

Town of Essex Planning Commission
Draft Regular Meeting Minutes
Thursday October 23, 2025

A video recording of the meeting is available on the Town of Essex YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@essexvt> .

Planning Commission Members:

At Meeting: Joshua Knox - Chair, Georgia Lavigne - Vice Chair, Jonathan Schumacher - Clerk, Ian Carroll, Paula Duke

On Zoom: None

Absent: Dustin Bruso, Trefor Williams

Administration and Staff: Katherine Sonnick – Community Development Director, Kent Johnson – Town Planner

Others Present: At Meeting – None. On Zoom – Sharon Zukowski, Cheryl Van Epps, Patty Davis, Lorraine Zaloom, Anne Miller, Ken Signorello, Dianne Percy, rachael, J Percy, Gina Halpin Barrett, John Sonnick.

1. Call to Order

- a. Joshua Knox called the Essex Planning Commission meeting to order at Time PM.

2. Agenda Changes/Additions

- a. No changes or additions to the agenda.

3. Approval of Agenda

- a. **Jonathan Schumacher made a motion seconded by Paula Duke to approve the agenda for October 23, 2025. Motion passed 5-0.**

4. Public To Be Heard

- a. No public comments

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Approve minutes from October 9, 2025, meeting.
- b. **Ian Carroll made a motion seconded by Georgia Lavigne to approve the minutes from October 9, 2025. Motion passed 5-0.**
- c. **Paula Duke said she has too many changes to the minutes to talk about. The secretary was out and said that the minutes were like a transcription and that the microphone did not pick up everything.**

6. Business Items

- a. Discussion. Planning Commission Priorities and Workplan.
 - i. Staff reviewed the spreadsheets of priorities included in the packet. There is also a summary of the roundtable meeting from August on what people thought were urgent. It was noted that workplan has not been updated since spring. Joshua Knox had the Zoning Amendment Priority worksheet pulled up to review.

- 44 ii. **08:30 – 23:00 in video. Home occupation.** There was concern about home
45 occupation use that did not fit the character of the neighborhood. There was
46 also concern over the definition of “character”. It was decided that a little
47 more research is needed to formulate some different approaches to making
48 the changes.
- 49 iii. **23:00 - 28:30 in video. Fences** are complicated as there are many different
50 ways to go with this. We do not receive a lot of complaints on fences, but it
51 does happen. The round table discussion on fences was the most productive.
52 There was discussion to review other towns’ fence regulations as a starting
53 point. There is not a clear request on this topic from the residents. There also
54 needs to be a review of what to regulate which has already been developed.
- 55 iv. **28:30 – 1:14:00 in video. Purpose of zoning regulation section 5.6.** This is
56 more urgent than complicated. This needs to be more linked to the town
57 plan. How does the town plan apply in a site plan review, which is a
58 complicated legal question and ties to the RPDI. We need to preserve the
59 character and provide metrics to judge it. The public is looking for the
60 Planning Commission to provide that so the DRB can do their job. There was
61 also discussion about the Town Plan.

62 **45:18 Lorraine Zaloom** said there was confusion on the JAM and use of the
63 word Shall, plus not holistically building without proper infrastructure. Also, a
64 cost benefit analysis and the Housing Commission weighing in. The RPDI has
65 in the past been used as a water source and we may need that again. Also,
66 she feels that in certain instances the Town Plan has some regulatory uses.

67 **49:51 Cheryl Van Epps** agreed with Lorrain Zaloom and spoke about item
68 three of the general requirements under section 5.6. Adequately protects
69 public health, safety, and welfare. She is concerned about buildings going on
70 in some sites and why all these waivers are being granted. Safety is also a big
71 issue for me. Especially with the slopes and changes to the landscape.

72 Regulations are not about people’s happiness they should be about safety.
73 Also, when I think of the Town Plan, I think of the voice of the town’s people.
74 And we should be working towards affordable housing. What is the purpose
75 of this push to build and keep that in mind when we build these regulations.

76 **52:49 Ken Signorello** wanted to know if it is true that none of the regulations
77 being worked on are from the Town Plan? To which it was pointed out that
78 they are further down the list. He would like to see the Agricultural Overlay
79 District at least on the radar for work. When people a benefit from less
80 restrictive regulations, we never see the benefit, but when you make
81 something more restrictive it becomes an issue.

82 **56:17 Patty Davis** spoke Highway Statute 23.1042 and the four criteria when
83 it comes to transportation. She is also concerned about the character of
84 neighborhoods and criteria number four and property values. In the CCRPC
85 zone she would like to see human scale development. What does the
86 resident get for it? Let developers build their own commercial roads and not
87 use residential areas for traffic. The access to these areas is an issue.

1:01:05 Sharon Zukowski spoke that Regulation 5.6 and conformance to the Town Plan is vague and causes issues all the time. We need to be more specific about site plans vs the Town Plan. This will help the DRB.

1:11:16 Anne Miller spoke about it being important that we conform to the Town Plan.

1:14:00 – 1:50:00 in the video. The Commission continued the conversation talking about affordable housing and ways to sort through the issues. Also, a meeting with the DRB to get their input on how regulation changes can alter their decision-making process. There was mention of November 13, 2025, with the DRB.

- b. **1:50:00 – 2:06:45 in the video.** Consider ask to Selectboard to reconsider opting into Tier 1B status.

- i. **Joshua Knox** spoke checked with the Commission to see if they are in favor of him attending the next Selectboard meeting and asking them to reconsider their prior decision on Teir 1B status. The Commission agreed overall with him doing this.

Lorrain Zaloom asked if they could reconsider her area in this process. Especially about traffic.

The Commission then reviewed the map of the areas in question.

- ii. **Ian Carroll made a motion seconded by Paula Duke to remove everything east of Essex Center, mixed use north, mixed use south from the recommendation. Motion passed 5-0.**

7. Other Business

- a. No other business was discussed.

8. Potential Executive Session

- a. No executive session was held.

9. Adjourn

- a. **Paula Duke made a motion seconded by Georgia Lavigne to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 5-0.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Kariella Tabone
Secretary

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2025.
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)

Signed by Name, Title