CONSERVATION & TRAILS COMMITTEE
Essex Town Offices, 81 Main St., Essex Junction, Vermont 05452

Minutes of Tuesday, March 10, 2020

In attendance
Conservation & Trails Committee (CTC): Cristine Hammer, Chair; Hilary Jones, Clerk; Elisabeth Coleman, Justin St. James (via telephone call)
Town Staff present: Darren Schibler, Town Planner

AGENDA ITEM #1: Public Comments

Hammer called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

AGENDA ITEM #2: Agenda Changes and Approval

Schibler noted the 1 LeClerc Woods project has been moved to the April 9 Planning Commission meeting.

COLEMAN MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY JONES, TO APPROVE THE AGENDA. THE MOTION PASSED 4-0.

AGENDA ITEM #3: Development Review

3/12/2020 Planning Commission Meeting

1. 54/62 Browns River Rd (consent)

Schibler explained the application is to dissolve the boundary line between the two properties. The landowners bought the adjacent lot and want to combine the two properties and tear down the existing building on the adjacent lot. Hammer asked if the building to be torn down is a historic property. Schibler looked at the Town’s GIS map and noted that it is a historic building. Because the property is not within the Business Design Control Overlay district and affects only a single-unit dwelling, the Town’s historic preservation standards do not apply and the historic designation will not affect this application, but Schibler noted it should be brought up at this PC meeting.

2. ETC|NEXT

Discussion will focus on finalizing the plan documents.

3/26/2020 Planning Commission Meeting

1. 84 Susie Wilson Rd

Schibler explained the application consists of a 10-acre lot becoming 7 residential lots. The development will require waivers for not providing enough frontage per lot and individual lot size. The Planning Commission previously suggested putting more thought into the overall design of the lots. This is a
continuation from a previous application, but town staff has not yet received updated drawings. Coleman asked whether anyone suggested reducing the number of lots. Schibler said it had been suggested to the design team during previous meetings. Hammer asked if the homes will be sold at an affordable price, and Schibler responded that the applicants intent was to provide “starter homes” at reasonable market rates, but noted this probably means prices of at least $250,000-$300,000.

2. 10 Carmichael St (conceptual)
Schibler explained this project is at the corner of Carmichael and Commonwealth and has been going through design iterations for approximately 5 years. This is at conceptual plan stage for now. The changes from the previous plan includes separating Building H, which previously occupied the entire corner, into two separate buildings. Building H would have 6000 square feet of commercial (perhaps Essex Pediatrics, as shown on the drawings). Town staff has suggested that more ground floor commercial would be beneficial to the town center, and are generally not impressed with the overall design, greenspace, pedestrian access. Hammer asked how many residential units are included in the design. Schibler noted there are 52 residential units. Hammer noted there are only 28 parking spaces shown on the plan for underground parking. Schibler noted many spaces are being added in adjacent areas. Hammer stressed that this plan is not conducive for users.

3. 1 LeClerc Woods
Schibler noted this application has been moved to the 4/9 Planning Commission meeting. This is a large property that has been subdivided in pieces over the years. This application proposes an 8-unit planned unit development in the southwest corner of the property. The proposal includes 2 bedroom rental units. There is shared water and wastewater on site. The proposal will also include the remaining 99 acres as open space, but the applicants have noted that some of this may be further subdivided. Schibler noted this 99-acre area is home to significant wildlife habitat and wetlands but there is not a good access from the PUD to the area. Jones asked why this was being included in the proposals, Schibler explained that a PUD has to have an amount of open space, but this proposal does not fit the criteria because it is not easily accessible to users or connected to the dwellings. Though protection of natural areas is important, staff would also like to see some form of open space within the 4.7-acre development site.

4/9/2020 Planning Commission Meeting

1. 86 Center Rd (continued)
Schibler explained this is the Burger King proposal. Previously the Planning Commission discussed better integration between Burger King and the rest of plaza, more landscaping between Burger King and rest of plaza, and asked to set it back further from Center Road. The design team changed the vehicle circulation plan, but town staff does not think the new design is very efficient in terms of providing green space, and also presents some traffic safety issues. The new facade has been designed to match what the Price Chopper looks like but it does not include double-hung sash windows, paneled entry doors, or a fully-pitched roof. The landscaping plan includes mostly dogwoods and as designed would provide more of a separation between BK and rest of plaza; however, it does not provide functional civic space as the Planning Commission and staff had requested. Also, the current design impacts wetlands to the northwest, which has been previously approved by the state.
AGENDA ITEM #4: Town Meeting Day Debrief

Hammer and Jones were able to attend the table with CTC information. Hammer noted Natalie Braun from the Energy Committee spoke to her about connecting with our committee about possible overlap on projects. She will attend our next meeting.

AGENDA ITEM #5: Clean Up Day Preparation

The clean-up day poster has been generated. The CTC needs to contact sponsors for food donations, which Jones volunteered to do. Hammer asked St James for a blurb regarding trail clean up to include in the general packet for clean-up day. Next month we will ask Parks and Rec to put the event on Facebook and ask if they will send an email to pass holders. Hammer will contact the Essex Reporter to add the event to their calendar. Schibler will contact Boy Scout troops.

AGENDA ITEM #6: Tree City USA Designation

Hammer explained we are in the process of achieving TreeCity USA designation, which includes hosting an Arbor Day celebration. Jones has arranged a meeting with people from Essex Elementary School on 3/17 to discuss logistics of the event. Schibler will contact Chuck Vile to see if he can attend the meeting to discuss location of planting and species options.

AGENDA ITEM #7: Minutes

COLEMAN MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY BOTULA, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF OCTOBER 8, 2019, NOVEMBER 12, 2019, DECEMBER 10, 2019, JANUARY 3, 2020, AND FEBRUARY 11, 2020. THE MOTION PASSED 4-0.

AGENDA ITEM #8: Work Plan and Calendar Check

- Hammer noted someone stopped at our table at town meeting to express their interest in keeping the Saxon Hill trails clean and clear. Hammer suggested we could consider hosting one of the clean-up days at Saxon Hill instead of Indian Brook. Schibler noted that there was desire to organize trail maintenance at Saxon Hill among several volunteer groups, including Fellowship of the Wheel and the Saxon Hill Riders Club (a chapter of the Vermont Association of Snowmobile Travelers).
- Hammer noted only two trail caretakers attended the appreciation event last month, and we need to recruit new members to the program. Discussions ensued about how communication to the trail caretakers is supposed to channel through the Parks and Rec department. Coleman asked whether we could reach out to them directly. Schibler will advise.
- Landscaping ordinances - currently town ordinances have landscaping scattered between zoning ordinance and stormwater ordinance, and they are not very comprehensive. Discussions were held about updating these ordinances.
- Ash tree replacement program - we received the grant from Vermont Urban Forestry to remove ash trees from Brigham Hill Road and replant in other areas of town. The ten ash trees that were flagged for removal last fall were recently removed and replacement trees (where applicable) have been ordered and should be arriving in April or May.
AGENDA ITEM #9: Reading File

Schibler remarked on a notice in the reading file that the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District (WNRC) had received a grant to provide customized trainings to Conservation Commissions at their regular meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 8:31 PM.