Essex Conservation and Trails Committee (CTC)
Regular Meeting Minutes
81 Main St. Essex Jct., VT 05452
September 9, 2025

Draft meeting minutes prepared by Erin De Vries, submitted on September 15, 2025

ATTENDEES:

Members present: Ken Signorello (Chair), Bino Cummings (Vice Chair), Erin De Vries (clerk), Duane Millar Barlow, Paul Davis, Steve Dowd
Members absent: Morgan Kirk, April Peterson, Sarah Salatino
Staff Present: Kent Johnson (Town Planner), Harlan Smith, Hans Nedde
Public present: No public present

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ken called the meeting of the Conservation and Trails Committee to order at 6:06 PM. After resolving a minor technical issue with the recording, Ken turned the meeting over to Vice Chair Bino Cummings to provide him with practice in running a public meeting.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Three items were added to the agenda: a vote for a new committee clerk, a brief announcement regarding tree plaques, and a trails report from Hans Nedde. The committee decided to hold the clerk vote and the plaque announcement immediately following the agenda approval, and to hear Hans Nedde's trails report after the Development Review Board (DRB) application review.

A discussion was held, initiated by Harlan Smith, Assistant Director of Parks, Trails, and Open Space, regarding the process for adding items to the agenda. Mr. Smith suggested that staff could provide a memo to the Committee chair in advance of the final agenda publication to ensure timely and important information is included. This would provide the committee with preparatory materials, which is a common practice. It was agreed that staff would email the chair to request agenda items and would provide memos or other materials in advance.

Motions:

- To approve the agenda with the proposed additions and changes. Moved by Ken. Seconded by Duane. Passed (6-0).

3. VOTE ON ESSEX CONSERVATION & TRAILS COMMITTEE CLERK

Following the resignation of the previous clerk, the committee held a vote for a replacement. The chair called for nominations.

Motions:

- To elect Erin De Vries as the committee clerk. Moved by Duane. Seconded by Steve. Passed (6-0).

4. ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE TREE PLAQUES

The committee discussed a previously approved motion to purchase plaques for trees donated by Horsford Gardens and Nursery for Arbor Day. It was revealed that this action conflicts with the Essex Public Funds Policy, as using public funds to create a plaque mentioning a private business could be construed as a private benefit and advertising. An email from Betsy Dunn, the original proponent, indicated she was dropping the idea due to this conflict.

A discussion ensued about whether the plaques could be justified as a public good for educating the public about Arbor Day. To proceed, a formal written rationale would need to be submitted for approval by Greg or the Select Board. The committee decided to postpone a final decision on the matter. A related discussion occurred regarding the best practice of submitting memos or supporting documents with agenda items in advance of meetings to allow for proper review by the committee and the public.

Action Items:

- Steve Dowd will follow up with Betsy Dunn to determine if the committee should continue to discuss the tree plaques.
- Erin De Vries will research the Association of Vermont Conservation Commission's standards and practices for submitting agenda items and materials.

5. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

No members of the public were in attendance or online to speak.

6. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The committee reviewed the minutes from the August 5, 2025 meeting. An amendment was requested to add Hans Nedde to the list of staff present. A request was also made for future minutes to include line numbers; it was noted that this is an issue with the PDF export process, which will be addressed going forward.

Action Items:

- Duane will amend the August 5, 2025 meeting minutes to add Hans Nedde to the list of staff present.

Motions:

- To approve the minutes from the August 5, 2025 meeting as amended. Moved by Paul. Seconded by Ken. Passed (6-0).

7. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Advise DRB on Development Applications

A staff member presented a suggested checklist to guide the committee's review of development applications for the Development Review Board (DRB). The checklist covers key areas such as trails, natural/aesthetic/cultural resources, trees and landscaping, and open space requirements for Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). The document aligns with the Town Plan and includes links to key resources.

Following the presentation, the committee discussed a new process for reviewing DRB applications to improve meeting efficiency. It was proposed that committee members should review applications prior to the monthly meeting and come prepared with comments, with a designated point person attending DRB or Planning Commission meetings to share the feedback. A committee member volunteered on a trial basis to be a point person who will conduct a more detailed review and bring recommendations to the full committee.

The committee then reviewed several applications:

3 Bushey Lane The project proposes adding 16 new parking spaces, a new dumpster enclosure, and associated stormwater management improvements. The committee noted that the expansion would not impact the steep slopes behind the property. The project does not include changes to landscaping, and there are no trails or pedestrian facilities nearby. The committee had no comments.

260 Woodside Drive The project involves constructing a small entryway addition to the existing building. Landscaping in the construction area will be impacted and subsequently replaced. The application is considered a minor change and is scheduled for the DRB's consent agenda. The committee had no comments.

58 Center Road The applicant proposes adding a three-plex building to an existing home on a five-acre lot. The primary discussion focused on securing a trail easement along the northwest edge of the property to provide a crucial future connection to the Matthew Town Forest as part of the larger Keystone Trail project. The applicant is reportedly open to discussing it.

Action Items:

- A committee member will email the formal recommendation memo to staff.
- A committee member will attend the relevant DRB meeting to speak on behalf of the committee's recommendation.

Motions:

- To recommend a trail easement to the Northwest of the property at 58 Center Road to achieve connectivity with the Keystone Connectivity Project from Chelsea Road to Mathieu Town Forest. Moved by Ken. Seconded by Duane. Passed (6-0).

70 + 74 Essex Way The committee reviewed a proposal for a new walking trail at the Essex Resort, intended for guests on private property. The discussion focused on ensuring the trail is built according to best practices. The committee decided to recommend that the applicant follow the 'Vermont Town Forest Trail Design Guide'.

Motions:

- To recommend that the applicant apply the trail building standards in the Vermont Town Forest Trail Design Guide. Moved by Paul. Seconded by Ken. Passed (6-0).

127 Stinson Drive This application for the clubhouse was previously reviewed and continued to the October 2nd DRB meeting. The committee is still awaiting updated plans, which are expected to include landscaping changes. No formal comments were made.

21 Upper Main Street The committee held a conceptual discussion regarding two proposals for the property: one 8-plex building or two 4-plex buildings. The plans have been updated to schematically show landscaping and a proposed shared-use path. Concerns were raised regarding the proposals' non-conformance with the business design control district regulations, including the placement of parking along the road and a lack of pedestrian connections. The committee decided not to issue a new formal recommendation at this time, opting to rely on their previous recommendation from March 11th which supported a trail easement.

b. Trails Report by Hans Nedde

Hans Nedde presented a new process for the town to formally adopt trails, which would establish an official, mapped trail system with dedicated maintenance budgets. This would allow the Parks & Recreation department to plan and prioritize maintenance. The process involves

Hans presenting trails to the committee for their recommendation, which would then be forwarded to the selectboard for final approval.

Hans presented four initial parcels for trail adoption:

1. **Leech Field Property:** Recommending the adoption of 'Trail #1' (the cellular trail) due to its level grade and high usage, with a potential improvement to convert it to a crushed stone path.
2. **Pinewood Neighborhood:** Proposing the adoption of the single trail connecting two roads. A caveat is that an unofficial town easement must be formally established.
3. **Forestdale Natural Area:** Proposing the adoption of the main inner loop and the three connector trails that link to surrounding neighborhoods.
4. **Indian Brook:** Recommending the adoption of all existing mapped trails, including the heavily used 'green trail,' to assign them official budgets.

Action Items:

- An agenda item titled "Trail Adoption Proposal" will be added to the next meeting for the committee to make an official recommendation.
- Hans Nedde will work with staff to prepare a formal memo with descriptions and maps for the next meeting's agenda packet.

c. Update/action on Conservation Fund Survey

Paul presented a memo summarizing the results of the Conservation Fund Survey, which received 129 responses. The results showed broad support across all conservation categories, with water and wildlife protection as top concerns. A key finding was a significant lack of public awareness about the fund's existence and purpose, as 33% of respondents were unsure if they would donate. The primary recommendation was that greater education could lead to increased voluntary contributions. The committee decided to place the report on the next meeting's agenda and include it in the public packet to allow time for review and for the committee to add a stronger recommendation for a public awareness campaign.

Action Items:

- The Conservation Fund Survey report will be added to the October meeting agenda and packet for review and potential approval.
- Paul and Ken will collaborate on revisions to the report before the next meeting.

d. Review/Adjust/Approve CTC Work Plan

The committee discussed the CTC Work Plan, an item that has been postponed multiple times. The current document is outdated and members do not have direct editing access. It was decided that all members would review the document and email their suggested changes to Ken within one week.

Action Items:

- All committee members will review the CTC Work Plan and email suggested changes to Ken by September 16, 2025.

8. ADJOURN

Motions:

- To adjourn the meeting at 8:26 PM. Moved by Erin De Vries. Seconded by Ken. Passed (6-0).

Meeting recording: https://www.youtube.com/@essexvt/videos

Next meeting on: October 14, 2025 @ 6:00pm; in-person and online