

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING
MINUTES OF MEETING
OCTOBER 6, 2022
APPROVED NOVEMBER 10, 2022**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Phil Batalion, Chair; Patrick Scheld, Vice Chair; Diane Clemens, Scott McCormick, Elijah Massey.

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager.

OTHERS PRESENT: None.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Phil Batalion called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

City Manager Mahony recommended adding the June 16, 2022 meeting minutes to the agenda and removing the March 3, 2022 and May 19, 2022 meeting minutes from the agenda, as they had previously been approved.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

None.

4. MINUTES

a. May 5, 2022

MOTION by DIANE CLEMENS, SECOND by PATRICK SCHELD, to approve the minutes of May 5, 2022. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.

b. June 16, 2022

MOTION by PATRICK SCHELD, SECOND by DIANE CLEMENS, to approve the minutes of June 16, 2022. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.

c. July 11, 2022

MOTION by SCOTT MCCORMICK, SECOND by DIANE CLEMENS, to approve the minutes of July 11, 2022. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.

d. August 4, 2022

MOTION by DIANE CLEMENS, SECOND by PATRICK SCHELD, to approve the minutes of August 4, 2022. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion of future agenda topics

City Manager Mahony began by outlining the Planning Commission's authority and scope as defined in the City Charter and State statute. She said that largely, this is comprised of writing the City's Comprehensive Plan and establishing the regulations (through the Land Development Code) to implement that Comprehensive Plan.

The Planning Commission then reviewed the topics within the Comprehensive Plan in order to develop a list of future agenda topics and tasks. They discussed exploring the feasibility of a rental registry (to take inventory of current short-term rental landscape and see trends) and associated rental ordinance; exploring caps on short-term rentals. They also discussed having educational and background materials to bring new Planning Commissioners up to speed on topics such as Design Five Corners, the Crescent Connector, and the Main Street Park.

Commissioner Batalion listed two groups of priority areas from his perspective. The first includes open items that arose during the Land Development Code (LDC) update discussions. This includes inclusionary zoning, parking requirements, and improving community engagement with the Planning Commission. The second includes items that are related to the Comprehensive Plan. These include rental regulations, addressing vacant commercial spaces in the City, transportation improvements (for bus, rail, bicycle improvements, and cycling routes/infrastructure), re-establishing a farmer's market, potential development for Stevens Park, and updating floodplain maps.

Commissioner McCormick noted that there used to be a Joint Town/Village Energy Committee and that the Town still has one. He asked whether the City should form its own Energy Committee. Commissioner Scheld said that it would be helpful to take stock of current standing committees for the City, as a number of committees prior to separation had been joint committees, and they are now either Town committees or defunct.

Commissioner McCormick listed a number of priorities from his perspective, in addition to the Energy Committee comment. These include looking at options for grant funding or volunteers, exploring whether the charette process could be used for Design Five Corners, inventory additional public space for community garden spaces, determining whether the City has a Tree Management Plan or a Bike/Pedestrian Plan, ways to support and attract businesses to the City, and including exploring the concept of an incubator space for businesses in the City.

Commissioner McCormick listed a number of priorities specifically related to energy. He asked why there are not requirements in the LDC around electric vehicle (EV) chargers. Commissioner Clemens replied that there are state regulations around EVs. Commissioner McCormick noted a recommendation around having an energy coordinator position, but recognized that there are current staffing limitations. He asked whether there have been energy audits conducted for all City buildings. Commissioner Clemens replied that the City and Town hired someone to do an audit of municipal buildings. Commissioner Batalion asked whether the City could have energy requirements that are above and beyond the State's energy code. City Manager Mahony replied that it's a complex topic, and that municipalities may not have the legal authority to implement stricter requirements in some areas. Commissioner McCormick then brought up the possibility of identifying more specific sites for renewable energy and solar for municipal buildings. He additionally brought up disaster management,

and asked whether the City should consider developing and adopting a Climate Adaptation Plan. He said that they could look at stormwater, streams, and the potential for more intense flooding.

Commissioner Batalion spoke about transportation priorities and goals. He brought up how the City can improve the Amtrak station and add routes (such as to Boston or to Montreal). He asked who needs to be engaged in order to start that conversation. Commissioner McCormick asked whether there is funding available for Amtrak refurbishment. Commissioner Clemens replied that there is an earmark at the federal level after a push from Senator Leahy for this, but isn't sure where. Commissioner Clemens said that there is a segment of rails in the southern section of a potential Essex to Boston route that would need to be converted to passenger rail, as it's currently freight. Commissioner Batalion said that in terms of a Montreal route, U.S. Border Protection would want passport control in a station in order to run a Montreal route, which would entail some lobbying to Senators/Congresspeople on the part of Essex Junction. He also brought up the improvement of bus routes and how to ensure that they are as accessible as possible. Commissioner Massey spoke about improved "bikeability" and suggested having a more formalized plan for improving the bicycle system and making it more interconnected, noting that it would entail coordination with other municipalities. Commissioner Clemens said that more community buy-in about multi-modal transportation is key. Commissioner Batalion brought up that increasing bicycle/car interaction safety by improving bike routes is also key. He said that a good goal for this priority area is that someone should be able to traverse the City on a dedicated bike path.

Commissioner Scheld asked whether there is a role for the Planning Commission to assist the City Council in determining whether there is a need to establish additional committees, especially given that many of the commissions on which the City had been involved were joint committees with the Town prior to separation. Commissioner McCormick also suggested using task forces, rather than forming long-standing committees.

City Manager Mahony said that she would put together a proposal for the criteria that the Planning Commission could use to prioritize the above topics that were discussed. Planning Commissioners agreed, saying that they will discuss criteria and prioritization at their November meeting.

City Manager Mahony then reviewed a number of the discussion points above, providing updates to Planning Commissioners where available. She noted that for Main Street Park (the pocket park), there is a small committee that is still actively thinking about design and that it should be on the October 26 City Council agenda. She said that in terms of community engagement, the LDC is in front of the City Council currently for their consideration. She said that the City Council is currently focused on implications for the duplex/triplex component of the LDC. She said that there are some components of the LDC that they may want to remove so that they can move forward, such as the design overlay, and others that they may want to pause on and think about a bit more. She said that it may be prudent to have a joint meeting between the City Council and Planning Commission to discuss these items more. Commissioner Batalion asked if the duplex/triplex language would come back to the Planning Commission, if the City Council wants to make changes to it. City Manager Mahony replied that yes, the Planning Commission needs to be informed and ensure technical accuracy of the LDC if the City Council modifies the language. She noted that the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) is actively revising their Regional Active Transportation Plan, and suggested that the Planning Commission review that once that revision occurs. She also suggested that in terms of interconnectivity, municipalities could collectively approach the CCRPC to request funding for a scoping study for

interconnected bike lanes. She said that in terms of the Amtrak station, the City has received \$3 million from Senator Leahy's office and that they are working on next steps, including securing local match for the funding. She also discussed the housing needs assessment that the Town conducted and noted that it contains separated City and Town data, and said it is good background material for topics related to housing. She noted that there is a section in the LDC on parking that would be a good place for requirements around EV chargers. She touched upon designations, noting that the Junction currently has a Village designation and a Neighborhood Development Area (NDA) designation. She asked whether it would be better to move from a Village designation to a Downtown designation. She noted that the Downtown Designation would require a municipality to have a main street program entity in place to be a business assistance association. She said it would be helpful to hear from experts on the differences between the designations. In terms of committees, she informed the Planning Commission that the Joint Housing Commission still exists, but that they may split into City/Town in July of 2023. She said that they are currently working through inclusionary zoning, which will eventually be handed off to the Planning Commission, and the potential of a housing trust fund.

b. Discussion of meeting schedule

City Manager Mahony recommended meeting once a month on the first Thursday of the month. The Planning Commission agreed with this schedule, though they will meet on November 10th rather than the 3rd, due to scheduling conflicts.

6. ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION by SCOTT MCCORMICK, SECOND by PATRICK SCHELD, to adjourn the meeting.
VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 P.M.

RScty: AACoonradt