

Town of Essex Planning Commission
Draft Regular Meeting Minutes
Thursday December 11, 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=fm0x8zY154>

Planning Commission Members:

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

Administration and Staff: Katherine Sonnick

Others Present: At Meeting – Jacob D'Amour, Ken Signorello, Dorothy Bergendahl, Katherine
Shattuck, Will Dodge, Natalee Braun. On Zoom – Anne Miller, Cheryl Van Epps, Community
Development, Gina Halpin Barrett, Lois Whitmore, Rod Williams, Sharon Zukowski, Tammy
Getchell, Will Dodge.

1. Call to Order 0:17 in video

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

2. Agenda Changes/Additions 0:40 in video

- a. No changes or additions to the agenda.

3. Approval of Agenda 0:55 in video

- a. **Ian Carroll made a motion seconded by Paula Duke to approve the minutes for October 16, 2024. Motion passed 6-0.**

4. Public To Be Heard 1:29 in video

- a. **Jacob D'Amour** is looking to locate a business in Essex. A kennel in the RPD-I district. He mentioned that due to the makeup of the RPD-I, that sound from a kennel would not be a factor. Also, there is a growing need for this service. It is his hope that the Planning Commission will allow this.

5. Business Items 6:29 in video

- a. Discussion with Conservation & Trails Committee, Economic Development Commission, Energy Committee and Housing Commission about Action Items in Chapter 1: The Action Plan of the Town Plan.
- b. Joshua Knox suggested we go in order and have the commissions provide their thoughts starting with the Conversation and Trails Committee. **Ken Signorello 7:57 in video** spoke and went through their priorities. They picked out five items. Action item 5.9 which addresses tree preservation and replanting to combat the effect of greenhouse gases. He went over the benefits of this and would like to see more requirements for replanting when development takes place and preserving trees where buffers are required. He provided more information on how helpful trees are to the town. He then addressed Joshua Knox who asked if he has done any research individually or as a commission on quantification. Ken Signorello said they have done

some research, there is data and he can provide it. The commission then discussed different tree impacts on the area. Ian Carroll asked how the tree warden played into this, and Ken Signorello said that he is more forestry rather than residential and urban forestry. So, he would be consulted and could participate. **Action Item 8.5 14:12 in video** Update the 1989 Open Lands Study to include an inventory of agricultural potential of parcels and consider implementing further protection measures of these lands. Ken then referenced the scenic overlay district. We could prevent regulations that would prevent agriculture in this area by knowing more about these areas. It is not a prevention of development, it is just to make sure that agriculture can happen in spots ideal for it. **Action Item 9.3 and Action Item 6.6 16:12 in video** CTC merged these two together since they connect and there are also 171 requirements. There are also wildlife corridors to be considered. Ken also discussed a unified bylaw updating BD standards to incorporate ETC. He then went over the benefits of this and how to comply/implement. **Action Item 7.8 18:29 in video** Explore developing a tree nursery. It has had a lot of starts but nothing has stuck yet. We are currently looking to do something at the tree farm or other suitable areas. We are also looking forward to working with CTE on this. Many of the ash trees are being attacked by insects, and CTC is looking to provide a reasonable alternative. There was discussion on how long it takes for a tree to grow. Steve Dowd is the point person on this. The tree farm would be strictly for the town. There might be an issue or opportunity with the city. **Action Item 9.56 22:34 in video** the conservation and trails have put in an application to use the conservation fund to buy a property for a boat access or small park. The area tends not to flood. The commission discussed **Action Item 7.8 24:10 in video** and provided additional information to what Ken Signorello had already presented. Based on geography and the work that CTE is already doing, it would not be much of a stretch to have them take care of a tree nursery by the high school.

- c. **Energy Committee 26:30 in video.** Will Dodge, the chair of the Energy Committee, presenting though other members are present at the meeting as well. **Action Item 5 28:01 in video** is the idea of investigating and appointing an energy coordinator position pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 1131 to develop energy implementation plans, coordinate efforts with other government agencies, and encourage residential and commercial energy conservation. They would work with the committee and the facilities manager to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We do think it is a good idea and might be a good idea to start in that position as a dual role. **Action Item 5.2 29:12 in video** is to develop an energy plan for incorporation into the town plan, which is done through the community development office, but a lot of that work is done by the CCRPC, and he has with him a draft of the plan and would like to make it more user friendly as they set goals for the town that are measurable. A lot of it is hard to understand, so we need to put it in plain language that is relatable. There was a CCRPC energy plan that needed to be reformatted, and this is what we are trying to do. **Action Item 5.3 31:42 in video** is to explore efficiency, renewable energy, energy storage, low emission transportation, and power equipment options for all town property, vehicles, and facilities. This is something Shawn MacNamara is

working on, and we will provide our input maybe by interfacing with the finance department and exploring those options. **Action Item 5.4 32:34 in video** revise zoning regulations to incentivize and/or require residential and commercial energy standards to meet or exceed Vermont energy building codes and implement effective means of enforcement. The lead responsibilities with the Planning Commission, CDO, and Energy Committee. We have not done much with this yet but would like to work on it, and hopefully we can discuss plans to get started sometime in the future. **Action Item 5.5 33:04 in video** promoting low emissions renewable energy development by evaluating town and developer owned properties for potential energy generation facilities. We have done a lot of this, and it comes down to properties, which neither of are easy. We need to put out an RDP that would include an RFI to find solar companies that would want to do the development work. This is a long-term project, and it is part of the FY26 work plan. There is also 80-90 Main Street, and you can have a roll out solar array. This is not feasible today. Implement more EV charging. Focusing on Upper Main and maybe a geothermal network to make it as efficient as possible. There is also an action item that requires all new commercial buildings to produce at least 50% of their own projected electrical which is meeting with financial difficulties. Also, there are more community solar net metering. Vermont Electric Co-op is promoting this. Amendments to the energy committee charter to encompass greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. We are working with the town manager on that. We are also working on creating an energy revolving loan fund to pay for renewable energy and decarbonization projects. We are also doing a lot of community outreach to get more of a presence and work with other town energy committees. **Action Item 5.8 41:16 in video** there was discussion that it sounds like we are not feeling that the 50% is possible. Is it possible to provide incentives to work towards this goal and even then, it may not be possible on every building. And discuss different issues surrounding this. There was also a lot of discussion on solar options. **Action Item 5.1 1:02:21 in video** about the energy coordinator, is VSA encouraging without money, just enabling town and perhaps making them a member of the energy commission. Someone who is doing this all the time. The question being what is the payback on this. This is something we should look at.

- d. **Housing Commission 1:05:43 in video** Anna was unavailable and Lois Whitmore said she cannot present for her so they will be rescheduled for January 8th, 2026.
- e. **General Meeting Takeaways 1:09:47 in video** Joshua Knox brought the meeting back to the commission for Q&A. Dustin Brusso asked when do we have potential time slotted to talk about zoning use changes such as the kennel or RPD-I in general. Joshua Knox said that starting in the new year we could take a look at changes after meeting with everyone tonight. Conversation continued about potential meeting dates and organizing a list of items for future agendas. And different systems of organizing this data so that we can go from a draft, to discussion, to decision, to actionable item model. There was also discussion about how many public hearings you could have per month. **Merging the subdivision and zoning 1:32:11 in video** the

work is pretty much there. We need to go through the references to make sure different sections are correct, but some deep questions might remain.

6. Other Business

- a. Schedule Housing Commission and Economic Development Commission possibly for January 8th, 2026, meeting.
- b. Discuss goals to provide quarterly submissions for the Selectboard.
- c. What uses are currently allowed in the I1 district. And what things are currently in RPD-I but not in I. As well as an economic benefit to these.
- d. Planning Commission update on upper Main St. Make this a regular agenda item where we can fit it properly.

7. Adjourn 1:35:29 in video

- a. **Joshua Knox made a motion seconded by Georgia Lavigne to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 6-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Kariella Tabone
Secretary

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

Signed by Joshua Knox, Chair