

THE WORK: City of Essex Junction - Brand Identity Project Brief



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BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVE

What are we trying to accomplish? Change perceptions, move widgets? Simple, single-focused. The City of Essex Junction (CEJ) is seeking a new brand identity that will be both evergreen and authentic. Deliverables desired as part of the project scope include logo files (reflecting visual elements and messaging), a logo kit, brand style guide, and branded template files to assist with the city's day-to-day operations.

The stated project goal is to deliver a brand that reflects a growing, diverse and inclusive community, one that resonates with the City's history as a village and effectively communicates the impact on the community, serving various stakeholders. Public input is an important part of this process to ensure the new identity reflects the community as a whole. The rebranding should also build upon the City's Community Vision and Strategic Plan. Another goal is to provide city departments with the tools they need to create effective and strategic communications moving forward.

As background, Essex Junction was incorporated as a Village within the Town of Essex on November 15, 1892, and became Vermont's 10th city on July 1, 2022, after Village residents voted to separate from the Town of Essex. The CEJ is forward-thinking, growing, and offers a high quality-of-life in a small city in the Greater Burlington metropolitan area. With primarily residential streets, the city is neighborly, tree-lined and family-friendly. Community connectivity is significant (with amenities and activities, and with accessibility via cycle lanes, trails, and public transportation). It's a walkable city with passive and active green spaces. It offers inclusivity and equity via affordable housing, vertical development, incentives, and new businesses.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Who are we connecting with? Demographic / psychographic profile. Key actionable insights.

What makes them tick?

The target audience includes current and potential residents, employees, committees, businesses, and community organizations.

THE BIG IDEA

One thing we want to say to our audience? How is it relevant and solve the problem they have?

The City of Essex Junction is a small city with a big heart and momentum. It is a vibrant, walkable, welcoming, and tightly connected community that blends small-town authentic charm with modern energy.

Everything here is connected—the people, the neighborhoods, the culture and nature.

TONE OF VOICE

The voice should feel connected, optimistic and grounded. It should be confident but not corporate, neighborly but not small-town nostalgic. It should also feel warm and thoughtful, while avoiding jargon and over-formality.

REASONS WHY

Why should the audience believe in us? Points that directly support the big idea. What makes us different / unique?

- According to survey responses:
 - People feel what makes Essex Junction unique is its balance of modern energy with warmth and approachability.
 - It is overwhelmingly described as friendly, approachable and grounded, but also busy, evolving and purposeful.
 - It is a community that is both laid-back and active.
 - It is a city that is growing but rooted in community values.
 - There is deep affection for community connection, walkability and local experiences.
- Locals and visitors are drawn to Maple Street Park and Pool, the city's seasonal events (like Pumpkin Palooza and the August Fair), and a strong mix of great local restaurants and shops.
- There's a sense of pride in how the city balances history—especially the iconic train junction—with a family-friendly, recreation-rich lifestyle.
- The historical identity of the train and junction shape both the form and the function of the city.
- The idea of “junction” is both literal and symbolic. The city offers walkability and connectivity with easy access to the city of Burlington or the mountains, and within CEJ to parks, restaurants, events, and neighborhoods. It's a great “midlife” place to live, offering the best of all worlds.
- There is a strong sense of community spirit. People are neighborly, friendly and welcoming. People know each other and they participate in local traditions.
- There are great recreation opportunities, from the popular Maple Street Park to seasonal events, sports fields, and biking.
- The connectivity offers convenience. You can walk or bike from nature to bakeries to parks, and bump into neighbors along the way.
- The city offers both the vibrancy of a city with small town charm through a variety of dining options, the Brownell Library, local businesses and events.

DESIRED RESPONSE

What would we like the audience to think, feel, and do? Use their words.

We want our audience to feel proud of the brand identity, as an authentic representation of the place in which they live and/or work.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

What do we need to keep in mind when working on this?

Refer to the This or That exercise below for additional insight on logo design.

- There is a strong leaning toward:
 - clean, accessible design that offers a detail or flourish
 - A balance of contemporary design and timeless warmth
 - abstract or word mark logos
 - modern with a nod to heritage, history and place
 - timeless, evergreen design
 - Bold but approachable typography that conveys clarity and confidence
 - showing diversity
 - forward thinking and creative
 - Earthy and natural tones paired with fresh energetic accents
- In the survey results, there was a strong preference towards a warm color palette (followed by cool)
- In the survey results, several key words rose to the top of all responses:
 - Friendly
 - Safe
 - Community
 - Clean
 - Connected
 - Walkable
 - Welcoming
- In the survey results, The Junction was the most common nickname, followed by Essex Jct. In terms of spelling, Essex Jct (abbreviated) was the top result, followed by Essex Junction spelled out.
- Avoid:
 - overly formal and/or seal-style logos
 - a logo that is too literal, loaded with imagery
 - green color choices (to differentiate from other cities and towns)
 - trendy design choices
- The city is both lively and personal, so the identity should be approachable but dynamic.
- Should we lean into the brand as it is referred to? (ex. “Junction” vs “JCT” vs “CJ” vs “COEJ” vs “EJ”)
- The CEJ is a city in name, but not in feel. “City of” should technically be in the logo, but can be more subtle. The village mentality and feel is still important to people.
- Consider a symbolic reference to the train or “junction” as a nod to the city’s origin and continued connectivity. Lines, crossing points or hubs could reinforce the city as a connector.
- Incorporate a sense of movement or flow to reflect walkability and access.
- Explore a design that feels friendly, warm, open, and human-centered. Round forms, organic elements, warm color tones and not overly polished.

- Consider how to convey community life and activity to reinforce a sense of place and rhythm.
- There is a balance of heritage and forward-thinking to convey.

SCOPE

Outline the specific pieces needed to accomplish the goals above. Deadlines, any production specifications, where to deliver, etc.?

Discovery Session & Online Survey (CEJ.001.25)

- Discovery Session
- Project brief
- Survey development, distribution & report

Brand Identity & Message Development (CEJ.002.25)

- Concept development (5 concepts; up to 5 rounds of revisions to 1 concept)
- Primary and secondary logo variations
- Messaging options (3)

Logo Kit & Brand Style Guide (CEJ.003.25)

- Logo kit with files (b/w, grayscale, CMYK and RGB)
- Brand style guide (logo usage, sub-brands, colors, fonts, and templates; 1 round of revisions)

Collateral & Templates (CEJ.004.25)

- Branded templates (brochures, PPT, report covers, letterhead, business cards, memos, road and building signage, and street lamp banners). 2 rounds of revisions included.

Identity Schedule

Please refer to separate [timeline document](#).

COMMUNITY SURVEY INSIGHTS

The community survey reveals a city that is proudly evolving, yet deeply rooted. Essex Junction is seen as a vibrant, connected community with modern energy and authentic charm. Residents and stakeholders want a brand that reflects progress without pretense. This means an identity that’s fresh, confident, and creative, but still grounded in friendliness, accessibility, and civic pride. The most powerful brand positioning opportunity lies in expressing Essex Junction as “a small city with a big heart and momentum.” It’s a place where people and ideas intersect, where community thrives, and where Vermont’s future feels tangible and welcoming.

For the identity and messaging development, this means we should:

- visually aim for a clean, modern aesthetic with subtle nods to history and place
- verbally adopt a tone that is warm, purposeful, and quietly confident (while avoiding jargon or over-formality)
- emotionally celebrate connection, activity, and belonging—the traits that make Essex Junction feel both special and real

In a review of survey responses, it is clear that the community sees the City of Essex Junction as a small city with a big heart and momentum. They see it as a place where community connection, creativity, and progress meet everyday life. They also see it as evolving confidently, while staying grounded in its neighborly roots.

Some key messaging themes:

1. **Connection at the Core:** Essex Junction is where people, paths, and ideas meet — it is a community defined by relationships and movement.
2. **Progress with Purpose:** The city is evolving thoughtfully, guided by values of inclusion, creativity, and sustainability.
3. **Everyday Vibrancy:** Life here is walkable, active, and full of local moments that make people feel part of something real.
4. **Rooted in Vermont, and Ready for What's Next:** A brand that honors its heritage while embracing its future as Vermont's most forward-thinking small city.

Summary learnings from open-ended survey questions:

- **What makes the City of Essex Junction unique compared to other Vermont towns or cities?** There is a clear desire for the brand to balance modern energy with warmth and approachability. While “modern,” “forward-thinking,” and “bold” were selected alongside “earth tones,” “creative,” and “vibrant,” there’s an evident tension between progressive visual identity and grounded community character. Respondents favor traits that feel contemporary and dynamic but not flashy. This suggests the brand should avoid overly rustic or conservative cues and instead convey confidence, creativity, and subtle sophistication. This insight implies the identity should visually and verbally celebrate Essex Junction’s evolution into a city while maintaining its sense of neighborly scale and connection.
- **How do you describe the City of Essex Junction to someone who’s never been?** When asked to imagine Essex Junction as a person, participants overwhelmingly described it as friendly, approachable, and grounded, yet also busy, evolving, and purposeful. The duality between being “easy-going” and “on-the-go” captures a community that’s both laid-back and active, comfortable yet striving. Words like “developing,” “welcoming,” and “involved” reinforce a sense of intentional progress, a city that’s growing but rooted in community values. For messaging, this indicates that the voice should feel confident but not corporate, neighborly but not small-town nostalgic, and should highlight connection, purpose, and momentum as key brand traits.
- **Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about the future identity for the City of Essex Junction?** Survey participants expressed deep affection for community connection, walkability, and local experiences. Highlights include the Maple Street Park and Pool, the Brownell Library,

the annual fair, and the active events calendar (Pumpkin Palooza, Train Hop, etc.). Local dining and small businesses (Boxcar Bakery, Martone’s, etc.) are repeatedly mentioned as part of Essex Junction’s charm. People describe it as a “friendly, walkable place that feels like home” and praise its balance of urban and natural amenities. Many also noted the city’s unique identity as a “junction,” a connector between communities, cultures, and lifestyles. This suggests the brand should emphasize connectedness, community spirit, and livable vibrancy—a place where daily life feels both convenient and enriching.

Please refer to the separate survey summary report for more details.

DISCOVERY SESSION EXERCISE INSIGHTS

Session Date: July 24, 2026

CEJ Attendees: Ashley Snellenberger, Steve Shaw, Jessie Angus, Joanne Pfaff, Jeffrey Ferland, Katie Murad, Nathan Doudera, Time Miller. **Place Attendees:** Steve Crafts, Michael Adams, Brianne Lucas

BRANDS THAT INSPIRE

Brands or campaigns that inspire you, and why:





























- Kleenex - very clean, modern, fresh, contained in a shape. A little something extra (unexpected element) makes it unique.
- Arbor Day - clean logo, simple, showcases exactly who they are. Like the combo of the mark and text.
- Amazon - like the hidden smile and the A-Z “easter egg.”
- Apple - simplicity, one color, stands out. You know exactly what the symbol is.
- Runout Customs - simple. Has an “if you know, you know” aspect.
- Orvis - symbol. You can remove the word and still recognize the brand.
- Patagonia - symbol, iconic, simple.
- Boxcar Bakery - visual, strategic, playful, sophisticated. Reflects the visual space. Makes you want to wear the design.

- Vacation - branding, messaging, nostalgic. An interesting blend of old meets new. The message of “leisure enhancing protection” is emotional.
- Spotify Wrapped - very recognizable, clean and clear.
- Ladro - thief visual has a story behind it.
- Target - symbol is recognizable without the word.
- Instagram - recognizable without the word. Clean, simple.
- Loewe - mission branded visuals with interesting dualities. Fun but sophisticated. A little whimsical with refined elegance.
- Nike - the swoosh is iconic. Campaigns are empowering and emotional.

The Colchester logo has themes, and overall people seemed to like that it speaks to the city but the colors were generic and it was not well executed.

TYPES OF LOGOS

As a general recap on the logo types, we discussed how literal logos can be limiting and polarizing, that abstract logos allow viewers to take what they want out of it, and that word marks can convey personality in type and color.

WORD MARKS	LITERALS	ABSTRACTS
 	 	 
 	 	 
 	 	 
 	 	 
 		

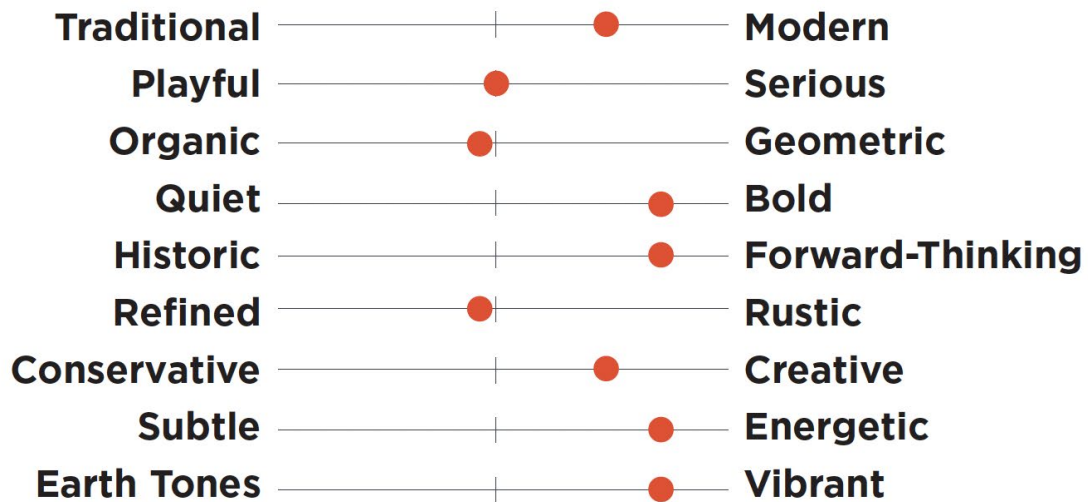
LOGOS YOU LIKED FOR MANY REASONS



- Burleson and Pine County logos - liked because of how the logo can be broken down into separate elements to fit various needs (just graphic, just words, etc.)
- Eagan logo - liked because it is literal but also abstract
- Sao Paulo logo - liked how colorful and fun it is.
- Telluride - feels evocative of the area. Font is cool. Gives a sense of place.
- Paris Olympics system: liked the geometric and fun approach to the pictograms and icons developed and signage for the events.
- Montreal Logo: liked the icon with 4 hearts that look like a clover. Simple and effective.
- City of San Diego & City of Guelph logos: liked the simplicity
- Arbor Day logo - visual that works well (is versatile) across foundation and tree city program.
- City of Danville logo - liked how it is modern and fresh, incorporates elements of the city without going overboard. Typography is clean, crisp and contemporary.
- Sao Paolo logo - colorful, represents diversity.
- City of Prescott logo - simple, evocative of the region.
- City of Orlando logo - modern, simplified landmark in the design.
- Kansas City logo - like the simple fountain and heart shape (area has a lot of fountains).
- City of Detroit logo - cool image. Makes you think industrial, backbone of America.
- Chesapeake Virginia logo - nice, simple, feels like you're on the water.
- Town of Telluride logo - simple, feels like you're in the mountains. "Cool kid" vibe to the font.

THIS OR THAT

We showed two opposite words, and determined where on the scale the new logo identity should sit.



CITY GOOGLE REVIEW

If you were writing a Google review for the City of Essex Junction, what would you say you love about living there? What activities would you recommend? What would you suggest your family or friends do when they visit?

“I love the energy of this small city. Feels like a town but there is surprises all around. I’d recommend getting some brunch and coffee at Boxcar and then taking a stroll through the 5-corners to the 5 Corners Antiques and other small shops - Karen’s Kloset, Bespoke, and Yankee Quilt. Then a small drive to the Essex Experience to grab some lunch at Salt & Bubbles or Black Flannel on your way to more unique shops (Nusantara, Addie & Grace, Livresse) on the way to the mountains or farms nearby.”

“I would encourage people to visit Maple Street Park and Pool. This is such a great resource for the community, and Essex Junction Parks and Recreation does a fantastic job of programming (summer camps and after-school) and special events (Pumpkin Palooza, Train Hop, Easter Egg Hunt, Memorial Day Parade, and Fourth of July Fireworks). Food is another suggestion I would make. We have some great restaurants, such as Boxcar Bakery, Martone’s, and Vespas, which are among my favorites. I would also encourage people to take a walk around Essex Junction. In the Five Corners, there is a great mix of old and new buildings with shops and restaurants. There are also great neighborhoods to walk in.”

“Essex Junction is one of those places that just feels like home, even if you didn’t grow up here. It’s walkable, friendly, and has just the right mix of small-town charm and community energy. The restaurants are solid—some great local spots to grab a bite, whether you’re in the mood for something casual or a bit more elevated. The community really shows up for local events, especially the annual fair, which brings a ton of people into town and gives the whole place a fun, lively vibe. I also love the little things—like the train still running through the center of town and the seasonal events that make it feel connected and alive. It’s a great place to visit, and an even better place to be part of.”

"I chose Essex Junction for its strong schools and proximity to Burlington, lakes, and mountains. I stay in Essex Junction for those things, but so much more. I can walk out my front door to a wooded path behind my neighborhood for nature and quiet. I can ride my bike to the local top-notch bakery where the staff literally knows my name and my favorites. I can pop over to our first-rate parks and rec facilities or grab a sandwich for lunch, where I'm likely to see someone from my kids' school or a friend from down the street. Essex Junction is community, convenience, good taste, nature, grounded, and welcoming. 5 stars."

"I would recommend that people visit Maple Street Park, especially in December for "Lights in the Park" or in October for Pumpkin Palooza. I would also recommend the fair in August. The City is very walkable which is also nice."

"I'd highlight the walkability, bikeability, and the vibrant yet easygoing lifestyle here. What makes Essex Junction unique is how it naturally connects people to the mountains, surrounding communities, and the vibrant culture of the region. It's a place where the name "junction" really comes to life, offering a perfect starting point for exploring everything Vermont has to offer."

"All roads lead to Essex Junction. While your first inclination might be to just keep on driving through, there are plenty of things that make the stop worthwhile. Fantastic shops and amazing recreation opportunities are just a couple of things that make EJ an amazing stop."

Interesting takeaways: CEJ is the "Most urban of the suburban." There is a "The village way" mentality, which is to do it right and do it well. Parks and rec always has something going on. "Community" is really big. Everyone knows everyone. Uniqueness is in the daily life.

BRAND PERSONA

Think about the City of Essex Junction as if it were an actual human being. What adjectives would you (and your audience) use to describe its personality if it was an actual person?

