

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
December 5, 2013**

- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Diane Clemens (Chairwoman); John Alden, Nick Meyer, Amber Thibeault, David Nistico, Aaron Martin. (Andrew Boutin was absent.)
- ADMINISTRATION:** Robin Pierce, Development Director; Rick Hamlin, Village Engineer.
- OTHERS PRESENT:** Onan Whitcomb, Frank Naef, Brad Luck, Sue McCormack, Chris Halpin.
- AGENDA:**
1. Call to Order
 2. Audience for Visitors
 3. Additions/Amendments to the Agenda
 4. Minutes
 5. Work Session: Comprehensive Plan Update
 6. Other Planning Commission Items
 7. Adjournment
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1. CALL TO ORDER

Diane Clemens called the meeting to order at 6 PM.

2. AUDIENCE FOR VISITORS

Frank Naef

Frank Naef, Park Terrace, asked about the number of units versus total square footage in the proposed mixed use development at Five Corners. The warning says 45,000 s.f. of residential space. Robin Pierce said the number has not changed from what was presented by the developer. There was agreement the warning should include information on the number of units in the development.

3. ADDITIONS/AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

None.

4. MINUTES

August 2, 2012 & February 21, 2013

MOTION by John Alden, SECOND by Aaron Martin, to approve the minutes of 8/2/12 and 2/21/13 as written. VOTING: 5 ayes, one abstention (Amber Thibeault); motion carried.

October 18, 2012

MOTION by John Alden, SECOND by Dave Nistico, to approve the 10/18/12 minutes with the replacement of Amber Thibeault with Liza Kilcoyne in "Members Present". VOTING: 4 ayes, 2 abstentions (Amber Thibeault, Diane Clemens); motion carried.

November 7, 2013

Postponed to the next meeting.

November 21, 2013

MOTION by John Alden, SECOND by Nick Meyer, to approve the 11/21/13 minutes with correction of Stipulation #8 in the motion for the Thasha Lane development to read: "The lighting shall be removed from the emergency access road." VOTING: 5 ayes, one abstention (Aaron Martin); motion carried.

5. WORK SESSION: Comprehensive Plan Update

OPEN SPACE/RECREATION

Brad Luck provided updated information on the village parks, the dog park and community gardens. Mr. Luck noted the following:

- The master plan has been updated to cover 2007-2016. A new master plan will be drafted beginning 2017.
- The master plan is used as a guide and most of the obligations and directives outlined in the plan have been met except building sand volleyball courts at Maple Street Park and further investigation of the need for indoor rec space.
- Potential resources to support parks and recreation include:
 - Capital plan – in the past there was one cent on the tax rate for recreation, but this was decreased and held steady at \$75,000. Prudential Committee is considering asking the voters to reinstitute one cent on the tax rate for parks and recreation.
 - Recreation impact fee – staff is researching rec impact fees in the village and will report to the Trustees and Prudential Committee. There are school impact fees in place now that will sunset in 2014. The town does not have a school impact fee, but does have a rec impact fee.
 - Funds from the land acquisition fund (remaining balance in the fund is limited).
- Two of the Heart & Soul values are relevant to recreation: Health and Recreation & Thoughtful Growth. Information can be found on the Heart & Soul website.
- There is not much open space in the village, but there are three parks (Stevens Park, Maple Street Park, and Cascade Street Park).
- Rec needs are growing in the village because the school population in the village is not declining and the aging population is seeking rec opportunities.
- The village should be ready to act if the state land on West Street becomes available for recreation purposes.

There was discussion of folding rec needs and future growth into the comprehensive plan. Diane Clemens asked if the village is seeking free form open space or park-like open space. Brad Luck said there is need for both preservation of open space and green space for passive recreation. Maple Street Park is fully utilized. Have some space in the village for programs would be helpful. The town has a more up-to-date master plan (2011) and speaks to open space, trails, and opportunity for indoor rec space.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no comments from the public on open space/recreation.

TRANSPORTATION – Sidewalks, Paths, Streetscape

Rick Hamlin noted changes were made in the text in the transportation section of the plan to use generic terminology, such as “bike facilities” and to do some tune up related to the crescent connector road.

John Alden mentioned people walking in the road because only one sidewalk is plowed and the need to ensure policy to promote safe use of sidewalks and bike paths. Mr. Alden also asked if there is an easy way to let people know where the paths and connections are in the village. Rick Hamlin explained the winter plowing policy per the directive of the Trustees (plow one sidewalk only) is to save money and ensure sidewalks are plowed expediently following a storm. The educational piece is to encourage people to use the sidewalk and make sure the walk is in good condition. One goal of the Bike/Walk Committee is to map all routes and linkages in the village and identify gaps. The committee has also developed a list for use in review of projects. The list helps identify connections to consider. The Bike/Walk Committee is looking at other places in the country that are advanced in bike facilities for ideas. Robin Pierce noted at the last Regional Planning meeting there was discussion of “trunk routes” for commuter cyclists and effort to maintain those routes in good condition.

Nick Meyer asked about traffic calming techniques on main arterial roads into the village. Rick Hamlin said the measures depend on the roadway and could be as simple as speed enforcement or flashing signs to alert a driver to their speed. Mr. Meyer asked if there are limitations due to having a state highway in the village. Mr. Hamlin noted Route 15 through the village is under the control of the village. Route 2A (Park Street and Lincoln Street) is controlled by the state.

Diane Clemens mentioned the goal in the open space section of the plan of eight foot wide sidewalk/path. Rick Hamlin advised this should not be a goal because an eight foot wide sidewalk does not make sense for every location and type of rider. Some bikers are comfortable riding in a vehicle lane or bike lane while others want a separate path. The village needs to have flexibility and look point-to-point in serving the biking and walking community. John Alden urged having the Land Development Code specify some way to accommodate facilities for bikes, pedestrians and cars. Rick Hamlin noted a goal should be to interconnect the village and surrounding communities and accommodate needs as best possible. One goal of the Bike/Walk Committee is a dedicated multi-use path from Essex Junction to Richmond. Transportation Objective 2.8 in the plan encourages neighboring communities to provide information on major developments that could impact Five Corners and on what facilities will be built so connections can be made.

Diane Clemens noted the open space section refers to sidewalks as being passive open space. Rick Hamlin clarified sidewalks can be considered part of open space, but are not passive. Sidewalks are a functional piece of the transportation system and part of the streetscape.

John Alden asked about concrete versus asphalt sidewalks/paths. Rick Hamlin stated concrete is part of the public works standards which are part of the Land Development Code. The public did not like asphalt sidewalks because they were not as neat and clean as concrete. Concrete is more durable and lasts longer than a paved path, especially in less than five foot widths. John Alden asked about primitive trails in the village. Rick Hamlin stated due to safety concerns the public did not want children walking out of sight on paths in the woods. There are a few places with unsigned trails in the areas of Fairview Farm and Warner Ave. The Bike/Walk Committee could have as a goal mapping any informal trails that are known in the village. Mr. Hamlin noted the students in the UVM Engineering Program are looking for projects and could be asked to design a pedestrian link connecting to the state property on West Street from Pearl Street by Harley Davison Motorcycles.

Nick Meyer mentioned the tree planting program for complete streets and the village tree policy to help replenish and maintain trees in the community. It was recalled there was a time when the village had tree lined streets. There was discussion of available space for planting trees (in the right-of-way or on private property). Nick Meyer asked the threshold of the village taking over a private road. Rick Hamlin stated all utilities (sewer, water) must meet the specifications in the Land Development Code. The village would rather not take over short, dead-end streets with a few houses, but must have access to the public water line to the houses on the street.

There was discussion of changes to Park Street due to the crescent connector road which will include a pedestrian sidewalk, bike lane, and allow travel from Park Street to Route 15 even when the chip train is traveling through the village. Robin Pierce noted the village requested construction documents by April 2014 and hopes to complete the road by summer 2015. The crescent connector should be noted in the comprehensive plan.

John Alden asked about including a commuter train in the plan. Rick Hamlin said there is mention of reconnection of service to Montreal, but not commuter rail service because light rail cannot run in combination with freight rail. There is language in the plan that says "utilize rail to the maximum extent to move people and freight". John Alden asked about the status of making the train station ADA accessible. Rick Hamlin said Amtrak is behind in the work and will do just the minimum to be compliant, not the plan presented for the station by the UVM engineering students. There was mention of the better working relationship with the railroad. Rick Hamlin said most of the communication with the railroad of late has been for the new crossing as part of the crescent connector project and to do upgrades at the Central Street crossing. Nick Meyer noted merchants on Railroad Ave. have an issue with people using the bus or train occupying the parking spaces on the street. Rick Hamlin said there will be parking along the crescent connector and the parking lot off Ivy Lane. The parking lot at the federal building is underutilized and the village should again begin discussions about using some of the spaces. CCTA has been asked to relocate the third bus waiting at the station to avoid blocking access to parking spaces.

Diane Clemens asked about pedestrian and bike traffic traversing IBM property to get to Williston. Rick Hamlin said this has not been discussed. A path through CVE property connecting Route 2A to Route 15 has been discussed though. Robin Pierce reported on the path connection to the tree farm off Old Colchester Road from Autumn Pond apartments and the high school. There will be a complete loop around the tree farm and the developer of Autumn Pond will maintain the path connection. Emergency vehicles will be able to use the path to access the soccer fields at the tree farm.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Sue McCormack, resident, spoke of the importance of biking and walking to the community and that these values came out strongly in the Heart & Soul values (Health and Recreation & Thoughtful Growth). Regarding connectivity, people are interested in getting to Richmond or rural parts of the town so having a path would be good. Information should be provided to the public on what is meant by a "bike path", the different kinds of paths and the pros and cons of each. Rick Hamlin said the plan does cover three different paths: shared use, cycle track (separate from the road), and on road (shared with vehicles). The Bike/Walk Committee is discussing doing outreach to schools on paths in the village. The committee is also working on identifying signal loops that are triggered by bikes so markings can be painted on the pavement for bikes to trigger the lights.

There were no further comments.

6. OTHER PLANNING COMMISSION ITEMS

Minutes to be approved at the next meeting:

- November 7, 2013
- December 5, 2013

7. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by John Alden, SECOND by Aaron Martin, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous (6-0); motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 PM.

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