

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF JOINT MEETING
WITH PLANNING COMMISSION
July 1, 2008**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Deb Billado John Lajza
George Tyler Peter Gustafson
(Larry Yandow was absent.)

PLANNING COMMISSION: Mark Thibeault Liza Kilcoyne
Diane Clemens Andrew Boutin
Dan Kerin

ADMINISTRATION: Dave Crawford, Village Manager
Patty Benoit, Administrative Assistant
Jeff Arango, Development Director
Dave Barra, Village Attorney
Rick Hamlin, Village Engineer
Robin Pierce, Development Director (new hire)

OTHERS PRESENT: Bill Niquette, Infill Development Services
Dave Grimm, CVE
Matt Stevens, CVE
Curt Montgomery, developer
Gabe Handy, developer
Alex McEwing, business owner
Brad Dousevicz, realtor/developer
Tom Weaver, developer
Jason Starr, press

I. CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

In the absence of Larry Yandow, Trustee Deb Billado called the special meeting to order at 5 p.m. and led the assemblage in the Pledge of Allegiance. Introductions were made. Dave Crawford, Village Manager, explained the purpose of the meeting (the Trustees want to foster development and other strategies in support of the village). Mr. Crawford mentioned his ongoing effort to meet business people and property owners in the village, and the invitation to Bill Niquette to share his experience with the redevelopment of the City of Winooski. Mr. Crawford announced Jeff Arango will be leaving his position as Development Director to attend graduate school. Robin Pierce was introduced as the new planner for the village. A press release announcing the hiring of Mr. Pierce was provided to the assemblage.

II. PRESENTATIONS

1. Presentation on Essex Junction by Jeff Arango

Jeff Arango reviewed economic development in the village, noting economic development is rarely one dimensional and cannot not be discussed without including housing, open space, and

services provided. Economic development is really community planning and a holistic approach is needed. Mr. Arango gave examples of “out of the box” thinking in economic development, such as putting in parks to attract people to places and subsequent support for area businesses. Mr. Arango acknowledged the money secured by the Congressional delegation for the downtown development project at Five Corners, but pointed out Essex Junction still needs \$360 million in real property value to offset the machinery and equipment tax loss from IBM and several million dollars to offset the decrease in IBM’s appraisal value. These revenues can be realized through jobs, housing, quality of life, enhanced services, and affordability of the village. Community assets in the village include the downtown area, historic buildings, housing, quality of life, infrastructure, proximity to employers, and other amenities. The village needs the circumferential highway, improvements to Pearl Street, better use of underutilized properties, making downtown a designation area, and open space for trails. The local economy is IBM and the local market place. The vision for the village includes increased density, green building, energy conservation, public transportation, bike/pedestrian paths, and open space. The village has New England style buildings, historic buildings, mixed uses, and regulations to allow increased building heights. To stimulate development further master planning is needed. The village needs to plan for development/redevelopment (purchase land or development rights) and quality of life amenities (parks, trails). Market studies should be done. Grants should be sought for growth center designation. There should be partnerships with developers. Tax stabilization programs must be offered and TIF districts established. Waste water capacity can be sold and the revenue used for economic development. Parking in the downtown area is an issue for the village, but a collaborative partnership with businesses/developers could be made to meet parking needs.

2. Presentation on Economic Development by Bill Niquette, former Director of Winooski Community Development

Bill Niquette advised public awareness by the broad community of the Board of Trustees efforts toward revitalization of the community is necessary. Essex Junction has a positive impression of revitalization and development. Also needed are organization and commitment to see the implementation of the community’s vision. The planning and zoning points of view are fundamentally different. One provides a look toward what the community wants to be in 20 years (planning) and the other (zoning) provides rigor to the rules so the community looks like what is planned. Redevelopment opportunities need community people who want to see redevelopment. Investors must be comfortable working with these people. A fundamental understanding of what the community wants and what is available for development is required. It is good to involve individuals outside the political officials (i.e. tap long term residents or organizations). The community development group itself may pull different people to the table. The community wants people who can solve problems and issues. Dealing with the railroad in Essex Junction will be a challenge so a good working relationship with the railroad company and the village is vital. Limiting factors for re/development in Essex Junction include availability of land and the willingness of landowners to work together on development. One proactive approach is to think outside of traditional property lines for development opportunities and involve people with local knowledge of the area/land. Perseverance on the part of community leaders and the community itself is important. The Trustees can be most helpful by introducing resources to help solve problems and bring opportunities to the table. Downtown revitalization takes time so it is not productive to worry about the climate today for the future. The real estate market (housing) is perpetually undersupplied, especially in the medium income bracket in Chittenden County.

There is great demand for senior housing. The economic times push rethinking the benefits of living in the village versus in a rural setting (gas prices and such). People are living in the village and do not want to leave. The village offers infrastructure, schools, and parks. There is already much in place to build upon. Continue being proactive with outreach, urged Mr. Niquette.

GENERAL DISCUSSION/COMMENTS

Deb Billado asked about financing. Bill Niquette explained in Winooski most of the federal money was from transportation funding. Public improvements were recast as transportation projects. TIF districts were employed as well (\$25 million in limited obligation bonds were issued for the parking garage and to match federal and state money that was received). In Winooski the taxpayer was not liable for the bonds. The general tax base was not relied on. The project was eligible for HUD grants, but chose bonds because of the loan guarantees secured from the state. If the project was successful, the state received the benefit of the infrastructure without spending money, and if grant money was needed, the project was eligible for this money anyway. It was a win-win situation. There was much local political support as well as nonprofit organizations driving the economic development. In Essex Junction, some residents like the downtown as it is while some will welcome change, observed Mr. Niquette.

Andrew Boutin asked about the issues that came up with the redevelopment in Winooski. Bill Niquette stated there were archeological issues, utilities (transmission line for Chittenden County went through the middle of the city), the railroad, and contamination. Local property owners were approached who were suffering from the degrading downtown and they were asked to help create an investment vehicle to kick start the revitalization project.

John Lajza asked about the economic development committee. Bill Niquette stated there are excellent models to follow. Ad hoc committees can be formed (independent individuals incorporated to collaborate). Economic development experience is not necessarily needed. Committee members could be doctors, dentists, homemakers, but all should have a deep connection to the community and want to be proactive about the future of the community with a deep desire to see things happen. Committee members should be willing to go out into the community and talk to residents. The development director should not also do zoning enforcement. The zoning board should be separate from the planning commission which should be separate from the advisory boards.

Jason Starr, *Essex Reporter*, asked about the status of redevelopment in Winooski. Bill Niquette replied the easy part was the project. The hard part is maintaining operations on a daily basis. Winooski is doing a good job of this so far. Liza Kilcoyne commented as an eyewitness to the Winooski revitalization project she observed the community getting used to their “new shoes”. Shops were empty at first, but are now filling up. The revival is ongoing, though slow. People are seeing an opportunity to make something new and become a part of the city fabric.

George Tyler asked about the public input process in developing a vision for the community and finding a balance between public involvement and getting something useful in the end. Bill Niquette suggested having a discussion with the community about what is liked or disliked in the community, what works or does not work, what is wanted or not wanted. Develop a general sense of what is thought of in a downtown, but Mr. Niquette cautioned that people may say they

want something, such as a grocery store in the community, and conditions are created to make this happen, but the store never comes to town because residents continue to shop elsewhere. This happens because expectations were not well thought out, stated Mr. Niquette.

Peter Gustafson commented the decline in the economy of the country, the increase in fuel costs, houses not selling, people cutting back, plans to bring in more business and build more housing to offset the machinery and equipment loss, this is a juggling act that is very scary. Bill Niquette suggested making the best of what the village has, whatever that is. Let the market do what it does best. The development role of a town is facilitating an efficient market. Inform developers of what is available for development. Encourage developers to talk to each other. Be proactive. Anything that is done to improve the village is not harmful to IBM so it is not necessary to make a choice between the two. It is prudent to work with the major employer in the area and have an eye on the village at the same time. Regarding housing, the housing stock in the village is hard to build for what it sells for today (\$275,000 is the typical cost of a starter home).

There were no further comments.

III. EXECUTIVE SESSION and/or ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by John Lajza, SECOND by Peter Gustafson, to go into Executive Session and invite the Planning Commission to attend. VOTING: 5 ayes; motion carried.

The Board entered Executive Session at 6:40 p.m.

MOTION by John Lajza, SECOND by Peter Gustafson, to adjourn Executive Session and the regular meeting. VOTING: 5 ayes; motion carried.

Executive Session and the regular meeting were adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

RScty: M.E.Riordan