ride their bikes to them, and walk around just have fun. I just that's my only concern.
236 That's all I wanted to say. And thank you for letting me talk and your consideration for

everything.”

Joe Schaefer said, “I’m his (Jason Braun) neighbor live on off Sand Hill Road. Joe Schaefer. I’m not originally from here. I moved here from Michigan 5 years ago. I grew up in a suburb of Flint, and I live near the Thumb Correction Facility. And Davidson and Leir were two towns that were along I 69. Think of it like 89. It’s the through road between the two cities. Both towns are like South Burlington. The city is one road through each town. Everything’s on there. It’s boondocks in between. As Flint died, people started moving into the suburbs. And despite the land being cheaper around the correctional facility, they could not get people to move there. And even if you look at it now, you can look up the Thumb Correctional Facility, look at a map, Google Earth, there’s no neighborhood there. There’s these two huge communities, and they built around it. It’s like a big dead zone. If this gets built over here. I live off Sand Hill Road, actually on Partridge Drive at the very end of Allen Martin. We’re really close to it, and I’m worried that we’re going to see the whole area just kind of implode in on itself given enough time, because no one wants to live by a correctional facility. The one thing that stuck out to me growing up was, you know, no matter where you were, if you got in the general vicinity of the place, there are huge signs. Do not pick up hitchhikers, correctional facility. These are huge signs, 4 foot by 8 foot, you know, reflective text so you can see them at night. This wasn’t a maximum security prison, but there was a lot of problems, like he said, with the people coming into the prison, and then people getting out, not having anywhere to go. They just kind of stayed. I really worry about putting a correctional facility so close to our neighborhoods, and you know close to schools, close to small businesses. It just, you know, kind of from past experience living near a correctional facility, I don’t think it would be good for the community.”

Andrew Seaver, 14 Hillside Circle: Handed out a printout to the commissioners, “This is a Vermont Digger article from September 9th. Talking about what’s happening now since the transport, which we talked about at the last meeting, has gone away. So, that there’s no sheriffs and all of that. At the time the environment states attorney sheriff decided to stop transporting people released from the southern state facility in Springfield practice that had been cut due to a lack of resources. And so now these folks are being told now that, well don’t expect any money this year because we know we’ve got a big hole in the education fund that someone’s got \$150 million for. So, the whole transportation thing would say, they don’t have the means to fix, and I don’t believe that whatever they might tell us, that they’re going to have the meanings to fix it. But one interesting comment in this was about the few times that when people are released from Vermont’s rural prisons onto the streets, they will do what they need to do to survive. Valerio told the lawmakers. So, this is the BPS commission. In rare past instances, that’s meant starting fires to stay warm. And if I was in that situation, I probably would do the same thing. Like other folks here have said, it’s not that we’re against the facility, and whether it needs to be a different type of facility, or no facility. It’s about whether or not this is right for our community, and is it right in this part of town? So, I think that with all of what you folks have said tonight, you’re at the same point that we are. It’s like it’s all unknown. There’s no guarantees. There’s nothing, other than wait and see if, you know, something does not happen. And that’s just, you know, it is about what’s in the best interest of the Essex community. It’s not about what’s best for the state. It’s not what’s best for South Burlington or the rest of Chittenden County. Your responsibility here is, what is best for the town of Essex and the town plan going forward, is this part of what the town plan is, and this is what we want to see?”

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285 Lisa Goodrich, 30 Hillside Circle: "Half a mile is the crow flies from the proposed site. As I'm
286 listening tonight, I didn't come up here to speak, but we're talking about the impacts to the
287 entire community, and I kind of think it might impact development as well. We're working very
288 hard trying to find how to develop the area given constraints, be they you know the slopes, etc.
289 etc. but, this could have a very negative impact on positive development that people would like
290 to see, you know, trying to make ethics a destination place, looking for more recreation. Now, I
291 don't think people are going to be really thrilled about recreating right next to a prison, or
292 putting in a restaurant potentially, or any of those things. I know that there's a large demand for
293 indoor soccer field, which is not working out just yet over there, but we have to take all of those
294 things into consideration when talking about development of the town and growing our work
295 force. So, I just wanted to put that up there, and it's not about not wanting to be inclusive.
296 These people are a member of our society at large, but the state has said they have money,
297 and they can buy land elsewhere. I can't think of the woman's name. Wanda has said it. She
298 was recorded as saying it just on last February. So, it's not like there aren't other possibilities
299 out there. We are not the last resort. Thank you."

300
301 Johnny Mendez: "I have two things to say. One, I live on Hickory Lane, one mile from the site,
302 post site, the prison. I'm against the prison being in Essex. I am pro rehabilitation. I am pro
303 lowering, you know, civism rates and all that, and getting folks back into society as functioning
304 members of society. But Essex is not the town form Prisons change the face of a town. There
305 is a long track record. Regardless of what kind of design, what kind of facility, the sheer nature
306 of a prison changes the face of the town. And I've lived here for 20 years, and when I see all
307 the amazing things that have happened in this town, we had a little lull and all of a sudden
308 things just seem to be kind of buzzing. I see the mountain bikes going through those Saxon
309 Hollow trails. I see what's going on at the Essex experience, and I just have this really amazing
310 feeling about this town. All of that is at stake, and I think a prison is going to absolutely begin to
311 invite the types of businesses that no one wants to see. And dare I say it, what we see in some
312 places, even Essex Junction, some of the types of businesses that we see there, we don't
313 want to see here and that's what's going to happen. A couple of things that have that also
314 came to light. You know, you mentioned 14 months having birth from businesses, 14 months,
315 and really having birth from people. That's on us, right? But I will say in defense of parents of
316 young children, it's very difficult, especially with the challenges they face to make the time to
317 be here, or to take part as Zooms when they have young ones at home. It's hard for business
318 owners to kind of take the time to be able to hit all these things when they're facing challenges
319 as well. But it is on us. I have two people here who came because we started to talk to our
320 neighbors, and they came because we started to talk to them. So, everyone who's online right
321 now, our challenge to you, if you're against the prison, talk to your neighbors and get them to
322 get active. Write letters to the planning commission. Let them know your feelings. And for
323 everyone who's here, also reach out to businesses and have them start to get active, because
324 we as a town can let the planning commission know that you should get your time back to be
325 able to work on things that will really help this town in the long term. Those short-term things of
326 infrastructure, things will be overrun by the detrimental long-term that happen to the town if
327 necessary. No one's going to care about the buses and oh look at this new road and all that
328 because, of the sheer impact the detrimental effects of having it in this town, so I am against it.
329 I think the town should go into places like Berlin perhaps, that they own."

Karen Crawford: "I also live in the area off of Sand Hill Road. And I wasn't concerned so much of thinking of my home, except my concerns were, we have three schools right here and walking distance of that area where the prison is potentially going to be. And quite honestly, I was just amazed to think that we would consider putting a prison within walking distance of these three schools. I think we've got maybe 400 kids in each of those schools, and as someone else had mentioned, you know, kids are walking to school, kids are riding their bikes to school. And if you drive around our communities any morning, you will see, even sometimes when it's very cold that those kids aren't out there, and they're moving. And we live in a nice area. We live in a wooded area, which is lovely to live in and be around, but it also affords people places to just kind of hang out and not necessarily be seen. As stated, it's on community members that we haven't come forward maybe and spoken up at these things, but I just happened to hear about it. And so, I don't even know how many other community members really have no idea that even though it's been 14 months that this is going on in your meetings or maybe in other meetings in the community. And so, it's hard even to keep track of items like this to come and say this might be my opinion, or my feeling, but I do sincerely appreciate each of you seems to have really looked at the town plan and what the outlines for what Essex is hoping to grow towards and to lean in the direction of and to stay within that. And I appreciate that you can have a guideline that is not feelings based, but that it is something that's been written down. It's been thought about. It's been pursued through years. And so that gives you good guidance as to whether or not something fits into the zoning that we currently have or warrants a zoning change. And I also do appreciate the fact that we do not really know that the state will not agree to one thing and build one item and then change it in the future, and then I assume we have no way of stopping that once it's already done. And so, then it's out of our control. So, a plan that may have started with that you felt was worth the change, could change to something that you never would have."

Irene Wrenner: "I would like to second what Mr. Teegarden said at the beginning of the comments. I'd love to look at this as a yes if propose an MOU to the state unless they do that first. I don't think people who have been to meetings may have a really good sense of where this site is. It is farther away than the Amazon site. It is near where North Williston Road comes out. And meets Route 115. According to my GPS, it's over a mile. So, if your children are riding their bikes on River Road, you may have a bigger problem than them riding their bikes near a potential women's correctional and re-entry facility. It's misperceptions like that that I think have swayed some people's thinking and that concerns me greatly. When I hear that overcrowding was the only reason that was heard as a reason to build this facility. I've been paying attention for a long time. I had the benefit of serving on the Senate Institutions Committee, and what was brought to our attention was the unsanitary environment. The showers reeked of human waste and were infested with sewer flies, maggots, and mold. There's an inadequate physical plant. This facility was built in the 1970s. It's one of the oldest in the state prison system, and it was never designed to be a full scale facility, originally serving as a temporary detention center for men. It has a leaky roof, broken HVAC, inadequate wiring, and an uneven heating system that often shuts down in the middle of winter. Some of the rooms are now stacked with four people when they're built for two. Some of those four person rooms only have a single electrical outlet. So when you don't have any AC in the summer, and you got one little fan plugged into that wall, it's really problematic. So, I hope you understand it's not just overcrowding, there are other issues. There's a lack of dignity at basic necessities. The toilet to inmate ratio in some of the units was 3 units to 40 people which falls

below the 1 to 8 American Corrections Association standard. There are so many limited opportunities for workforce training. There is not currently a work release program, and so on and so forth. If any of you were aware, the background of a number of the people who came to the last meeting, and were so disruptive are part of a national organization called Free Her. It's on them. The misbehavior, and I don't appreciate a national organization fundraising off of a dilemma."

Dave Goodrich: "When she was just making these comments, my question was why? Why didn't the state let this correctional sale descend to where it is? They didn't have the money, I guess, or they didn't care. Why are something not maintained? Why? If the state can build a prison in Essex, why didn't they fix this? Why did they just leave it? We had problems on Woodside, I believe, too. Why did that happen? Was that our fault? Was that the state's fault? The state's fault. So, I don't really trust the state. I don't trust they're going to have the money to build and maintain this place, it's going to end up falling on us or it's going to become another South Burlington facility. I think that's the perfect location. I think you put a prison not in in a bunch of neighborhoods. You put it in a business area or isolated somewhere out in the middle of nowhere. I just think we're planning on sending people to the moon and to Mars, and we can't fix prison, and so instead we're going to build another one here. I just there are so many things that make me uncomfortable. So, I appreciate the conversation. I appreciate people come up for the prison, but I just I'm not convinced. So anyway, thank you for listening to all of us and, taking this seriously. I guess the other concern is, and maybe I've missed the explanation on this. I might be ill and misinformed. But once we give zoning over, we change zoning, and the state basically has control of this land to do as they please in the corrections. Guess once we change zoning, we can't go in and say we don't like that idea. We'd like you to build a smaller, or we'd like you not to expand to clearly violent criminals, or we'd like you not to change it. Do we have any say once the zone is changed? And they don't seem to be too forthcoming. Again, it would be nice if we could get promises of we will do this. It has to be legal. You said they ask some legal basis. That hasn't been working. And I like your point that they've given us answers. It's at this point, they haven't been giving us more answers. I think we have to accept the answers they've given us. So that's all I have to say. I like many of these more eloquent people, I believe we need correctional facilities, and we need to improve them, but I don't think this town is the place for it."

Rachael Lizot: "I just want to echo the concerns, that people have raised today about the project. And I would also just like to make a point in saying that we are well aware of the site location, and we have valid concerns as people who not necessarily abut, but are close by to the property, closer as the crow flies, and as people indicated the schools are very close by. Kids are walking, biking. There's two playgrounds, in addition to the schools, that the town owns that are pretty well used. And I'd just like you to please consider the future of our new town. You know, the town of Essex, you know, is new now. We are on our own, and we have a lot of potential and that is exactly what the town plan speaks to, and I just would just like to remind the board of that."

Susie Seaver: "I actually live off Hillside too. Two areas of concern. I know when we're talking about the emergency services, my mother was living with us and in 2017 when she passed away, it took them 27 minutes, not the fault of their own, but it took them 27 minutes to show up at our house, to the point 911 was questioning, no one's there yet. Like, no. I think it's like at

23 minutes maybe a police officer showed up, and then of course they're like well my mom had been there for like 25 minutes, and they're like I could try to revive her. So that affects, and the other thing that hasn't come up too, I've talked to several police officers, and they talk about the ones in the prisons, but what they're not telling you too, and I confirmed it the first night that the prison officials were here. You have people arrested and police officers coming from all over the state that have a warrant. They pick up people that have a warrant for arrest. And how it works is after 4:30, weekends and holidays, they come to the facility. So, in this case in South Burlington, they get dropped off. Prior to COVID, they were brought to the courthouse where they would see if they made bail or whatever. I was told 9 times out of 10 they make bail. So, now what happens after COVID, they're brought to the facility, and then they face the judge by zooming the following day at midday, and then if they're released, they're allowed to walk off. The state says, "Well, we provide a bus." And that was back then. Now they have no transportation. But even then, as I confronted one of the police officers, I'm like, "What do you know?" 9 times out of 10, they don't take that bus, because they wouldn't actually if they're coming from Berlin, and quite a few come up from central Vermont. If you want to take the bus, they want to stay up here for where there's free things. So, if there's temporary housing shelters, then those people are literally the ones walking off daily and into our neighborhoods. So, that's very, as a 63 year old, my kids are grown out, but I'm concerned for myself. And so I'm for a prison, but I heard the same people say that we have money, we can buy property where at some place that would be better fit."

Chelsea Paige: "I am a resident of Burlington, so I don't live in the town, and I'm not sure if comment is open to other folks like me, but I really appreciate the opportunity to participate. I'm a new resident of Vermont, and so I just want to speak to you guys as as fellow residents of this state, that I really wish you could see a path forward to working with our state government to find a way to make this project work for both your town and also all the residents of our county. I have two children, and what I know from my own experience is that anyone in our families can become addicted, and can become justice involved. And when I think about our kids well-being, I think about a place where if they do something wrong, they can go and be treated humanely and have a chance to get better. And I feel really sad that if towns like Essex, which is such a wonderful town, if we can't see a way to provide this in our state, that our children could be sent out of state or when they grow up, and you know try to make a life here in Vermont, and do something wrong and need support, that this facility is either not going to be here for them or they'll have to go far away from their families to find reintegration. And that makes me sad for our state. I think we need every resident of Vermont to be here and be supported to make this state, you know, all that it can be."

Diane Percy: "I just wanted to say I'm really proud of Essex. Whenever I have to make a tough decision, I always kind of reflect and say, well, did I do the best I can? Did I look at criteria? Did I look at things non-emotionally? And I just want to make sure that everybody in the room and online remembers that Essex has already stepped up, and we're hosting for the state the River Valley residents 10.2 acres. They could put up whatever they wanted to. It's zoned for corrections. They chose to put up River Valley. So, I just really want to publicly say, we continue to do our part. That facility has only been open I think since 2022. Does that sound right? 22, 23. So, let's see how they do. I hope it doesn't become like what's going on with the South Burlington facility. But for people who are thinking about Essex not doing their part, it's probably say, "Oh yes, we are." And they've already made a commitment to expanding a little

bit down there, and they can do that because the zoning changed 40 years ago, and allows for corrections, and now they've got that building down there, and they're going to expand it a little bit. So, I just want to stay focused on that as 11,000 person town that we're doing our part, and it's time for the other communities in Vermont to really think deeply about what they can do."

Chairman Knox moved the conversation back to the board members. He asked how commissioners would respond to a "Yes, if" question towards the state.

Vice Chair Lavigne responded: "I feel like if we got some solid indication that there would be a bus route, that there would be money towards our infrastructure, money towards our first responders, if we were giving something for the community, I would feel okay. I would feel good about it personally. I'm not seeing that. It is the chicken and the egg problem, but I don't know how to resolve that."

Chairman Knox noted that most commissioners seemed like they would be open to the zoning change if there were guaranteed benefits from the state. He inquired with staff regarding how the motion should be presented to represent the opinions of the commissioners. A few commissioners discussed how the motion should be worded. Feeling that the meeting minutes and recordings would provide the state with information on why the commission voted the way they did.

Commissioner Schumacher made a motion to approve and move forward with the state's request. Chairman Knox second the motion. The motion fails 0-5 (Commissioner Carroll left the meeting earlier),

AGENDA ITEM 7: OTHER BUINESS: The commission will meet for a second meeting in October to discuss Planning Zoning Changes and potential housekeeping meeting with the DRB.

At 7:50 p.m., Commissioner Schumacher Moved and Commissioner Duke Seconded a Motion to Adjourn. The Motion passed unanimously.

PLANNING COMMISSION

By: _____

Joshua Knox, Chair