EAST HADDAM PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

MUNICIPAL OFFICE COMPLEX – 1 PLAINS ROAD

MEETING ROOM #1 & 2

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

June 10, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m.

2. ATTENDANCE

PRESENT: Crary Brownell (Chairman), Jim Curtin (Vice Chairman), Bernard Gillis (Regular Member), Richard Pettinelli (Regular Member) (arrived at 7:18 p.m.), Toni Dumaine (Regular Member), and Susan Kinsman (Regular Member).

ABSENT: Deborah Langdon (Regular Member).

3. MINUTES

Minutes of May 13, 2025, were approved as presented.

4. BILLS

Halloran and Sage Law Firm Jacobson invoice for discussion of vote acceptance for $60.00.

Mr. Curtin made a motion to pay the bill, seconded by Ms. Kinsman and the motion passed unanimously.

5. DISCUSSION

A. Moodus Master Plan

The Commission reviewed the 75% draft of the Moodus Center Master Plan and requested feedback before its public presentation, potentially aligned with the upcoming town referendum. While generally well received, members emphasized the importance of including a section on the failed 1970s redevelopment to better contextualize the current state of the village and strengthen future grant applications. Suggestions included adding more visuals, architectural standards, a clearer village vision, and specific elements such as a traffic circle to enhance traffic flow and aesthetics.

The Commission agreed to proceed to a 90% draft, focusing on incorporating redevelopment history, setting clear project priorities, and identifying potential funding sources, including the option of hiring a part-time grant writer. Members stressed the importance of detailed design standards, planting plans, and visual tools to engage public interest. Recognizing financial constraints, they acknowledged that redevelopment would be incremental, with some existing buildings likely to remain due to continued use.

Bob Casner emphasized the importance of clearly illustrating what was lost during past redevelopment, particularly historic and architecturally significant buildings, to help the public understand the site's history and imagine a compelling future. He encouraged the inclusion of architectural renderings or façade concepts to generate public support.

Phil Barlow inquired about the plan's timeline. Jim Ventres responded that a 90-95% draft would be posted online soon, with a public presentation potentially scheduled to coincide with the budget referendum. He noted that while the plan was behind schedule, recent zoning changes were helping to address prior planning issues. The Commission also discussed difficulties with STEAP grant applications, citing the need to finalize design components and produce shovel-ready materials to improve future funding success.

B. Beebe Road/Scenic Road

Mr. Ventres reported that the A2 as-built survey is on hold pending passage of the town budget to fund it. He outlined the necessary review process for the proposed bridge crossing, which includes approvals from Inland Wetlands and Planning & Zoning, along with filings required by the state due to the project's size and its location on a scenic road. Easements from the state are not needed, as the lakebed is privately owned and the state holds only water rights. While the new bridge construction does not require a lake drawdown, a drawdown will still be necessary to remove sediment from an area previously damaged. Mr. Ventres has submitted the initial paperwork and is currently working with the state to resolve technical issues related to filing additional required forms.

C. Banner Estates

Mr. Pettinelli made a motion to change the order of business and move Banner Estates discussion to the end of the meeting seconded by Ms. Dumaine and the vote passed unanimously.

6. **Preliminary Discussion – Casner Realty LLC-Corner of Town Street and Norwich Road**

Roger Nemergut presented a conceptual plan for a mixed-use development on approximately 7.88 acres at the corner of Town Street and Norwich Road, within the East Haddam Business Park. The property includes three undeveloped lots from a 1986 subdivision plus an adjacent parcel.

The proposal features eight detached buildings: four two-story structures with ground-floor retail and four two-bedroom apartments above, one single-story commercial building, and three additional houses building for storage. The design takes advantage of the site's natural grade, allowing walkout access to upper floors. Access is offered by both Town Street and Commerce Drive.

Parking is segmented near buildings, with each structure having its own septic system and a shared community water supply. Soil tests indicate the site can support the development. The plan complies with IG2 zoning coverage limits and proposes use of an existing detention basin, with planned expansion and modifications for stormwater management. Wetlands and existing stone wall will be preserved, with the northern area

reserved for open space and plantings. Architectural renderings will be presented at a future meeting.

In response to the questions, Mr. Nemergut noted the previous submission of the Town Street entrance to the state DOT, which had no comment due to the lack of a finalized plan. With the new concept, DOT feedback is expected, though a traffic light is unlikely due to low traffic volume. Parking includes 145 spaces, meeting zoning maximums; some commissioners questioned the necessity of this number, and Nemergut agreed to consider reducing impervious surfaces.

The commission encouraged incorporating green infrastructure in parking areas, such as infiltration systems or permeable paving. Mr. Nemergut agreed, including possible modifications to the detention basin to function as a biofilter. Commissioners also highlighted the lack of designated loading and trash collection areas, which Nemergut said will be addressed in future submissions.

Bob Casner explained the storage buildings would be enclosed, attractive structures with interior rentable units, designed to blend with the development's aesthetics. These would not support industrial uses like machine shops. Casner emphasized maintaining property value and visual appeal.

He further described the mixed-use concept combining retail, office, residential, and storage to create a stable, active development. Recognizing retail challenges, the addition of residential units aims to ensure ongoing site activity. Buildings will be constructed sequentially, with occupancy secured before proceeding. Septic and water needs will be met per building, drawing on local development experience to prioritize quality design and maintenance for a walkable commercial area.

Regarding potential future uses, Mr. Ventres noted any change from storage to incubator businesses would require formal application and approval, including likely septic system upgrades, making such changes costly.

Mr. Fellner of Fellner Architects detailed the site and architectural concepts, highlighting integration with the terrain. Pathways connect the site and lead to an old mill, intended as a community feature for small events. The four mixed-use buildings are set into the slope with retail on the lower level and apartments accessible from the upper grade, totaling 16 two-bedroom units.

Architecturally, the design reflects East Haddam's rural village character with gabled roofs, cupolas, and varied building shapes. Exterior materials will avoid industrial metal siding in favor of clapboard-style finishes. Warehouse/storage buildings are designed to be visually appealing and cohesive with the overall development. Renderings will include views from key vantage points, such as the Route 151 and Wrassling Cats intersection.

In response to Ms. Kinsman's question, Mr. Casner confirmed the project aims to create an attractive space rather than a typical industrial park. A walking trail composed of processed stone is planned above wetlands with no construction in the wetland areas. Casner also intends to restore an old mill foundation onsite as a historic feature related to the property's past.

Casner clarified that the road currently feeds the detention basin, not Sully's property, which has its own sediment basin. The exact location of a proposed walkway along the road is under evaluation, with safety and crosswalk placement being considered for the intersection.

7. HOME OCCUPATIONS

A. Application #25-09 – 14 Ridge Road (property location), David & Catherine Locke (applicants & property owners). Map 047, Lot 088. Home office for carpentry business.

A resident operating a carpentry business from his home submitted a home occupation application at the request of his bank. Although he had been working from home for some time, he was unaware that a formal application was required. He uses a pickup truck and keeps tools in his vehicle, with a small office in his home. No construction or prefabrication occurs on-site, and materials are delivered directly to job sites. Limited storage is kept in his garage, consistent with typical residential use. There were no objections or significant concerns raised by the commission.

Application was unanimously passed.

8. LANDUSE ADMINISTRATOR REPORTS

Mr. Ventres provided an overview of the recent 91-page update to Connecticut's affordable housing statutes. The new law introduces tiered income levels for housing affordability—30%, 60%, and 80% of the area median income (AMI)—which will impact how affordable units are defined and counted. The legislation also encourages zoning commissions to support middle housing types, such as duplexes and triplexes, particularly in areas with walkable access to jobs, services, and transit.

A significant change is the potential liability zoning commissions face for obstructing qualifying affordable housing applications. If a proposal meets statutory requirements and is denied without valid justification, towns may be responsible for legal costs. The law also restricts towns from denying projects based solely on limited parking availability if the location supports alternative transportation options.

While the legislation is geared toward transit-oriented communities, it calls for towns under 50,000 in population—like East Haddam—to develop local strategies to support affordable housing. This may include zoning regulation updates, identify suitable sites, or partnering with developers. State support and funding will be made available to assist with these efforts.

Mr. Ventres noted that East Haddam's rural setting, lack of public transportation, and absence of a public sewer system present challenges to meeting higher-density development thresholds (e.g., 4–6 units per acre), which are often required for certain grants. Nevertheless, the town should prepare by considering options such as small-scale developments, adaptive reuse, and possible partnerships to create permanently affordable units. He emphasized that while some of the legislation doesn't directly apply, it signals a push for statewide solutions and better grant eligibility for proactive communities.

B. Banner Estates

Mr. Pettinelli made a motion at 8:28 p.m. to enter executive session to discuss the Banner Golf Course inviting Bob Casner seconded by Mr. Curtin and the vote passed unanimously.

Mr. Curtin made a motion at @ 9:00 p.m. to exit executive session. No decisions or motions were made seconded by Ms. Kinsman and the vote passed unanimously.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Pettinelli made a motion to adjourn at 9:00 p.m. Seconded by Ms. Kinsman and the vote passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
E. Ruth Ziobron