

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
June 3, 2021**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Alden, Vice Chair; Phil Batalion; Diane Clemens; Patrick Scheld; Steven Shaw (David Nistico and Andrew Boutin were absent).

**ADMINISTRATION:** Robin Pierce, Community Development Director; Regina Mahony, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission;

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Calvin Bogart, Natalee Braun, Will Dodge, Gabe Handy, Nick Meyer, Phil March, David Skopin, Sara Stultz, Mia Watson, Irene Wrenner;

- AGENDA:**
1. Call to Order/Audience for Visitors
  2. Additions/Amendments to the Agenda
  3. Minutes – May 6, 2021
  4. Work Session – Continue updates for Land Development Code
    - a. Discussion on Design Five Corners
    - b. Design Review Amendments
    - c. Discussion with Energy Committee
  5. Other Planning Commission Items
  6. Adjournment
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**1. CALL TO ORDER**

John Alden called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

**2. ADDITIONS/AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA**

The agenda was reordered as follows:

1. Call to Order
2. Audience for Visitors
3. Work Session: Continue Updates for Land Development
  - a. Discussion with Energy Committee
  - b. Discussion on Design Five Corners
  - c. Design Review Amendments
4. Other Planning Commission Items
5. Minutes of May 6, 2021
6. Adjournment

**3. AUDIENCE FOR VISITORS**

Gabe Handy spoke about a proposed project on a lot to build six single-family homes with a common parking area in front. He said that these homes would be intended as starter homes. He showed a sketch plan. Mr. Alden asked about whether the zoning would allow this type of project, and Mr. Handy replied that yes, he meets the square footage requirements for this. Mr. Alden asked if there is a limit to the number of units that can access a single driveway, and Mr. Pierce replied that there isn't, and he also noted that this would be a Planned Unit Development (PUD). Mr. Alden said some of the neighbors may take an interest in this, since the units are arranged close to the property

limits. He said that the project could be a good tradeoff between density and maintaining the character of the neighborhood.

Mia Watson spoke as a member of the Essex Housing Commission. She said she is happy to field any questions as they relate to planning. Mr. Alden asked what the Housing Commission thinks about some of these in-fill developments, like what Mr. Handy is proposing above. Ms. Watson replied that the Commission's position is that Essex desperately needs housing and that this is in-filling existing development, not developing on previously-undeveloped areas like forests. She said that building new single-family homes almost always occurs at the high end of the market, and she is interested to see what prices would be possible for a starter home development. She said this sounds like what Essex needs.

Nick Meyer attempted to give public comment but had technical difficulties and was not able to speak.

Sara Stultz said that some parents have formed a group called Essex for Healthy Kids, in light of the potential vote for cannabis retail sale in Essex. She said that the group will raise concerns about the types of shops that are coming to Essex Junction, like smoke shops and vape shops. She said that the group thinks they are too close to schools and places where kids play. Mr. Alden said that typically there are radius requirements for these types of shops and also said that the Planning Commission will look in the LDC to see if there are opportunities to adjust the language. Mr. Pierce said that the Junction is forming a Cannabis Committee to hear concerns around this, and that the earliest that retail could come to the Junction is May of 2022.

#### **4. WORK SESSION: CONTINUE UPDATES FOR LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE**

##### A. Discussion with Energy Committee

Will Dodge and David Skopin of the Energy Committee, gave an overview of the Energy Committee's scope, challenges, and recommendations for Essex in 2021. He said that the Energy Committee tracks energy usage and makes recommendations to the Selectboard as well as looks at renewable energy sources and increasing efficient energy usage in the Town and looking at educational programs. He said that they have the right to request appropriations through the Town for operating expenses. He said that since the inception of the Committee, they have been acting as the Committee for both the Town and the Village within it. He briefly spoke about the Essex Energy Plan, which was adopted in 2019. He noted goals around land use, transportation, thermal (weatherization), and renewable energy. He spoke about a number of projects that Tom Yandow worked on related to energy in the Town. He noted that the thermal sector produces the highest amount of energy in Vermont, which is why the Committee is so focused on weatherization efforts.

Mr. Skopin talked briefly about the urgency around energy initiatives at the municipal, state, and national levels. He said that one of the overall goals of the Committee is to

reduce the overall carbon footprint of the Town in a strategic manner, by making relatively small changes that could have large impacts.

Mr. Dodge spoke about the recommendations that the Energy Committee gave to the Selectboard, which included installing solar panels at Sand Hill Park, encouraging the use of electric vehicles and electric maintenance tools at the municipal level, potentially net metering to take advantage of available credits, working with the Community Development Office on weatherization promotion in 2021, and having a designated energy inspector for buildings, among others.

Mr. Pierce noted that some European municipalities have decreased cutting grass on their lawns and medians in order to decrease energy use and encourage pollinators.

Mr. Alden spoke about energy efficiency and weatherization project funding and activities at the state and federal levels.

Mr. Dodge said that the Energy Committee will submit its recommendations around Land Development Code revisions to the Planning Commission.

Natalee Braun noted the work that Burlington's City Council has done around climate change mitigation through their Net Zero Energy Plan, and expressed hope that Essex moves in the same direction.

#### B. Discussion on Design Five Corners

Ms. Mahony continued the conversation about the purpose and location of the overlay, noting that the expansion of the concept of the overlay into trunk routes would help hold up the same level of historic preservation and design for areas approaching the Village Center. She outlined the recommendations included in the drafted memo, which include having certain elements of proposed feedback worked into the purpose statement, carrying those into the trunk routes, and recommendations on the locations for the overlay.

Ms. Mahony outlined the proposed recommended locations for the overlay, which included:

- Main Street: from Village Center District to 81 Main Street on one side and to Town Hall on the other, generally one parcel deep.
- Lincoln Street: from the Village Center District to North Street/Grove Street intersection. She suggested combining the design review overlay with the historic overlay. Mr. Alden expressed a preference for the design control district overlay rather than just strictly the historic overlay, as it allows the Village a larger chance to have input about the imagery and visuals as people enter the Village.
- Pearl Street: from the Village Center District to the West Street Extension on one side and to the Highway zoning district on the other. There was discussion about whether the overlay should extend to Susie Wilson Road. Mr. Batalion spoke in favor of extending it to Susie Wilson Road and Ms. Clemens agreed, saying it would give them more control and oversight on trunk roads.

- Park Street: from the Village Center District to Cascade Street on one side and 106 Park Street on the other side.
- Maple Street: from the Village Center District to Maple Street Park on one side and the intermediate school on the other. There was discussion about ending at Camp Street and Mansfield Avenue. There was discussion about whether zoning should bifurcate someone's parcel (it should not). Mr. Pierce noted that the criteria is that if the parcel fronts the street, it is pulled into that district.

Ms. Watson said that preserving historic character is good, but she spoke about the importance of having policies that increase density. Mr. Alden agreed, saying that in order to take advantage of the amenities in the Village Center, policies should allow for the most flexible housing options possible.

Mr. Alden requested a coordinated plan that shows the overlay boundary for one of their upcoming working sessions.

#### C. Design Review Amendments

Ms. Mahony explained applicability for historic district zoning within the overlay, saying that it should mimic the applicability to existing historic structures. Mr. Alden asked if these requirements can be applied to the Village as a whole, citing the many historic structures outside the Village Center. Ms. Mahony said that it is only applicable to the Village Center, but it could be applied to the overlay for the trunk roads.

Ms. Mahony said that in terms of the applicability of this level of review, she proposed that it comes into effect when an applicant is proposing an addition to an already-existing building or a demolition/reconstruction. She said that regular maintenance, exterior alterations, and change of use would be exempt. Mr. Alden confirmed that review would also apply to non-historic family homes, if they are in the overlay district. Other Planning Commission members agreed.

Natalee Braun expressed appreciation for the considerations around bikeability and walkability.

#### **4. OTHER PLANNING COMMISSION ITEMS**

Mr. Pierce noted a recent Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) meeting where it was suggested that the train station be renamed the Essex Junction Multi-Modal Facility, since it provides access and transfers to other forms of transportation and is the only facility in Chittenden County to accommodate train and bus transportation at the one location.. He also noted that after equity scoring, the train station dropped in rank from #3 to #6. He noted that the station is currently undergoing an ADA upgrade. He said he requested the scoring methodology to understand the re-ranking. He said that it will be important to keep an eye on this issue. Mr. Alden reiterated the Planning Commission's support for this work.

**5. MINUTES**

*May 6, 2021-*

**MOTION by Diane Clemens, SECOND by Steven Shaw to approve the minutes as presented. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carried.**

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION by Diane Clemens, SECOND by Patrick Scheld, to adjourn the meeting. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carried.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 PM.

*RScty: AACoonradt*