

Essex Economic Development Commission (EDC)

Meeting Minutes (draft)

Date	February 18, 2021
Location	Online via Microsoft Teams
Members	Annie Cooper, Chair, Brian Shelden, Vice Chair, Jeff Benjamin, Botur Kosimi, Clerk
Staff	Unified Manager Evan Teich, Town of Essex Interim Community Development Director Owiso Makuku, Village of Essex Junction Community Development Director Robin Pierce, Town of Essex Planner Darren Schibler
Partners	Sam Andersen (GBIC)
Guests	Energy Committee Chair Will Dodge, Conservation and Trails Committee Vice Chair Alan Botula, Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Chair Micah Hagen
Public	Irene Wrenner, Ken Signorello

Chair Cooper called the meeting to order at approximately 8:03 am.

Changes to Agenda

- Chair Cooper announced minor changes to agenda pertaining to guests that had tentatively agreed to join the meeting, including Energy Committee Chair Will Dodge, Conservation and Trails Committee Vice Chair Alan Botula and Bike Walk Advisory Committee Chair Micah Hagen. Chair Cooper requested a motion to approve changes to agenda, moved by Mr Benjamin and seconded by Mr Kosimi, passed 3-0.

There was no public to be heard.

Review and Approval of Minutes

- Mr Kosimi made a motion to approve the minutes, but Mr Benjamin was not sure if he could second that since he was not present at the last meeting. Mr Teich commented that if the committee has a quorum, members can vote to approve the minutes even if they did not participate in the previous meeting. Mr Shelden joined the meeting at that moment and seconded the motion, so Chair Cooper announced the minutes approved.

Discussions with Guests

- Energy Committee Chair Dodge made a short presentation about Energy Committee's purpose and activities, including its scope of work with both town and the village for over 10 years, advising the community on municipal energy tracking, ways to use less energy, save money, help the environment, making proposals on energy efficiency and greenhouse reduction, etc. He mentioned that 2 years ago Essex adopted an energy plan that calls for some major changes and summarized that the best hope we have of improving energy use to get to state's 90% by 2050 goal is by dealing with transportation. He said it essentially means getting vehicles electrified and people walking and biking as much as possible.
- Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Chair Hagen spoke about Bike/Walk Advisory Committee and how they are working to build minor infrastructure items around the core of the village, redesigning 5 Corners with safer crosswalks, bike parking and bike repair stations to enable more people to feel safe walking with their children to school, walk the area going to restaurants and businesses. He noted there has been a lot of progress such as striping on more roads than in the past 3-4 years that enables some riders willing to take certain safety risks on the roadways to switch from car to biking to get to other towns. He said however, there is still a high barrier in terms of getting somebody adopt biking because of how close the

vehicles can get to bikers and having bike paths that are scattered across greater Burlington region without being interconnected for the most part, so the long term vision is trying to build that network for safe biking all around.

- Conservation and Trails Committee Vice Chair Botula shared some information about Conservation and Trails Committee, including cooperation with staff in inventorying and studying of all different natural, historic, cultural resources available as well preserve, develop and maintain mission that involves connectivity of natural areas, trails, sidewalks, greenways in providing recreational opportunities for residents. He also remarked that their committee advises Selectboard and Town of Essex Planning Commission on local natural resources and conservation needs, review of development applications relevant to connectivity and pedestrian access and acquisition of land and easements. Conservation and Trails Committee Vice Chair Botula noted that their recent focus has been on Saxon Hill management plan, emerald ash borer mitigation response, urban forest, and starting an efforts to document natural area and trails in order to make information more accessible to the public in cooperation with the parks department. He mentioned potential collaboration with Tree City USA initiative and efforts to streamline zoning regulations.
- Mr Benjamin asked if there are any current projects in terms of addressing trouble areas such as River Road that unlike Essex Experience area do not have many bike paths and walking space. Mr Hagen replied that for many of those roads it is very difficult to get changes done and the best opportunity to get modifications to lanes is when state re-pavements are going on. He pointed out plans in Susie Wilson area for redesigning the lanes and discussions with the Town of Essex Planning Commission on building a plan in areas that will be developed in future setting requirements for adding bike path by developers instead of being funded by the community or large grants.
- Unified Manager Teich spoke about major differences between state and municipal roads saying some are much harder to deal with because of the width of the right of way. He talked about a few major projects they are looking to get funding for, one in Susie Wilson intersection with Route 15 and another in planning stages regarding completion of the bike lane on Route 15 from Fairview St to Route 289 that are incredibly expensive. Mr Schibler added that also part of the Susie Wilson project was redoing the lanes from West St extension to Susie Wilson Rd on Pearl St, changing it from 2 lanes on each direction to 3 lanes total, one on each direction with a center turn lane making room for a wider bike path and greenbelt on the North side.
- Interim Community Development Director Makuku said that she did not have any updates since the last meeting. Chair Cooper commented that we should figure out what we wish we could do to improve connectivity and then start making it happen like an app that shows people how to navigate and what is possible. Unified Manager Teich expressed concern that some of those paths are not owned by the village or the town, but by associations or others so we will have to work with them as we can't just direct people to a private property. He noted importance of having these conversations so we identify bottlenecks and find solutions to them and Ms Cooper emphasized her focus to get Essex residents to explore Essex itself first and the community to become more interconnected so it integrates better with the rest of the Burlington area.
- Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Chair Hagen suggested having regular inter-committee meetings on a quarterly basis and Energy Committee Chair Dodge supported the idea saying Bike Walk Advisory Committee could play central role in creating energy efficient and environmentally friendly designs for future community projects. Unified Manager Teich wondered what others think about the idea of instituting an annual meeting of committees and commissions to develop an annual work plan that answers such questions as what each group is working on, who needs to work with who on pieces and how can we all work together on priority projects. He marked that the staff can add that information to budgets and grant application in future. Conservation and Trails Committee Vice Chair Botula commented that the Conservation and Trails Committee is missing the overall vision in order to spot the pinch points and places where we really need connectivity to make it all more useful and asked whether such overall vision exists or not.
- Town of Essex Planner Schibler said that within the town and village comprehensive plan there are some transportation and bike/walk path goals with a map of high to low priority routes to implement, but

it has not been updated since at least 2011. He mentioned that it would be great to look at it as a group and decide what makes sense and if we can tackle any of them within the next 4-8 years. Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Chair Hagen noted that Bike/Walk Advisory Committee had seen a lot of turnover recently, so this may be the chance to refocus on what we are trying to do with bike and walk, and have the committee to redesign plans ahead of larger meeting again.

- Ms Andersen commented that there is a bill right now in legislature (H94) which is not certain to pass yet that proposes transportation plan for businesses with more than 50 employees, asking them to come up with a plan that incorporates not just the shuttle and driving routes, but also walking and biking access. She reminded others to consider this opportunity to businesses giving them access to trails and paths and ensure that timing of gathering of all committees fits the Selectboard's upcoming budget process so proposals are submitted in a timely fashion.
- Chair Cooper offered for all committees to have 4 joint meetings a year and the next one to be scheduled as soon as possible. Ms Andersen also said there is no news on VEGI program, which they are happy about, as the proposed bill will kill the program, there is activity on mini TIFS program and ACCD is testifying this week, and talked about proposal for additional financing and consolidating administration costs of state colleges. Mr Benjamin asked if New England Culinary Institute, which is closing its doors in Essex, could have accessed any of the state funds to which Ms Andersen responded that they only applied to state colleges.

Work Plan 2021, LOT, Business Census, Boards and Committees

- Chair Cooper suggested to move the agenda item regarding Village of Essex Junction Planning Commission to subsequent meeting and went over EDC work plan progress, including splitting the business list currently standing at 1501 entities into 4 segments for each commission member to further review and complete before it can be passed on to staff soon.

Chair Cooper made a motion to adjourn at approximately 9:13 am, moved by Vice Chair Shelden and seconded by Mr Benjamin, passed 4-0.

Prepared by Botur Kosimi, Clerk

03/02/21