

Town of Essex Planning Commission
Draft Regular Meeting Minutes
Thursday November 13, 2025

A video recording of the meeting is available on the Town of Essex YouTube Channel at
<https://www.youtube.com/@essexvt> .
Direct link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3g0lvTUH-s>

Planning Commission and Development Review Board Members:

At Meeting: Joshua Knox - Chair, Georgia Lavigne - Vice Chair, Jonathan Schumacher - Clerk,
Dustin Bruso, Ian Carroll, Paula Duke, Stephanie Bixby, Nick Martin, Hubert Norton.

On Zoom – Sharon Zukowski, Trefor Williams

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

Others Present: At Meeting – Aaron Martin, Director of Public Works, Ken Signorello, David
Skopin, Cheryl Van Epps, Sean Neely, Sal Sarepalli, Patty Davis, Irene Wrenner.

On Zoom – Lois Whitmore, Linda Merchant, Eleni Churchill, Natalee Braun, Anne Miller,
Margaret Smith, Duane Barlow, Gina Halpin Barrett, Patty Davis

1. Call to Order 0:28 in video

a. Joshua Knox called the Essex Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Agenda Changes/Additions 0:36 in video

a. No changes or additions to the agenda.

3. Approval of Agenda 0:59 in video

a. **Ian Carroll made a motion, seconded by Johnathan Schumacher to approve the agenda.
Motion passed 7-0.**

4. Public To Be Heard 1:05 in video

a. No public comments

5. Approval of Minutes 1:49 in video

a. Approval of minutes of October 23, 2025, meeting.

b. **Paula Duke made a motion, seconded by Ian Carroll to approve the minutes of the
October 23, 2025, meeting. Motion passed 6-0-1. Johnathan Schumacher Abstained.**

6. Business Items 2:58 in video

a. **Presentation – Sand Hill Road Truck Traffic Study. 2:58 in video** – Kent Johnson introduced
the information regarding the truck study, recapping back from a year ago. Initial public
data collections and comments. This is the second meeting to reflect to the community and
take more comments to create a final report. He discussed what the study is looking at and
managed by. **Sean Neely 5:22 in video** - Presented slides of maps and went over the project
area, public input, recommendations, network conditions and analysis with
recommendations to improve the network along with next steps. **Public Input 12:11 in**

video – Sean Neely went over the public input. **Recommendations to Address Public Concerns 13:41 in video** – slides were presented with maps showing recommendations. **Bike Improvements from Active Transportation Plan 18:05 in video** – Sean Neely detailed the proposed bike lanes and recommendations. **Network Conditions & Analysis 21:00 in video** – this was a broad overview of the steps taken in the study. **Existing Truck Travel Data 23:38 in video** – charts showing the different classifications of vehicles. Classes 7-11 were identified as trucks of concern for this and only at intersections of interest. **Capacity Analysis of Worst Intersections 29:55 in video** – intersections to include VT15 and Sandhill Rd, VT15 and Allen Martin Dr, and Allen Martin Dr and Thompson Dr. **Signalization 33:39 in video** – analysis and slides of where signals would be recommended for the three intersections mentioned previously. **Ten Year Follow Up Study 37:36 in video** – information presented regarding a study to take place in 2035. **Results Table 38:21 in video** – information presented summarizing location, deficiencies and potential improvements for various roadway sections. **Next Steps 39:35 in video** – refine recommendations, final presentation to Selectboard, final report. **Questions/Answers/Feedback 39:57 in video** – There was talk of the different types of bicycles and accommodations made for each. **School proximity 43:16 in video** – There was also concern with the proximity to the schools regarding bicycle transportation. **Order of Operations 44:46 in video** – Sean was asked what he saw as the proper order of operation to get best results. **Issues with summation are lacking data points 44:56 in video** – there was talk that there are missing data points on the intersection assessments. **Additional Capacity Analysis 49:38 in video** – there was discussion about needing an additional capacity analysis at times of peak truck traffic. **Connection of Kimo Dr and Thompson Rd 59:34 in video** – there was discussion about options regarding the long-term connecting of those roads vs a shorter-term fix on increasing the buffer for the Sandhill Rd sidewalk. **Online Plan availability 55:03 in video** – the current plan is available for public viewing on the town website at essexvt.gov. You can also put comments on the website. It was also suggested that the presentation pages be numbered.

Trefor Williams 56:26 in video – asked about improvements to VT15 and Allen Martin Dr. as an intermediate step. **Margaret Smith 59:20 in video** – she 100% agrees with Trefor on that intersection. She is also disappointed that the proposed light at the corner of Sand Hill and VT15 has been bumped out again. Along with other concerns regarding the plan. **Ken Signorello 1:02:36 in video** – pointed out that this is NOT an industrial zone as mentioned. It is a Resource Preservation District Industrial. There are differences between the two. There is poor signage at Lower Sand Hill Rd. **Patty Davis 1:04:27 in video** – ditto Ken Signorello and pointed out that people on Sand Hill Rd can't even cross the street to get to her neighborhood of 130 homes. People with strollers also want a grass mitigation. It is very dangerous. Long term truck routes are a problem. This is a residential road. She pointed out that the CCRPC does not have the authority to override the Federal Highway Administration. She also referenced 24 V.S.A. § 4385 as well as 19 V.S.A. § 1111. The CCRPC is required to ensure functional classification and highway hierarchy. **Next Steps and final report 1:13:26 in video** – Sean Neely went over the next steps and wrapped up his presentation. There was some discussion about the completion of VT289 and the

development of the adjacent industrial area. **Gina Barrett 1:17:02 in video** – was grateful to hear mention of the school timing. There is a lot of school and family traffic on Sand Hill. She would also like to see the light put in as well. Also, this is not industrial, and it wasn't meant to be industrial. Noise is a problem. Grass widening is needed. **Back to next steps 1:20:22 in video** – Sean Neely continued to review the next steps. **Last word by Lois 1:21:22** – she said not to forget a possible distribution center and all the traffic that will bring. Kent Johnson noted that the recent subdivision's traffic generation was included in the study.

- b. **PC and DRB discussion about zoning and subdivision regulations. 1:23:21 in video** – The main idea of the PC is putting the town plan into action, but the DRB is where the rubber meets the road. **Katherine Sonnick 1:24:17 in video** - spoke about the 50-foot buffer and steep slopes in regard to waivers, as well as multi-use paths, street trees, and how to interpret comments and perhaps the regulations need to be more specific. The consent agenda was also brought up. **Ian Carroll 1:27:30 in video** – How much do we need to weigh the town plan in our conversations. Some clarity in that as well as steep slopes, what does the 20% slope number mean? The 50-foot buffer in the RPD-I has been an issue as to what is acceptable. **Dustin Bruso 1:30:36 in video** – feels the biggest single issue is slopes, how do we calculate it. The 50-foot buffer is the second biggest. **Johnathan Schumacher 1:31:28 in video** – the slope issue, how do you measure what is 15% or 20%. What portion of the lot. The developers are at a loss to understand this as well. Do we deny just because of the 20% slopes? Maybe removing the slope helps the area. As for the 50-foot buffer, the problem is enforcement. How do we follow through to see that the conditions have been met. This issue extends beyond the 50-foot buffer. Consolidation of zoning and subdivision regulations have conflicting information. The DRB needs more definition on the use of the Town Plan. **Joshua Knox 1:37:41 in video** – spoke about a DRB application from 6 months ago for subdividing a property and they were already out of regulation. The Town needs a language where once the regulations have been exceeded, the application can go to perhaps the Selectboard. At what point do you stop? **Sharon Zukowski 1:40:04 in video** – “That was my neighborhood, and, in the future, we need to consider and honor the regulations even if they have already been exceeded. We cannot keep dropping the ball. It is never just one more. The state does not give us the right to waive our regulations in my opinion. Also, the 20% slopes need more definition. In addition, we need more directions on how much we are supposed to comply with the town plan.” **Stephanie Bixby 1:43:34 in video** – spoke about the town plan and staff does a good job of highlighting how it fits in. How many points do we need to check? What percentage of a lot must have steep slopes and is that part of the lot even being used. Interpretation of waivers could use clarification. It would be helpful if we knew the WHY of a regulation appears. WHY was it created? **Trefor Williams 1:49:16 in video** – “I tried to find a reason for the slope regulation, but it appears the entire country has 20%.” There was discussion about the impact of erosion regarding housing on steep slopes and how to enact enforcement. **Sharon Zukowski 1:54:24 in video** – on some steep slopes and the erosion caught up with the housing until it was up against them or a rain event can cause damage. When regulations are made, the intent should be put in front of the regulation, and why it needs to be enforced. **Johnathan Schumacher 1:56:33 in video** – you cannot make a regulation that covers everything and that is why we need to still have waivers and in that, what is the spirit of the regulation. What is the

difference between a waiver and a variance? The DRB needs flexibility. **Katherine Sonnick 2:00:11 in video** – buffer size is also dependent on what you want to screen and what kind of vegetation are you using to create that screen. **Dustin Bruso 2:00:31 in video** – regarding the town plan discrepancy vs regulations, it feels like the biggest issue is what to do when the regulations are not up to date with the plan. **Georgia Lavigne 2:01:24** – one of the problems is the town plan is updated every eight years, but regulations last longer than that. This is why intent would be helpful with the regulation. **Dustin Bruso 2:04:47 in video** – It would be helpful to have a statistical difference, data to clarify why. Discussion continued about how different changes impacted other neighborhoods. The biggest items in the last six months have been slopes and buffers and again we need to understand intent.

Sharon Zukowski 2:12:35 in video – loves the time stamps in the minutes and thought it was ai generated.

Ian Carroll 2:13:06 in video said it would be helpful if the PC would look at that the state's new regulations are and how do we want to deal with additional dwelling units.

Ken Signorello 2:14:52 in video – said the number of houses on a dead-end street is a risk factor. Another is energy. Slope 20% over a horizontal difference as well as soil type being a consideration. **Cheryl Van Epps 2:16:38 in video** – is from a steep slope area and the mitigation efforts have impacted wildlife environments. She mentioned there is some data with the ANR maps and other slope considerations from her experience.

7. Other Business 2:20:39 in video – no other business.

8. Potential Executive Session 2:20:43 in video

a. No executive session was held.

9. Adjourn 2:22:50

a. **Ian Carroll made a motion, seconded by Dustin Bruso to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 7-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Kariella Audrey Tabone
Secretary

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

Joshua Knox, Chair