

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
April 2, 2015**

- MEMBERS PRESENT:** David Nistico (Chairman); John Alden, Diane Clemens, Andrew Boutin, Amber Thibeault, Nick Meyer.
- ADMINISTRATION:** Robin Pierce, Development Director.
- OTHERS PRESENT:** Christine Forde, Bob Chamberlin, Greg Morgan, Meredith Birkett, Janet Botula, Al Villa, Jason Starr (*Essex Reporter*).
- AGENDA:**
1. Call to Order
 2. Audience for Visitors
 3. Additions/Amendments to the Agenda
 4. Minutes
 5. Public Meeting
 - Public Information Meeting, Amtrak Train Station Access and Circulation Study, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and Village of Essex Junction
 6. Other Planning Commission Items
 7. Adjournment
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1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman David Nistico called the meeting to order at 6 PM.

2. AUDIENCE FOR VISITORS

None.

3. ADDITIONS/AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA

There were no changes to the agenda.

4. MINUTES

May 1, 2014

MOTION by Nick Meyer, SECOND by Amber Thibeault, to approve the 5/1/14 minutes as written. VOTING: 4 ayes, 1 abstention (Dave Nistico)[Andrew Boutin not present for vote; motion carried.

May 8, 2014

MOTION by Amber Thibeault, SECOND by Diane Clemens, to approve the 5/8/14 minutes as written. VOTING: 4 ayes, 1 abstention (Dave Nistico)[Andrew Boutin not present for vote; motion carried.

May 15, 2014

MOTION by Amber, Thibeault, SECOND by Diane Clemens, to approve the 5/15/14 minutes as written. VOTING: 4 ayes, 1 abstention (John Alden)[Andrew Boutin not present for vote; motion carried.

November 20, 2014

MOTION by Nick Meyer, SECOND by Diane Clemens, to approve the 11/20/14 minutes as written. VOTING: unanimous (5-0)[Andrew Boutin not present for vote]; motion carried.

5. PUBLIC MEETING

Public information meeting on a study by Chittenden County Regional Planning and the Village of Essex Junction titled “Essex Junction Amtrak Train Station Access and Circulation Study”

John Alden recused himself. Christine Forde, Bob Chamberlin, and John Alden appeared on behalf of the project.

Bob Chamberlin noted the following:

- Previous studies of the train station are the foundation for the current study.
- Following observation of the area there appears to be a substantial amount of on-street parking available during times when the train is at the station.
- CCTA bus routes served from the station include Williston-Essex, Essex Junction-Burlington, and the Essex Center run. Buses coordinate with the arrival of the train.
- There are basic pedestrian amenities on Railroad Avenue (sidewalks, crosswalks, bike racks).
- There is no sidewalk along the row of parking spaces by the train station.
- There is a transportation component (traffic circulation) and a facilities component (sidewalks and such) to the project. There are no plans at this point for an electric car plug-in station as part of the project.
- Next steps include the consultants developing an alternative and then presenting the recommended alternative to the Trustees

John Alden reported on existing conditions:

- The train station is not owned by the village. The bus stop is on one side of the station.
- The railroad tracks have been upgraded and the station has been painted as the only improvements to date.
- Only a small portion of the building is used for the train station. Other uses occupy the remainder of the building.
- There is a pinch point on Railroad Avenue when buses are parked at the bus stop.
- The end of the building (Central Street side) is being used as an unofficial taxi stop.
- Amtrak has parking permits for eight spaces for overnight parking, but only four are designated with signage.
- Design elements of the improvements to the train station respect the existing building and create a community hub. The elements include:
 - A large roof canopy over the existing building with a pitched metal open truss roof to a porch overhang. There will be a clock tower on top of the monitor barn roof design.

- The roof overhang will cover two buses parked single file. Bus parking is pushed back from the intersection with Central Street.
- Existing curb bump-out will be trimmed back.
- A lobby will be added under the roof canopy to serve train and bus riders and include a public bathroom.

COMMENTS

Al Villa, Amtrak Station Manager, said there is a lift at the station to help passengers onto the train who are disabled.

David Nistico asked if CCTA will relocate the seating on the side of the building by the bus stop. John Alden pointed out with the improvements the waiting area is moved under the roof canopy. Meredith Birkett, CCTA, said the bus company spent \$60,000 to create the enclosed passenger waiting area that is there today and would like to keep what is there at the least or better. Mr. Nistico asked about bike racks under the canopy to accommodate people commuting on the train in the future and then using their bike to get to work. Meredith Birkett said CCTA has secure bike lockers in place in Winooski and downtown Burlington now. The same could be possible in Essex Junction.

There was discussion of the high traffic volume in the area (vehicles, pedestrians, buses, bicyclists) in the morning and afternoon each day, especially during the school year. Traffic volume is an issue if usage of the bus and train increases. The planned multi-use path along the tracks from Central Street to Grove Street was mentioned. Al Villa noted it is a federal offense to trespass on railroad tracks. The railroad company has posted signs which unfortunately are ignored by trespassers. Nick Meyer pointed out the area is under-utilized, but has much potential to be turned into a vibrant space. The streetscape can be improved with more plantings to help slow traffic. Parking at the federal building is not fully used so there may be opportunity to get the building fully occupied and the parking used. Parking needs to be available for the merchants and patrons. Mr. Meyer said he is not in favor of having a sidewalk by the parking along the railroad tracks because the spaces should be for the merchants, not commuters. Also, more hardscape is not needed in the area. One solution might be to make a break in the fence to allow access to the platform from the parking. Al Villa said more lighting along the platform would be beneficial as well.

Greg Morgan stated the Essex Economic Development Commission sees upgrade of the train station as an economic development priority for the community. The scoping study is one of the steps necessary to get the project into the state's five year transportation plan. According to Brian Searles, former State Secretary of Transportation, the station is Vermont's busiest station, but the building looks like a bunker and is an embarrassment to the state. Mr. Morgan pointed out the following;

- Trains can be a tremendous economic positive to the community in contrast to the drug use and nefarious activity taking place along the railroad tracks now.
- Great American Stations Project shows how to collaborate to improve train stations. Information on the project is online.

- Drivers do not always stop for people in crosswalks so lights may be necessary at the crosswalk to the station.
- McClure Building is now a mini-storage facility, but the use could change over time so the space should be considered in any long range plans for the area.
- Enforcement should be done with cars parked all day in spaces meant for short term use.
- Locating Five Corners Farmers Market at the train station could be beneficial.

There were no further comments.

MOTION by Nick Meyer, SECOND by Diane Clemens, that the Village Planning Commission supports the scoping study for the Amtrak train station moving forward. VOTING: unanimous (6-0); motion carried.

6. OTHER PLANNING COMMISSION ITEMS

Capital Project Committee

David Nistico announced the Capital Project Committee needs members. Amber Thibeault expressed interest in serving on the committee.

Merger of Community Development Departments

Robin Pierce reported preliminary discussion has taken place on merging the village and town community development departments and whether there should be a planning commission, development review board, and separate zoning board. Regional Planning is holding a meeting on April 27, 2015 to discuss development review boards. The consultant with Heart & Soul was selected to investigate combining the departments. At some point village staff (Robin Pierce) and the Planning Commission will be asked to contribute. The vision for the community will be a big discussion item.

The Planning Commission was in unanimous support of having the opportunity to be involved in the process. There was agreement the Heart & Soul process should also continue. Suggestions for involvement included:

- Meet with the Board of Trustees at least twice a year.
- Hold planning commission meetings on a regular basis to discuss issues and hold informal meetings to hear comments from the citizenry.
- Meet with the Bike/Walk Committee.
- Hold a joint meeting with the Essex Planning Commission to discuss topics of interest for the village and town.

Village Downtown Designation

Robin Pierce announced re-certification of the designated village downtown must be done this year.

Land Development Code Update

Work sessions need to be scheduled to update the LDC which must be done by 2016. There was mention of having overlays on the zoning map or an interactive map identifying bike routes, train station, tree plantings, historic properties and other sites in

the village. Potential locations for pocket parks in the village should be identified. Public outreach and education on signs should be done. Heart & Soul could facilitate an educational event and portions of the sign ordinance could be published in the village newsletter. Information could be added to the Downtown Essex Junction Facebook page which has information on parking and economic development.

7. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Nick Meyer, SECOND by John Alden, to adjourn the meeting.

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM.

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