



TRUSTEES SPECIAL MEETING
MONDAY, JULY 25, 2016 AT 6:30 PM
LINCOLN HALL, 2 LINCOLN STREET, ESSEX JUNCTION, VT 05452

1. **CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO FLAG** [6:30 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **JOINT MEETING WITH PLANNING COMMISSION AND ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT**
 - a. Discuss Thoughtful Growth in Action (TGIA) Final Report and Recommendations
5. **NEW BUSINESS**
 - a. Set FYE 17 Tax Rate
6. **CONSENT AGENDA**
 - a. Minutes of Previous Meeting 7/12/16
 - b. Expense Warrant #17002 dated 7/15/16 in the amount of \$119,673.71
7. **ADJOURN**

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**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING
MINUTES
July 25, 2016**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: George Tyler (Village President); Andrew Brown, Lori Houghton, Elaine Sopchak. (Dan Kerin was absent.)
PLANNING COMMISSION: John Alden, Amber Thibeault, Diane Clemens, Joe Weith.
ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT: Tom Weaver, Aaron Martin, Martin Hughes, Jim Moody.
ADMINISTRATION: Pat Scheidel, Municipal Manager; Lauren Morrissette, Finance Director/Assistant Manager; Robin Pierce, Development Director.
OTHERS PRESENT: Karyn Roberts, Dylan Giambatista, Greg Duggan.

1. CALL TO ORDER and PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Village President, George Tyler, called the meeting to order at 6 PM and led the assemblage in the Pledge of Allegiance.

With a quorum present for the Planning Commission, Vice Chairman John Alden called the planning commission meeting to order.

With a quorum present for the Zoning Board, Chairman Tom Weaver called the zoning board meeting to order.

2. AGENDA CHANGES/APPROVAL

The following change(s) to the agenda were noted:

- Add to Consent Agenda – Warrant #17003, dated 7/22/16

MOTION by Elaine Sopchak, SECOND by Lori Houghton, to accept the agenda as amended. VOTING: unanimous (4-0); motion carried.

3. GUESTS, PRESENTATIONS, PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

Karyn Roberts, 28 Lamoille Street, spoke about the application for a PRD at 32 Lamoille Street noting the following:

- The results and the meeting process were disappointing.
- The public meeting law was violated by the Final Plan application process because the public was not given the opportunity to speak on the application. Community members were not recognized with their hand raised to speak.
- Comments from two missing planning commissioners were not introduced at the meeting so the public did not hear the dissenting point of view.
- Accelerating the process of Preliminary Plan and Final Plan approval in the same meeting is concerning.

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- The Planning Commission exercised lack of discretion relative to Section 724 (PRD) which has language to protect the community and character of the area.
 - Several planning commissioners expressed unease with the project yet voted in the affirmative out of fear of being sued.
 - There is disagreement the existing house on the lot at 28 Lamoille Street meets the definition of the density bonus for affordable housing.
 - Every return trip to Essex Junction after being away for a period of time finds changes that are not for the better simply because the Land Development Code does not have language about something. For example, just because the Code does not have language about five story buildings does not mean these buildings should be allowed. The changes in the village are not the vision of the village.

George Tyler urged Ms. Roberts to attend the next Planning Commission meeting that is broadcast on Channel 17 and state her remarks again.

4. **JOINT MEETING: Board of Trustees, Planning Commission & Zoning Board**

1. Discussion of Thoughtful Growth In Action (TGIA) Final Report & Recommendations
George Tyler explained the next step with TGIA is for the Trustees and Selectboard to initiate an effort to fill in the details framed by the TGIA process including combining the Land Development Code with the town's Subdivision Regulations, consolidating the village plan and town plan, and the structure of government. The Trustees are looking at the short and long term future of Essex Junction to build a community with more capacity and flexibility for the future.

Village and Town Development Review Boards and Combined Planning Commission

The following comments were made:

- Amber Thibeault, Planning Commission, said she is open to the idea of a development review board, but has concern about how to populate the board. Public participation is an issue. Getting more public participation and education about the process is needed. Training of members, especially for the development review board, is important.
- Aaron Martin, Zoning Board, said forming development review boards and one planning commission is going in the right direction with the concept of planning as a whole. On the forefront the idea is good, but the character of the town is different from the village. Having separate development review boards reviewing development proposals is key.
- Andrew Brown, Trustee, said the village center and town center are distinct growth centers that need to complement each other, not compete with each other. The governance piece must be done fairly and done well. The direction is the right one.
- Elaine Sopchak, Trustee, spoke in favor of the process, but expressed reservation on governance. There is optimism with the role of the planning commission and two separate development review boards so the planning commission can focus on planning and the future and marrying the code to that. There is commitment to

having the village center district remain vibrant and attractive to businesses. Communication to residents is a priority.

- Lori Houghton, Trustee, echoed statements previously made about the DRBs and planning commission, and that governance is a non-starter. Enforcement needs to be incorporated into the discussion.
- Tom Weaver, Zoning Board Chairman, said combining the village and town has been a topic of discussion for a long time, and it is about time. The village has an identity and that should not be lost. The name of the board does not matter (planning commission, zoning board or development review board) as much as how the boards function.
- George Tyler, Village President, agreed with previous comments about maintaining the village identity. The village is involved in infrastructure projects that impact planning and zoning at a different level than the town. There is concern about changing a process that works now. The Trustees would be involved in making appointments to both the planning commission and the development review board for the village.
- John Alden, Planning Commission, urged making sure the various special and unique parts of the village and town are protected and enhanced. One planning commission will be able to evaluate and plan for the unique parts of the town including the village. Having two boards (DRBs) administering the planning documents is an intermediate step. Planning is stronger for the combined total area. Selection of members on the boards is critical. Having one planning commission for the public to provide input on changes to the code will simplify the process for the public. Changing the boards is not likely to alter participation. There are talented people in the community who want to do public service.
- Diane Clemens, Planning Commission, agreed having two development review boards and one planning commission is a nice intermediate step. How the rules are set up and having people with the right skills in the right place at the right time is key. The town should be rezoned to reflect growth centers and individual characteristics the community wants to accentuate. Education of the public is the hard part. People should be sent to the planning commission, not the development review board, for the education piece. The plan and code merging together can be done at the next round of updates (8 year span). The hurdles can be overcome with commitment. The public needs to be on board.
- Joe Weith, Planning Commission, agreed the comments that have been made make sense. The light workload of the planning commission is surprising. Most of the time has been spent updating the zoning regulations. Eliminating a board or two makes sense and will help with recruiting. There will be more people available to serve on the development review board and more to do.
- Martin Hughes, Zoning Board, agreed forming development review boards and one planning commission is a move in the right direction, but it will have its challenges (lot sizes in the village versus the town, public perception, public education of the planning process).

The consensus of the group is in support of more coordinated planning.

Dealing with Communications

George Tyler stated the public communication piece has been a long standing issue as well as how this should be addressed (board, office, group dealing with public communication).

The following comments were made:

- John Alden said each community should have a staff position with the individual trained in communications. The village website needs to be current, informative, and correct as well as easy to navigate.
- Tom Weaver stated there is a certain responsibility on the part of the public to seek information about an issue just as the boards have a responsibility to publicize information. There are many ways today to notify the public (Front Porch Forum, village webpage, and such)
- Lori Houghton said the boards have the responsibility to get out information. Boards and staff are doing so many good things, but the public is not aware because the information is not being posted.
- Elaine Sopchak suggested the budget process next year include funding for a Communications Director position.
- Diane Clemens said electronic and written messages should be posted. The public has to step up and participate. The village as a whole needs to reach out to the public. There is a large amount of miscommunication on Front Porch Forum.
- Robin Pierce said a report will be forthcoming from the recent meeting facilitated by Regional Planning on increasing participation and attendance at meetings. People mostly attend meetings because they are opposed to an issue. Those in support are not compelled to attend.
- Amber Thibeault urged using social media to reach the younger generation.
- George Tyler mentioned misinformation on social media is a problem.

There was brief discussion of the function of HR and the cost of a Communications Director position.

Next Steps

George Tyler said a merged planning and community development entity will likely be a town entity (village community development effort and oversight moved into town government) and village services will be incorporated into the town. The Trustees retain and maintain control of the village budget, but ultimately the movement is toward one elected board, unified governance, and one planning and community development entity.

John Alden said the TGIA process was long and arduous, covering lots of territory and trying to build consensus. In the end there was focus on the issues at hand which are outlined in the report. Implementation is a critical component. There is still work to do. Having a balanced representation on the planning commission is key so districts do not completely disappear. Balance should be maintained for some period of time so people can see that life will not be completely different from today.

Diane Clemens said there were suggestions noted through the process questions and great suggestions and approaches offered by individuals at the TGIA sessions. This information should be evaluated and the raw data put in an appendix to the report. Regarding a combined planning commission, half the population in the village and town live in 5 square miles of the village and the other half lives in the 30 square miles of the town. No matter where people live they come to the village to comment on Five Corners, for example, and vice versa. The village needs to be clear what is wanted with planning.

Joe Weith stressed there must be fair representation on the planning commission with some members from the village and some from the town. George Tyler said there would be an MOU between the Trustees and Selectboard to jointly appoint members to the planning commission and development review boards.

Elaine Sopchak stated boards change and an MOU is not as binding as an ordinance. There should be a permanent agreement or charter in place regarding appointment of board members so there is equal representation and equal membership.

Tom Weaver said once something is changed it is unlikely to change back, but the village may not have the luxury of not looking at change.

Andrew Brown agreed with equal representation and say on the new boards and that an MOU can be changed or eliminated. Consideration and thought needs to be given to whether the village/town arrangement will work for the community 20 years down the road.

There were no further comments.

MOTION by Amber Thibeault, SECOND by Joe Weith, to adjourn the Planning Commission meeting. VOTING: unanimous (4-0); motion carried.

The Planning Commission meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM.

Without objection and with no further business before the Zoning Board the meeting was adjourned at 7:55 PM.

5. NEW BUSINESS

1. Set FYE17 Tax Rate

MOTION by George Tyler, SECOND by Andrew Brown, to set the FYE17 tax rate at \$0.2289 per \$100 of assessed property value.

DISCUSSION: George Tyler noted the tax rate which shows a 3.25% decrease is headed in the right direction. The work and effort by staff on the budget is appreciated. It was noted the impact of the assessment for Global Foundries is included in the rate. There were no further comments.

VOTING: unanimous (4-0); motion carried.

6. TRUSTEES COMMENTS/CONCERNS & READING FILE

1. Board Member Comments

- There was brief discussion of the Handy property/parking lot on Main Street and the planned coffee shop and food truck.
- Lori Houghton asked that the meeting material for one month past be retained in DropBox.

7. **CONSENT AGENDA**

MOTION by Elaine Sopchak, **SECOND** by Lori Houghton, to approve the consent agenda as follows and with the addition of Warrant #17003, dated 7/22/16:

1. Approve Minutes of Previous Meetings 7/12/16
2. Expense Warrant #17002 dated 7/15/16 in the amount of \$119,673.71.

DISCUSSION: Elaine Sopchak asked about the comment on “Massage Therapist” in the Land Development Code. Lori Houghton asked about language on building height in the Code. The Trustees will discuss any issues at the next public hearing on the Land Development Code. There were no further comments.

VOTING: unanimous (4-0); motion carried.

8. **ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION by Lori Houghton, **SECOND** by Elaine Sopchak, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous (4-0); motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan

