

### CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION PLANNING COMMISSION & CITY COUNCIL JOINT MEETING AGENDA

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<ul> <li>This meeting will be held in-person at the Essex Police Station at 145 Maple Street and remotely. Options to join the meeting remotely:</li> <li>JOIN ONLINE: Join Zoom Meeting</li> <li>JOIN CALLING: (toll free audio only): (888) 788-0099   Meeting ID: 953 1240 7791; Passcode: 040339</li> </ul>				
1.	CALL TO ORDER	[6:30 PM]		
2.	<b><u>CITY COUNCIL REORGANIZATION</u></b> a. Election of President, Vice President & Clerk – City Council Only Action	[6:35 PM]		
3.	AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES			
4.	<b>PUBLIC TO BE HEARD</b> a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda			
5.	MINUTES a. April 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2025			
6.	<ul> <li>BUSINESS ITEMS</li> <li>a. Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan Draft Review*</li> <li>b. Discussion of Act 181 and Regional Housing Targets*</li> </ul>	[6:40 PM] [7:40 PM]		
7.	MEMBERS UPDATES	[8:20 PM]		
8.	STAFF UPDATES	[8:25 PM]		
9.	ADJOURN	[8:30 PM]		
	*attachments included in the packet			

Agenda item timestamps are estimates of the starting time of each topic and are subject to change.

This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the Planning Commission, like all programs and activities of the City of Essex Junction, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the City Manager's office at 802-878-6944 TTY: 7-1-1 or (800) 253-0191.



#### MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission, City Council
From: Christoher Yuen, Community Development Director
Meeting Date: Thursday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025
Subject: Connect the Junction Transit Oriented Development Draft Plan

Issue: The draft of the Transit Oriented Development Master Plan is available for review and comments.

#### **Discussion:**

The City of Essex Junction is creating a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan for the City Center, Pearl Street Corridor, and Park Street area. TOD is aimed at creating walkable communities centered around transportation hubs, which allow people to safely walk, bike, and ride transit to destinations for work and leisure. This study area contains stops for Green Mountain Transit Bus Lines 2 and 10, as well as the Amtrak Station.

This project builds upon previous planning efforts that have envisioned how Essex Junction can grow thoughtfully, incorporating more diverse housing options and encouraging multi-modal transportation. Through a robust community engagement process, the team will devise strategies for future development in the area, looking at opportunities for new land uses, the expansion of public space, and the improvement of facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders.

Framework, the selected consultant for this project, has prepared a draft of the master plan for review. They will present this draft during the Thursday, May 1<sup>st</sup> Joint Meeting between the City Council and the Planning Commission.

Next steps will include determining additional public engagement strategies on the drafted plan. The project team will update the draft in response to comments collected over the upcoming months prior to final plan adoption by the City Council. Framework will then prepare a set of recommended Land Development Code and Comprehensive Plan updates for the City to implement.

This project is well timed as we look to increase housing opportunities in the City, region and state. There will be more specific discussion on the housing targets in the next agenda item.

Cost: N/A

#### **Recommendation:**

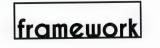
No formal action is needed on this item because the draft plan will be presented to the public for input before the Council is asked to approve the final plan. However, I recommend that the Planning Commission and City Council review the draft plan and prepare questions or comments for City Staff or the project consultants prior to the meeting.

#### Attachments:

Connect the Junction master plan draft

# THIS IS A PLAN OF ACTION... CONNECT THE JUNCTION **(**

## **DRAFT** MARCH 2025





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# **INTRODUCTION + BACKGROUND**



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# **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

This transit-oriented development (TOD) master plan, developed by the City of Essex Junction, works toward the vision of a more pedestrian-friendly city center with diverse housing options, vibrant public spaces, and safe and accessible options for walking, biking, and busing. While streetscapes in Essex Junction are currently dominated by space designated for single-occupancy vehicles, there are opportunities to reallocate space to pedestrians and create a more efficient, accessible urban environment centered around public transit, making room for more amenities and housing, while also playing a critical role in addressing climate change by reducing car dependency and lowering emissions

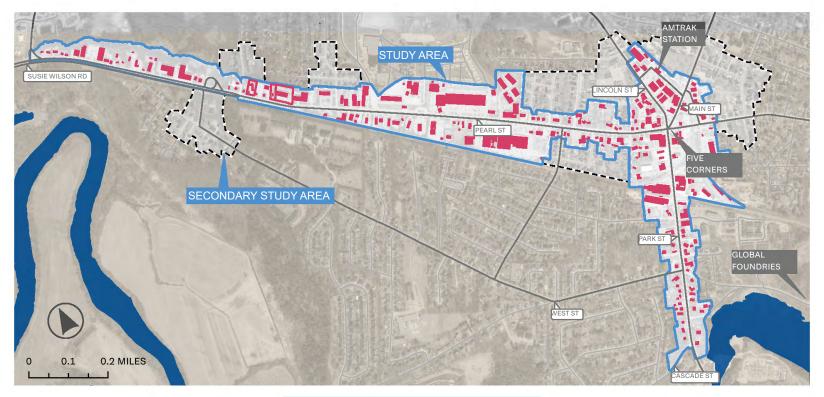
The project comes as part of the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program, which has awarded funding for transit-oriented development to 10 communities throughout Northwest Vermont. In Essex Junction, these funds will be used to build upon previous plans that have outlined the "thoughtful growth" Essex Junction residents would like to see, and to work toward the vision of a City Center that provides opportunities to live, work, and gather.

Documentation and analysis of related plans and policies and existing site conditions alongside extensive community engagement efforts online and in-person provided the foundation for this plan, providing a starting point for strategies and actions and guiding community engagement efforts. Key takeaways from the Existing Conditions Report are detailed in the following pages.

Themes taken from existing conditions analysis, City input, public feedback, and transit-oriented development best practices were translated into this plan's "Big Ideas," which summarize the key goals and desired outcomes for this project. Visions were broken down into actionable strategies alongside practical planning and design tactics and visuals including maps, renderings, and timelines.



The primary study area for this project includes the blocks surrounding the Five Corners intersection, extending along Pearl Street west to Susie Wilson Road and on Park Street south to Cascade Street. This area was chosen based on access to an all day, two-way bus route (#2) as well as the Amtrak Station. The secondary focus areas are also within close range of these public transit options, but are less of a focus in terms of redevelopment, rezoning, and road reconstruction.



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# THE HOUSING CRISIS IS LOCAL

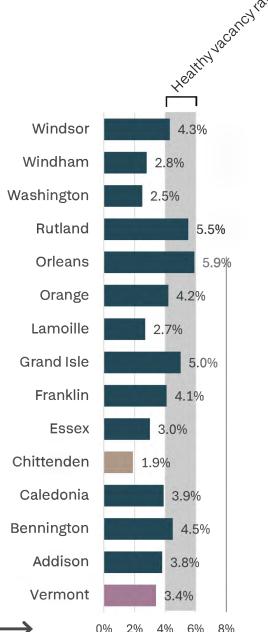
Vermont is experiencing an acute housing crisis. Chittenden County, in particular, is struggling to accommodate both existing residents, and households that would like to move to the County to be closer to the state's largest employment center.

Housing prices have escallated in the last several decades, reflecting chronic underproduction. This is particularly evident in the high number of cost burdened renters (those spending more than 30% of their monthly income on rent); in Chittenden County, 51% of renters are cost burdened compared to 44% for the state at large. Low vacancy rates, an indicator of housing shortage, are a key culprit. In 2022, Chittenden County had a vacancy rate of 1.5%, far below the "healthy" vacancy rate of 4-6%. This lack of housing inventory not only prevents people from accessing housing outright, but also accessing the right housing for their needs. Different types of households have different space, affordability, and accessibility needs. Increasing housing diversity means that empty nesters have a place to downsize, workers can live near employment, and families have enough space - supporting a healthy, diverse and thriving community.

#### Rising to the challenge

Currently, the rate of housing construction in Vermont is well below the 5,000-7,000 homes per year needed to meet demand. Chittenden County must add between 15,783 and 47,407 homes by 2050 to accommodate existing need and anticipated growth. Under the HOME Act and Act 181, municipalities like Essex Junction must incorporate housing targets into planning efforts and ensure that local zoning enables enough new development to reach goals. Connect the Junction is intended to help meet the challenge by balancing increased housing density with community-oriented and people focused planning choices.

Vermont rental vacancy rates by County// US Census Bureau 2013-2017 -



# WHY TOD?

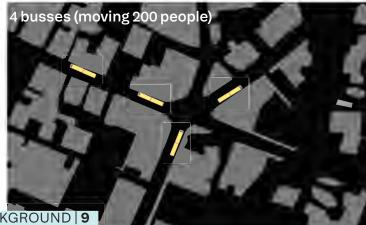
Organizing cities around single occupancy vehicle travel is both inefficient and expensive. Transit Oriented Development takes advantage of the efficiencies of co-locating employment, housing and mass transit to reduce costs on a per unit basis (for example, providing one sewer main for 100 households living in a single apartment complex instead of sewer lines to 100 dispersed homes represents exponential pipe savings). The black space in the diagram to the right shows all of the space in 5 Corners that is currently devoted to cars both in motion and at rest. This space includes roads, on street parking, and parking lots. The diagram also shows the amount of space required to transport 200 people in cars, vs on bikes, and finally using public transit - 177 cars vs 200 bikes vs 4 buses. Transitioning away from cars and towards public transportation means more space for people to live, work and play at lower costs both for individuals and for the City. Not only is this cheaper, but it's more environmentally friendly. Building up rather than out reduces impermeable surface coverage that contributes to runoff, preserves rural land and reduces the need to use a single occupancy vehicle for daily needs. Without more height and intensity, Essex Junction won't meet its housing or climate goals.

### Why Pearl Street and the 5-Corners?

Pearl Street is already one of Essex Junction's most connected, mixed-use, and transit-rich areas with proximity to regional bus service, schools, jobs, services, and retail. This provides the conditions to support more housing density.







INTRODUCTION + BACKGROUND

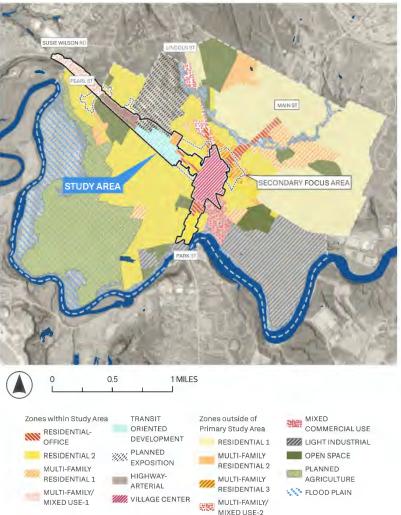
# **EXISTING CONDITIONS OVERVIEW**

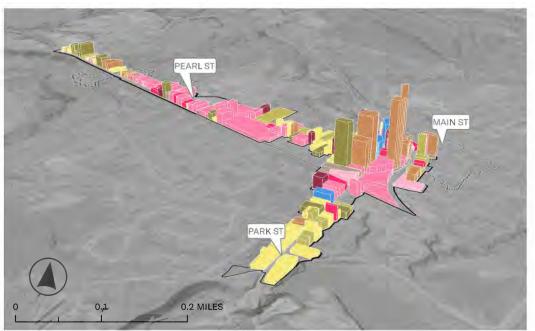
## **Zoning & Land Use**

This project's study area contains a mix of zoning districts and development standards ranging from small scale residential and multi-family districts to the historic Village Center and Transit Oriented Development District that prioritize mixed-use development. The maximum height varies between 3 and 4 stories.

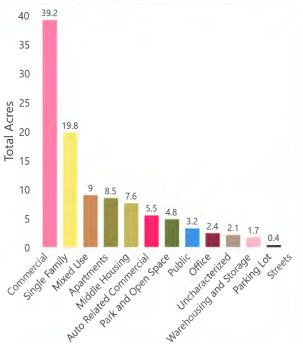
Most districts have standard parking requirements; except Transit-Oriented Development and the Village Center Zoning Districts. The Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District has reduced parking requirements, and the Village Center District has no minimum parking requirements but does provide guidelines for minimums.

The Village Center and the corridors approaching the Five Corners are subject to the Design Review Overlay and Historic Preservation Overlay that include special standards for design review and historic preservation. Current Land Use Map





Total acreage by existing use



### Key Takeaways

- Large surface parking lots exist in the project area and represent opportunities to realize community goals for more housing options and better access to transit.
- The City Center has the highest land values per acre due to its compact mixed-use development. The City Center is also the most walkable area within the project area despite the impact of traffic flow along state highways.
- Most of the uses within the project area are along major transportation corridors and state highways. These properties are impacted by traffic that may not have an origin or destination in Essex Junction.
- There are significant redevelopment opportunities within the project area on vacant parcels and non-vacant parcels with high likelihood for future redevelopment.

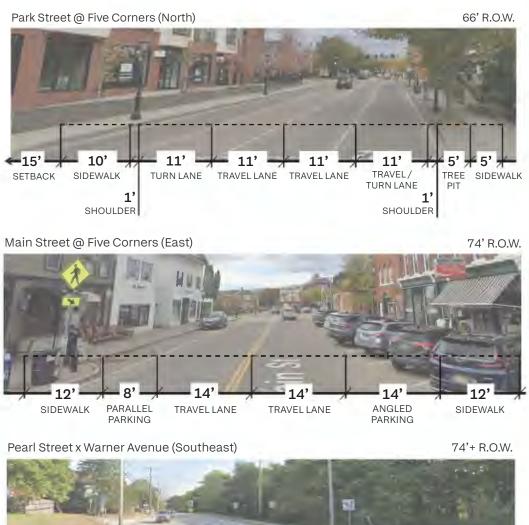
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# **Streets & Mobility**

Streetscapes are diverse throughout the project area but generally prioritize vehicular travel over other modes of transportation. Recent improvements have created safer and more attractive conditions for pedestrians and cyclists- with more connected bike lanes and sidewalks, street trees, and lighting - but designated pedestrian street crossings, especially near bus stops and along Pearl Street, are still extremely limited.

Streets in Essex Junction currently accommodate various forms of transportation, with a bus routes (GMT Route #2), bike lanes, and shared-use paths. The recently opened Crescent Connector and the Colchester-Essex Multi-Use path, a 10'-wide asphalt path that runs between Lime Kiln Road in Colchester and Susie Wilson Road, present opportunities to make new connections that prioritize pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. Streetscape improvements in the study area should build upon past efforts in order to support even safer, and more accessible multimodal transit.





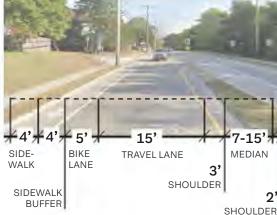
 $6 - 10^{\circ}$ 

TURN

LANE

MEDIAN





#### **Key Takeaways**

- Traffic counts in Essex Junction have increased in recent years, with the highest traffic on Pearl Street from Susie Wilson Road to Post Office Square and on Park Street at the Five Corners. Much of the traffic in and around Essex Junction is through-traffic.
- Relieving traffic from Park Street and the Five Corners intersection. the new Crescent Connector presents opportunities to re-orient the City Center to pedestrians.
- Streets in the project area generally prioritize cars, with wide lanes, narrow sidewalks, and insufficient buffers from the travel lane.
- Transit in Essex Junction has high ridership, but there are **zones with poor** access to transit stops, especially due to limited safe pedestrian crossing opportunities.

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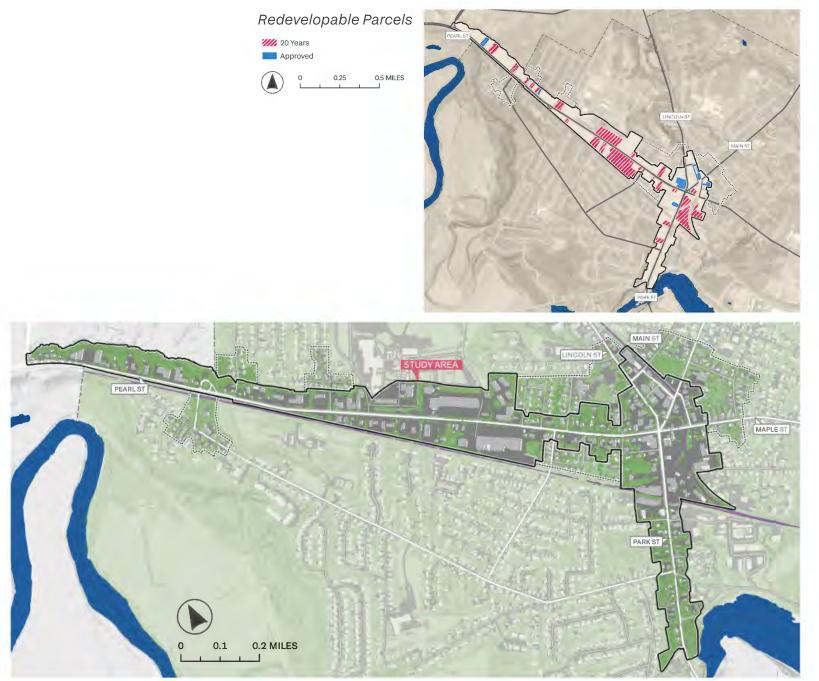
SIDEWALK

BUFFER

SIDE-

WALK

TRAVELLANE BIKE



BARE SOIL GF RAILROAD TR IMPERVIOUS BL

## **Community Design & Opportunities**

Essex Junction's historic rail lines shape the form of parcels in this study area. Rail lines cross Park St, Maple St, and Main St, contributing to irregular lot shapes and building configurations, with several large parking lots that envelope multiple sides of buildings. While they currently contribute to disconnections and poor pedestrian conditions in the City Center, these paved spaces represent opportunity for infill development, new public spaces, and landscaping. The addition of the Crescent Connector introduces another intersection point, adding another road crossing for pedestrians as well as new possibilities for land use along the new corridor.

Many of these rail-adjacent parcels and existing parking lots within the project area have been identified as "redevelopable," based on their current use, condition, land value, or other factors. There are several parcels in the City Center that have already been approved for redevelopment, which present opportunities to add diverse housing options, food and retail destinations, and public space. Further, there is an opportunity to develop in a way that creates a pedestrian-friendly corridor, with buildings at street grade with pedestrian amenities such as seating and plantings.

Land Cover

#### Key Takeaways

- There is a striking lack of green space within the primary and secondary project areas – and especially the more commercial zones – when compared to surroundings.
- Landscape conditions in the project area are varied, including narrow grass strips along roads, areas of patchy grass surrounding rail lines, sizable and wellmanicured lawns, and some instances of front yards that feature rock walls and established shrubs.
- The urban fabric is oriented around cars, with numerous free parking options, including public parking lots, customer parking lots, on-street parking, exposed dirt lots, and parking garages. In addition, there is an abundance of car-related services, repair shops, car washes, and gas stations throughout the project area.
- The frequency of car-related services, surface parking, as well as drive-thrus in certain areas contribute to a **large amount of paved surface** in the project area. The sheer number of parking lots, in addition to their irregular shapes and layouts, point to a potential lack of space efficiency and an **opportunity to add and improve public space and landscaping**.

This Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan builds upon previous work done in the region, including Pearl Street Scoping Studies and Design 5 Corners, and works toward upcoming planning efforts, which includes the 2027 Comprehensive Plan. In particular, Connect the Junction proactively plans for housing growth to set up the Comprehensive Planning process for success. Planning efforts are outlined in the timeline below.



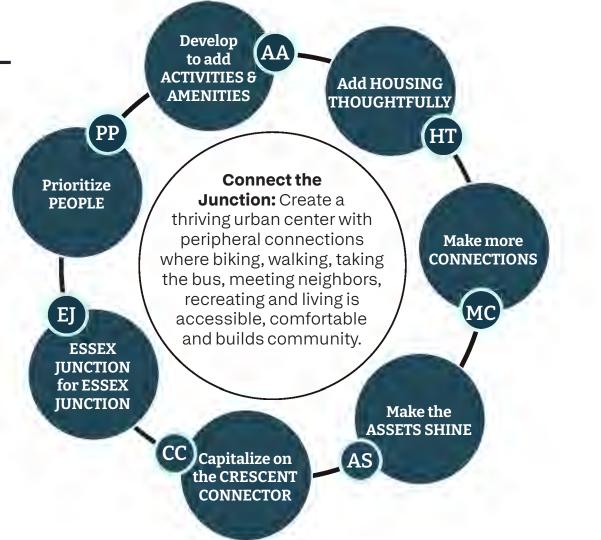
# **PLAN FRAMEWORK**



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# **PLAN VISION**

Connect the Junction aims to enhance the core of Essex Junction for the people that live and work here, creating a hub of housing, public space, and other destinations that can be easily accessed by public transit, walking, rolling, or cycling. These changes are envisioned to compliment existing historic architecture, add urban greenery, and overall contribute to pleasant urban landscape. This may look like redeveloping lots into mixed-use buildings that provide streetscape amenities, creating safer and more comfortable facilities for walking and biking, adding transit-accessible destinations. and strengthening the social connections and civic soul of Essex Junction's core.



# **BIG IDEAS**



### **Prioritize PEOPLE**

- Improve the experience for pedestrians and cyclists while calming traffic that moves through Five Corners by allocating more rightof-way space for multi-modal transportation, landscaping, lighting, and public space.
- CC

AA

HI

- Connector with complimentary development of open space, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and supportive retail and housing.
- **Develop to add ACTIVITIES & AMENITIES**
- Ensure that new development includes amenities for residents and visitors through design guidelines and code updates.

## Add HOUSING THOUGHTFULLY

Increase housing capacity to align with ambitious city and state growth targets through design that fits within the historic City Center fabric and offers diverse options for residents.

### Capitalize on the CRESCENT CONNECTOR

Leverage the City's investment in the Crescent

v]	

### Make more CONNECTIONS

Create more connections for pedestrians, cyclists, and cars through new and updated crosswalks, public space, roadways, and thoughtful development.

## AS

### Make the ASSETS SHINE

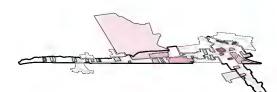
Recognize and leverage existing community assets, including public space, the Champlain Valley Exposition Centre, historical infrastructure, arts and culture.

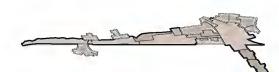


### **ESSEX JUNCTION for ESSEX JUNCTION**

Support active community organizations and local businesses through programming, marketing, and public space improvements.

# **PLANNING & DESIGN TACTICS**

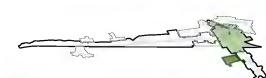












Redevelopment

This plan will produce conceptual designs for key "redevelopable" parcels in the site area, showing possibilities for additional housing units, streetscape amenities, and public space. The City will work with developers to identify how to make these designs feasible, and will influence development outcomes through codes and guidelines.

## **Codes & Guidelines**

This plan recommends updates to codes and guidelines to yield new development that provides public and private amenities and functions within the urban fabric.

### Temporary / Tactical

Tactical strategies will help to test ideas and act as lower cost, shorter term solutions. This may mean temporarily closing pedestrian-oriented streets or creating temporary bike lanes.

## **Roads & Circulation**

Road reconstruction can shift the balance towards more space for walking, biking, and greenery, while calming the flow of traffic through the City Center.

#### **Community Investment** 5

These strategies relate to the organizational structures and communication that leads to better use of public space. That could mean getting the word out about local assets, forming a Main Street organization, or creating systems for regular events and programming.

## Art & Public Space

The addition or improvement of public art, plazas, and greenspace will help to create a city core that reflects Essex Junction and creates a pleasing place to

# **PLAN ACTIONS**



**Prioritize People** 

**PP1.** Food Trucks on Memorial Wav » **PP1.1** Develop a public space management program for food trucks and other uses of public spaces

**PP2.** Pearl Street road diet » PP2.2 Rechannelize Pearl in focus area

around shopping centers and the CVE



» PP2.1 Add bike lane on four-lane section

» PP2.3 Add crosswalks in targeted locations

» PP2.4 Add concepts from Charrette

#### **PP3.** Focus on Railroad Ave as a people street

» **PP3.1** Add structures for market and community events on Railroad Ave, adjacent to the tracks

» PP3.2 Test temporary closures of Railroad Ave for events.

» **PP3.3** Integrate public art and cultural elements

» **PP3.4** Add more landscape and decorative lighting

» PP3.5 Leverage Amtrak Station improvements as an opportunity to improve public space and streetscape functionality

PLAN FRAMEWORK 21



### **CC1.** Park Street road diet

» CC1.1 Stripe a bike lane between Railroad St and River St

» CC1.2 Remove a lane and add a sidewalk. bike lane, and people space on the east side

» CC1.3 Continue for the remainder of Park St until Cascade St

- CC2. Main Street road diet
  - » CC2.1 Build pocket park

» CC2.2 Remove a lane of Main St and add sidewalk and people space

» CC2.3 Update pocket park to include expanded use of Main St ROW

### CC3. Test road closures on Main Street

» CC3.1 Close Main St for a summer event on a weekend

» CC3.2 Close Main St to test traffic flow during a weekday

» CC3.3 Consider long-term closure of Main St and potential design options

#### **CC4.** Redevelopment at Main and Maple

» CC4.1 Mixed-use building with housing and active street-level retail

» CC4.2 Landscaping and open space provided in pocket park

» CC4.3 Support concept of the Village Green

» CC4.4 Programming and activation of public spaces





**DA1.** Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities

> increase feasibility of adding amenities through redevelopment

street-level use requirements

through redevelopment

in the LDC

DA1.2



- » **DA1.1** Height increases as a strategy to
- » DA1.2 Mixed-use development and active
- » DA1.3 Refine use charts for street-level uses
- » **DA1.4** Update the land development code (LDC) to include new standards that align with implementation of this plan and add amenities
- » DA1.5 Integrate form-based code elements

#### **DA2.** Add retail along Pearl St frontage of Post Office Square

» DA2.1 Review the LDC to ensure development is feasible and has appropriate standards

» DA2.2 Consider parking modifications to allow infill development

#### **DA3.** Partner with the CVE on redevelopment opportunities that add amenities and enhance economic development

#### **DA4.** Redevelopment of Pearl St shopping centers » DA4.1 Update TOD District, HA District, and MF-MU1 District standards to align with the goals of this plan

» DA4.2 Develop requirements for active street level uses

» DA4.3 Park and open space requirements for large scale redevelopment Increase building heights in appropriate zones

STRATEGIC, TASTEFUL HEIGHT INCREASES DA1.1

**MAINTAIN & CREATE** NEW OPEN SPACE



**DIVERSE PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES** DA1, DA3

PLAN FRAMEWORK 23

HT1. Increase building heights in appropriate zones » HT1.1 Increase height limits to seven stories in the TOD District and City Center

> **» HT1.2** Right size height limit along certain street frontages including Pearl St to consider pedestrian experience.

> **» HT1.3** Consider changes to Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments to create more housing, encourage better design, add public amenities, and mitigate the impacts of height increases

### **HT2.** Increase housing capacity

**» HT2.1** Consolidate zoning districts

» HT2.2 Refine the zoning map to add housing capacity

### **HT3.** Develop a land capacity model and monitoring program for housing production

» HT3.1 Develop a land capacity model to address compliance with new VT growth targets

» HT3.2 Develop a monitoring program that tracks housing production in the City

### **HT4.** Consider permit streamlining approaches

STRATEGIC HEIGHT INCREASES & DESIGN GUIDELINES HT1



PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY STREETS



ACTIVE STREET LEVEL

HT1.3

HT2

MORE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT



UPPER LEVEL DISTINCTION OR SETBACK



Make more connections

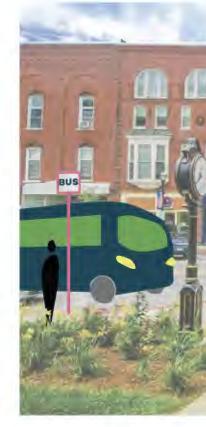
#### **MC1.** Add crosswalks, especially near transit



MC2. Establish pedestrian connections through the CVE

pedestrian connections





» MC1.1 ... on Pearl Street (several locations)

» MC2.1 Partner with the CVE to formalize

#### PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY FEATURES, COMPLEMENTING TRANSIT SERVICE

#### MC3. Develop an official map with street and public improvements

» MC3.1 Adopt an official map with proposed streets and public improvements in the study area Enhance Stevens Park as a community asset

THE R. P. LEWIS CO., NAMES

### PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS MC1, MC2

PLAN FRAMEWORK | 25

Image: St. Albans, VT (Source: SE Group)

AS1. Enhance Stevens Park as a community asset » **AS1.1** Add signage and paths to Stevens Park to improve access

> » AS1.2 Conduct community engagement and develop a concept plan to enhance Stevens Park

**AS2.** Make use of CVE for employee parking » AS2.1 Partner with the CVE to allow local employees to park at the CVE to support more customer parking and short-term redevelopment opportunities

**AS3.** Keep historic buildings and support them with quality public space

» AS3.1 Maintain the National Register Historic District in Downtown

AS4. Create and maintain a public mural program » **AS4.1** Update the LDC to authorize murals

> » AS4.2 Commission murals on public buildings near Five Corners

» AS4.3 Explore opportunities to provide grants to businesses to commission murals



**Essex Junction for Essex Junction** 

**EJ1.** Market and recruit desired businesses are missing from the area

» EJ1.2 Market study and marketing strategy

and market

the study area

HIGHLIGHT THE CITY'S BEST OUALITIES

**BRING THE COMMUNITY** TOGETHEF

THINK TO THE FUTURE RECRUIT DESIRED BUSINESSES

> **INVEST IN EVENTS &** PROGRAMMING



**COMMISSION MURALS &** OTHER PUBLIC ART

IMPROVE PUBLIC SPACE SURROUNDING EXISTING ASSETS

AS4







AS4



» EJ1.1 Review recent public engagement efforts to determine what types of businesses

### **EJ2.** More community events and programming

**» EJ2.1** Bring back events like the block party

» EJ2.2 Invite groups to use public spaces in

#### **EJ3.** Promote Essex Junction as a destination based on local industry, culture, and assets

» EJ3.1 Develop a marketing campaign that highlights strategic assets and qualities

**EJ4.** Explore a Main Street type organization for **Five Corners** 

> » EJ4.1 Explore the feasibility of a main street type organization for the Five Corners

» **EJ4.2** Explore feasibility of participating in the VT Downtown Program

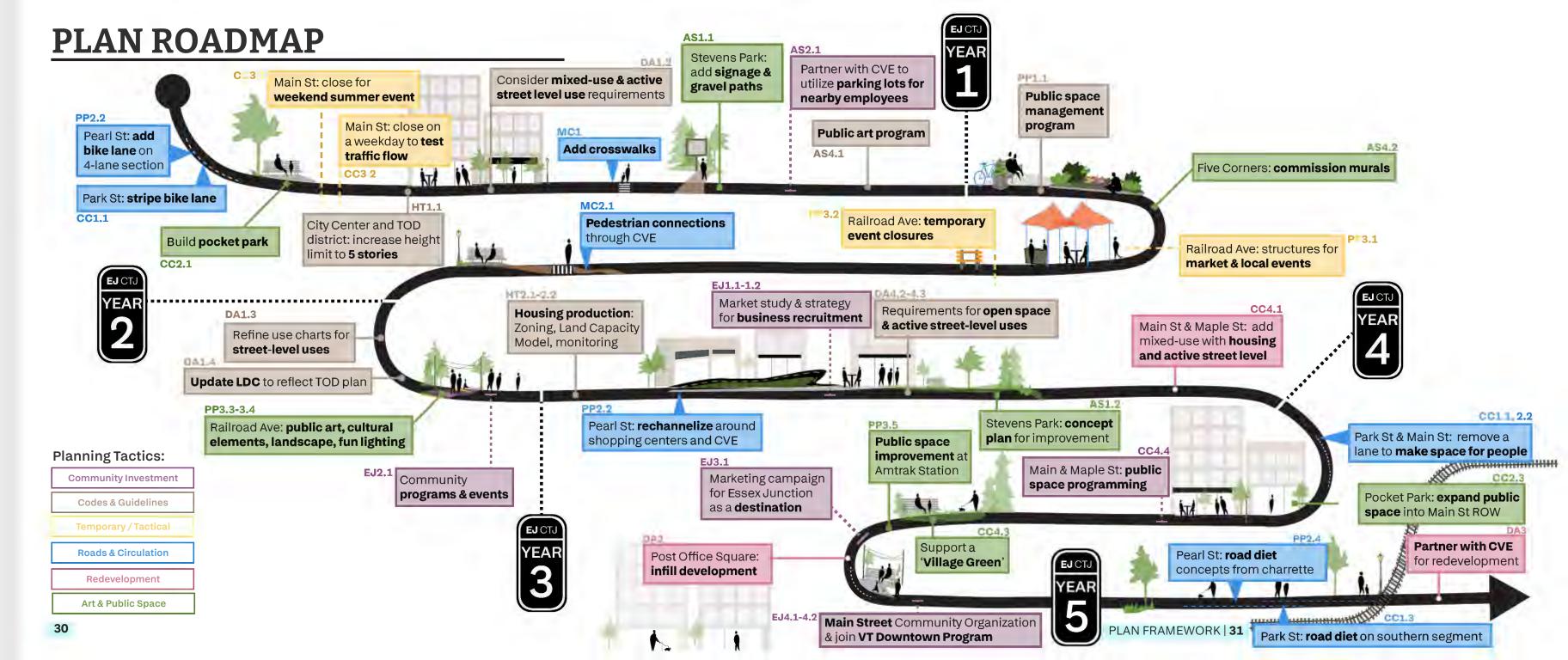


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Da5.     Designation       amenities     amenities       amenities     amenities       amenities     ba1.       ba2.     Partr       ba3.     Rede       ba4.     MC3.       ba6.     MC3.       ba6.     MC3.	<ul> <li>CC3. Test road closures on Main Street</li> <li>CC3. Test road closures on Main Street</li> <li>CC4. Redevelopment at Main and Maple</li> <li>DA5. Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities</li> <li>DA1. Add retail along Pearl St frontage of Post Office Square</li> <li>DA2. Partner with the CVE on redevelopment opportunities</li> <li>DA3. Redevelopment of Pearl St shopping centers</li> <li>DA3. Increase building heights in appropriate zones</li> <li>H11. Increase housing capacity</li> <li>H13. Develop a land capacity model and monitoring program for housing production</li> <li>H14. Consider permit streamlining approaches</li> <li>MC1. Add crosswalks, especially near transit</li> <li>MC2. Establish pedestrian connections through the CVE</li> <li>MC3. Develop an official map with street and public</li> </ul>
	ements Enhance Stevens Park as a community asset Make use of CVE for emplovee barking
AS2. Make AS3. Keep h public space	<b>AS2.</b> Make use of CVE for employee parking <b>AS3.</b> Keep historic buildings and support them with quality public space
EJ2. More EJ3. Prom	Market and recruit desired businesses More community events and programming Promote Essex Junction as a destination

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PLAN FRAMEWORK | 29



# WHAT WE HEARD



# **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The project team set out to develop this Transit-Oriented Development Plan collaboratively with the community in Essex Junction in order to ensure that the voices of those most impacted by this project were heard and incorporated. Throughout the process, we reached out to specific stakeholders through interviews and focus groups, while also providing open opportunities for broader community engagement—at local events, in a hands-on Design Charrette, and via online platforms.

We actively engaged diverse stakeholder groups, including developers, business owners, community organizations, students, and those representing public spaces and facilities. In addition, public forums such as City Council and Planning Commission meetings allowed for ongoing dialogue with residents, while the project website served as a central hub for information and input.

To encourage meaningful participation, the project team hosted a dynamic, four-day workshop in Essex Junction, where participants had the opportunity to engage directly with the project and collaborate with the team in interactive working sessions. The weekend events attracted strong media coverage and drew a wide range of attendees—families, Councilmembers, developers, youth, seniors, and more—who shared their perspectives on the challenges and opportunities within the project area. Using this feedback, we developed key themes focused on enhancing housing options, creating vibrant public spaces, and supporting thriving local businesses, all accessible via public transit and multi-modal facilities. These themes were directly incorporated into the "Big Ideas" and action items proposed in this plan. Specific feedback and themes gathered from the Charrette are detailed in the upcoming pages.

In addition to designated engagement events, we consistently shared progress updates and offered ongoing opportunities for feedback through the project website and at other local events, including National Night Out and the Community Dinner. This continuous, collaborative approach has ensured that the TOD plan aligns with the needs and desires of the community, fostering a strong sense of ownership and support among Essex Junction residents, business owners, and community leaders.

## **August 1** Planning C presenting the Curren and Public Engagemen

2024

•••••• August 5 Project We

•••••• August 26 segment

•••••• September 15-19 ba promoting the Charren

•••••• November 7 Plannir reporting back from th Charrette

commission Meeting at Conditions Report ant Plan	
ebsite Launch	August C National Night Out
	••• August 6 National Night Out
	posters and flyers promoting the Charrette and Project Website
•••••	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •
on Junction City News	
	August - October Focus Groups and
anner posted at 2 Lincoln	Interviews with key stakeholder groups
tte	
•••••	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •
• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	••• October 4-8 Community Design Charrette
	collaborative workshops hosted at the CVE and guided tours around the site area
ng Commission Meeting	
he focus groups and Design	
	••• January 25 "Vision and Big Ideas" document
	posted to project website for public comment
	••• January 26 Community Dinner
	"Big Ideas" posters presented for feedback

## THE DESIGN CHARRETTE

### **FRIDAY** Oct 4, 2024

## **Homecoming Game**



We brought project boards to the homecoming game to introduce the project and ask people about challenges and opportunities in the area. Dozens of kids stopped by our table and gladly answered questions in exchange for candy.

Feedback method: Post-it notes added to Challenges and **Opportunities** Map

## Themes:

- Kids enjoy the parks in Essex Junction, such as the playground at Thomas Fleming School and the pool at Maple Street Park. They also enjoy access to larger greenspaces outside the City such as Indian Brook and Sand Hill Park.
- Kids desire more food options and things to do, including shopping, go karts, and ice skating.
- People see opportunities for more green space, food trucks, and grocery stores.
- People appreciate the mix of "city" with "nature" and enjoy biking around, but there is a desire for better biking and walking conditions, especially for families/kids.

Challenges and Opportunities Map with post-its noting "assets, challenges, opportunities, and connections"↑

We spoke to lots of kids about what they love and want they want to see added to Essex Junction  $\rightarrow$ 





## SATURDAY Oct 5, 2024 **Kick-Off Presentation**

We presented slides on project background and existing conditions, with an option to join via webinar and live polling questions using Slido.

Feedback method: Live polling using Slido

*In response to the open-ended polling question:* participants said:

- Balance robust businesses, community spaces and safety
- Diversity of businesses
- Community connections through coffee shops
- Walkability
- Nothing—it would be ideal to overhaul the entire space and replace it with easy and quiet access paths for the younger generations to encourage civic engagement and community
- Historical character
- More restaurants
- Maintain the vibe
- Historical buildings and compatible new growth

## **Q** Champlain Valley **Exposition** Centre



# Describe the #1 asset you'd like to see preserved in the study area...

- Ensure accessibility for diverse (in all ways) residents
- Diversity of businesses
- Town character
- Viable local businesses serving residents
- Green space including river access
- Boxcar Bakery
- Open space for healthy activity
- Public transportation
- Safety
- Our historical character
- Nature
- Business vitality

#### In response to the open-ended polling question:

## **Describe the #1 thing you'd like to see changed in the study area...** *participants said:*

- Segregated bike and walking paths bordered by green space to reduce traffic noise and increase walkability and access to businesses by non-car transportation methods
- More trees, with separation between sidewalks & road
- Turn 5 corners to 4 corners
- Historical aesthetic matching
- Traffic control during CVE events—add crosswalk lights
- Traffic calming everywhere
- Keep main street open because traffic will be forced to side streets
- Focus on safety and good use of density
- Pedestrian railroad crossings
- Close Main Street
- Protected bike lanes everywhere
- Mandate green space/communal space in new development

- Less parking out front
- Infill parking lots
- Learn from past planning mistakes
- Add two stories to every building in the study area
- More Affordable housing
- Bike lanes on Pearl–West Street to Susie Wilson
- Return of Amtrak [route] to Montreal
- Crosswalks near every bus stop; Design control; Less traffic
- Not sure yet
- No strip malls-Crosswalks on Pearl Street
- Continuous bike lanes
- Traffic calming strategies
- Better stakeholder involvement
- Close Main Street

When prompted: In up to 3 words, describe what you see as the biggest challenges in the study area, participants said:

When prompted: In up to 3 words, describe your vision for the study area, participants said:



### SATURDAY Oct 5, 2024

### Workshop activity #1: Challenges + Opportunities

Champlain Valley Exposition Centre

**Feedback method:** Participants broke into 4 groups and marked up *Challenges and Opportunities Maps* to show:

- Assets they want to protect.
- Challenges that require improvements.
- Opportunities to transform places into something new.
- Existing or potential connections.

## Takeaways from the mapping exercises:

#### **Pearl Street:**

- The city needs to pair crosswalks and bus stops.
- Traffic calming measures should be implemented to slow down through traffic.
- There are fewer eastbound transit stops than westbound.
- Bike lanes are dangerous and discontinuous opportunity to road diet to create safer bike paths.

#### 5 Corners:

- Possibility of shutting down Main Street or reducing a lane of traffic (opinions for and against).
- Possibility of closing Railroad Ave to car traffic between Central Street and Main Street.

### **Park Street**

• Desire to create contiguous bike and pedestrian paths to access the river.









Map showing aggregation of feedback from the 4 groups, which helped shape the concepts and actions in this Plan; see appendix for original maps.

### SATURDAY Oct 5, 2024

# Workshop activity #2: Redevelopment + Infill



Feedback method: Participants remained in their groups and placed stickers to show where they envision different housing types, public spaces, and streetscape elements.

### **Themes:**

#### **Pearl Street:**

- Existing strip malls could be redeveloped as mixed-use without setbacks and with parking behind the buildings.
- Denser housing, including middle housing and lower density • multifamily, is desired along the northwest edge of Pearl, and in secondary study areas.
- Challenge with sound mitigation if housing is proposed near • the CVE.
- Opportunity for more diverse and year-round uses of the CVE property.

#### **5** Corners

- Desire to integrate green space into future development.
- Residents appreciate the current mix of retail and restaurants.
- Desire for mid- to high-density mixed-use development.
- People like the idea of incorporating parklets and food trucks into public space.





## **SUNDAY** Oct 6, 2024

We walked around the Five Corners and Pearl Street areas. talking about existing conditions and noting opportunities for new development and uses of space.

### **MONDAY** Oct 7, 2024

Site Tour

After the ribbon cutting for the new Crescent Connector, we walked the new throughway and around Five Corners to discuss how this change can pave the way for new development in the area.

**Feedback method:** Tour attendees provided feedback through conversation and by marking up maps.

## **Themes:**

- Reduce impact from traffic on pedestrians and bicvclists.
- Railroad Avenue presents unique opportunity for a pedestrian-oriented street. Capitalize on the Crescent Connector.
- Crosswalks should be added to the places where people are already making street crossings.

## **Site Tour Q** Five Corrners -> Pearl Street



# Crescent Connector + Five Corners



- Expanded and improved public space will support new development.
- Focus on community needs versus accommodating regional traffic.
- Right-of-way constraints make bicycle facilities challenging.



The Sunday tour started in the parking lot in front of Firebird Cafe, looped around Railroad Ave, and extended along Pearl Street.

## **MONDAY** Oct 7, 2024 **Closing Presentation**

We presented a summary of what we had heard throughout the weekend at the workshop, tours, and during "open studio hours" during which people were invited to share feedback on project boards, using activity maps, and via conversation with project team members.

## Vision + Big Ideas:

- 1. Prioritize People
- 2. Capitalize on the Connector by making more "people space"
- 3. Add activity and amenities with new development
- 4. Add housing thoughtfully
- 5. Make more connections
- 6. Make the assets shine
- 7. Essex Junction for Essex Junction

A model of a potential redevelopment scheme whereby the corner of Main Street and Park Street is an urban plaza. ↑

A concept an arc of green spaces around the Five Corners, with Main Street reduced to two lanes and Railroad Avenue improved with market shed buildings.  $\rightarrow$ 

# Champlain Valley Exposition Centre





# **PLAN ACTIONS**



ACTIONS

PLAN ACTIONS | 47



Improve the experience for pedestrians and cyclists while calming traffic that moves through Five Corners by allocating more right-of-way space for multi-modal transportation, landscaping, lighting, and public space.



Dedeviderereerst	<b>PP1.</b> Food Trucks on Memorial Way	PP1.1		
Redevelopment	<b>PP2.</b> Pearl Street road diet	PP2.1		
Codes & Guidelines			PP2.2	
Temporary / Tactical			PP2.3	
Roads & Circulation			PP2.4	
Community Investment	<b>PP3.</b> Focus on Railroad Ave as a		PP3.1	
Community investment	people street		PP3.2	
Art & Public Space			PP3.3	
			PP3.4	
			PP3.5	
	Timeline (years)	Short (0-1)	Med. (1-5)	Long (5-20)

PP1

**Big Idea |** PP Prioritize People Action | PP1 Food Trucks on **Memorial Way** 

**Description |** Public engagement participants expressed a desire to keep and expand the variety of businesses in the City Center. While mixed-use buildings may slowly develop and fill with retail, food trucks can offer a more flexible and short term way to meet this need. Further, food trucks can activate space by drawing in customers and bringing activity onto the streets.

Memorial Avenue presents an opportunity to prioritize people by closing the road to cars, bringing in food trucks, and turning this seldomused stretch of road into public space. Preventing traffic through this short stretch of road would improve the experience of moving through Five Corners as a pedestrian, and could improve the functionality of Veterans Memorial Park by making it function less like an island and more like a connected public space.



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**Big Idea** | PP Prioritize People Action | PP1 Food Trucks on Memorial Way

Subaction | PP1.1 Develop a public space management program for food trucks and other uses of public spaces

**Description** | The City has recently updated its municipal code to increase the ways in which food trucks can utilize space. It can continue to support the proliferation of food trucks in Five Corners by creating a public space management program, which could include efforts such as streamlining the permit process, advertising participating trucks on the City website, or supporting food trucks with events that will draw in customers.

This program could be broadly focused on public space management and include additional items such as sidewalk cafes, murals, and events.



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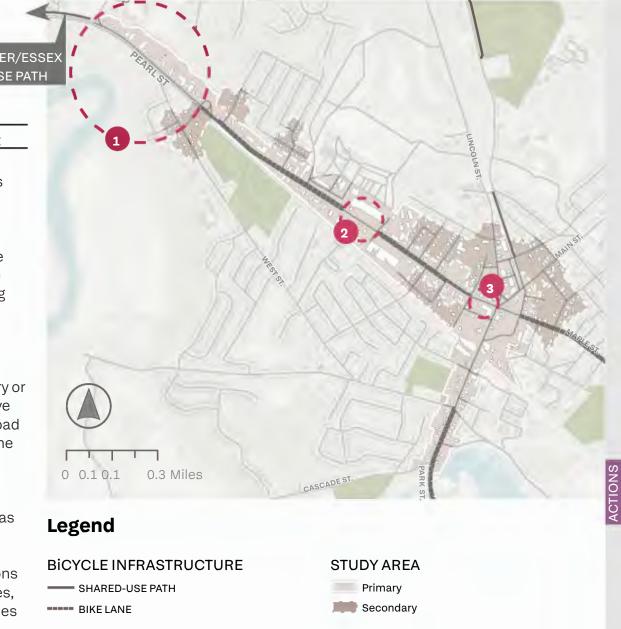


COLCHESTER/ESSEX MULTI-USE PATH

**Big Idea** | PP Prioritize People Action | PP2 Pearl St. road diet

**Description** | Prioritizing people on Pearl St. means allocating less space for cars and more space for cyclists and pedestrians. This effort, referred to as a "road diet," involves removing or reducing the size of travel lanes, which has the added benefit of naturally slowing car traffic. The extra right-of-way space recuperated from the road diet can be used to create wider buffers to separate bicycles from traffic, which can include greenery or other amenities. It can also involve bringing bicycle lanes off of the road and onto a curb, and increasing the width allocated to these lanes as well as sidewalks.

The map on the right shows 3 areas where a road diet would allow the City to fill in gaps in bicycle infrastructure. While these sections are the focus of the next few pages, the bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the entire stretch of Pearl St. pictured (from Susie Wilson Rd. to Park St.) would benefit from additional facility space for bicycles and pedestrians.













TOP LEFT: A bike lane through Seattle's South Lake Union neighborhood is separated from car traffic with a planter, and from foot traffic with an amenity strip that contains planters and utilities.

TOP RIGHT: An on-street bik lane is separated from car traffic with a pavement treatment, which also provides space for seating and planters.

BOTTOM LEFT: A two-way bik lane is separated from car traffic with a treelined planter.

MIDDLE RIGHT: A two-way, on-street bike lane is buffered from traffic with bollards on a pavement strip.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Los Angeles tests out wavy forms as artist buffers between bicycles and cars.

## PP2.1

#### **Big Idea** | PP Prioritize People

### Action | PP2 Pearl Street road diet Subaction | PP2.1 Conduct traffic studies to evaluate feasibility for road diets

**Description** | There are many considerations and due dilligence necessary before redesigning a roadway. Traffic volumes, stormwater, and other factors impact the feasibility of such a project. A traffic study or general scoping study to evaluate these conditions will be necessary before proceeding with design and construction of new streetscape facilities along Pearl St.

## PP2.2

## Big Idea | PP Prioritize People Action | PP2 Pearl Street road diet Subaction | PP2.1 Add a temporary bike lane to section 1

**Description** | Pearl St. section 1 (between Susie Wilson Rd. and West St. Extension) lacks a bike lane, which means that cyclists heading into Essex Junction on the Colchester/Essex Multi-Use Path must ride on the road for several blocks. There is currently a scoping study underway, evaluating a realignment add additional of bike facilities. Depending on the timeline of this project, the City may want to take a tactical approach to creating a temporary multi-use path or bike lane using an existing travel lane.

Many cities have created tactical bike lanes using planter boxes, bollards, or other objects to turn travel or parking lanes into bike lanes. The use of paint is an additional effort that can help mark the new use of the lane. This could be tested first in partnership with Essex Junction Recreation and Park as a running or cycling event, or be done seasonally.





ABOVE: Temporary bike lane separated with cones and planters in Columbus, OH (Source: Columbus Dispatch)

LEFT: Better Block PDX, Portland, OR (Source: Jonathan Maus via Bike Portland)

#### PRIORITIZE PEOPLE 53



#### Big Idea | PP Prioritize People

Action | PP2 Pearl Street road diet

Subaction | PP2.2 Rechannelize Pearl St. between Susie Wilson Rd. and West St. Ext.

**Description |** The addition of a permanent bike lane or multi-use path will facilitate safe travel for bicyclists as they move between Susie Wilson Rd. and West St. Ext. A road diet in this section is also a chance to slow traffic by reducing lanes, and provide wider pedestrian facilities that are buffered from car traffic.

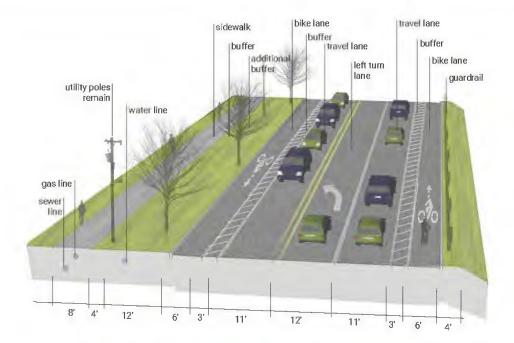
Pictured right is the preferred alternative from the 2018 Scoping Report Update. This design reduces to two travel lanes with one turn lane. maintains utility poles in their current positions, expands the sidewalk to 8', and adds on-street bike lanes in both directions. Consultant firm Stantec is currently working an additional scoping study, which will result in a updated proposed design for the roadway segment. The consultant has been asked to for a design that does not duplicate bicycle facilities (i.e., does not include both a bike lane and a multi-use path) and that does not place trees under utilities.





ABOVE: The Colchester/Essex Multi-Use Path runs along VT Route 15, and will eventually extend to Lime Kiln Road in South Burlington.

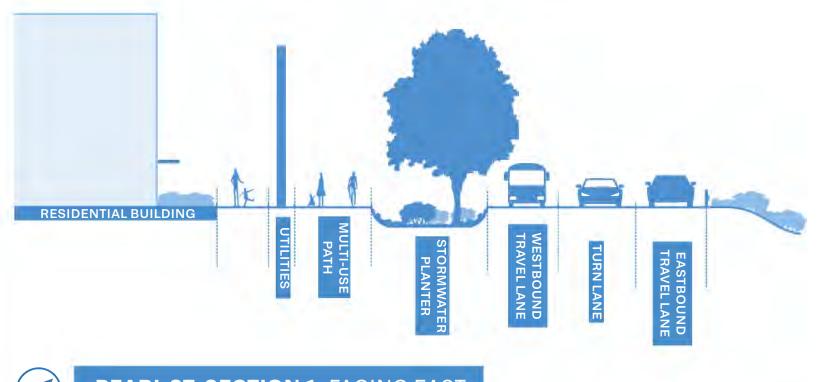






Proposal for future improvements to VT Route 15 at Susie Wilson Road Intersection (Source: Stantec)





PEARL ST. SECTION 1: FACING EAST

The illustration of a potential street layout for Section 1 aligns with Stantec's drawing in that it reduces to two lanes in each direction. with a turn lane to provide access into driveways on the west side of the road. Because of the steep grade and railway tracks on the south side of the street, it will likely remain undeveloped, and does not need to be access by cyclists and pedestrians. For this reason, the above section does away with the

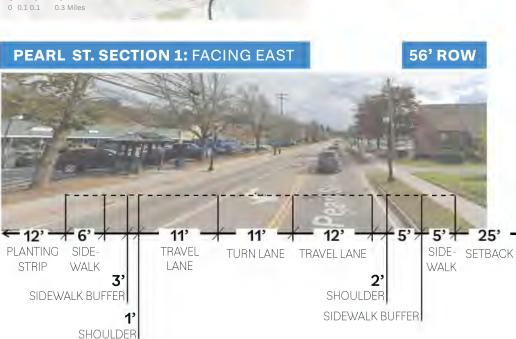
on-street bike lane traveling east, instead accomodating bicyclists traveling in both directions via a multi-use path. This provides a continuation of the Colchester/Essex path, and prevents cyclists from needing to cross the street at Susie Wilson Road. This leaves ample room for wide planters, which can be treated as stormwater gardens and planted with trees that provide a beautiful experience for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists alike.

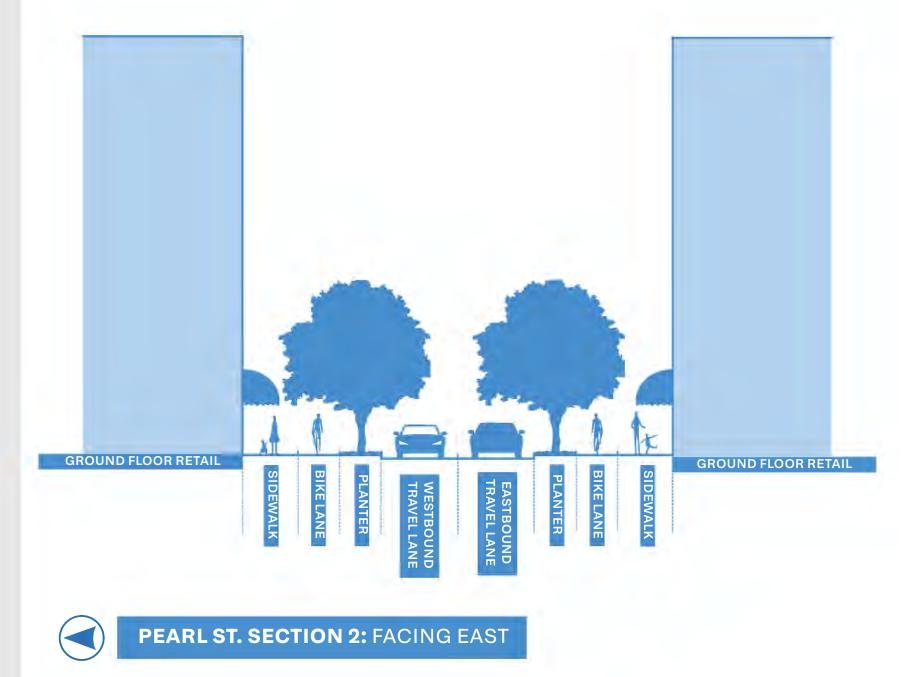
## **PP2.3**

Big Idea | PP Prioritize People Action | PP2 Pearl Street road diet Subaction | PP2.3 Rechannelize Pearl St. Section 2

**Description** | As Pearl St. develops with more ground floor, mixed-use buildings and smaller setbacks (seeing sections DA and HT), there is an opportunity to create a walkable area for shopping, dining, and gathering. A streetscape that supports this kind of environment might include wider sidewalks separated from the road by planters with trees and amenities like benches and public art.

The existing sidewalks in this section or Pearl St. are 5-7' with 3' buffers from adjacent traffic. A road diet in this area would look at using the existing turn lane for additional space for sidewalk and bicycle facilities, as well as wider planting strips planted with trees.







**Big Idea** | PP Prioritize People

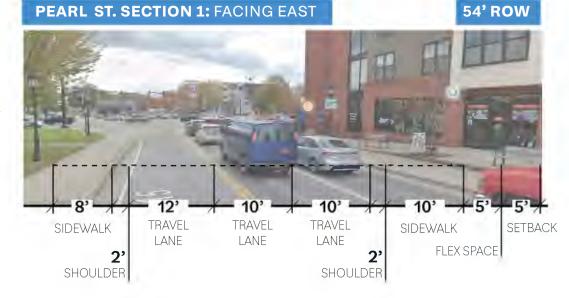
Action | PP2 Pearl Street road diet

Subaction | PP2.3 Study options for closing the Section 3 gap in bicycle facilities

**Description** | There is a 1 block gap in bike facilities between School St. and Five Corners, requiring cyclists to use car travel lanes or sidewalks before entering into the intersection. As the City invests in upgrades to Pearl St. that address the narrow sidewalks, bike lanes, and buffers, this gap in facilities should be filled.

With a narrower right-of-way than Pearl St. sections 1 and 2, this streetscape would benefit from the acquisition of additional right-of-way. Another possibility is to redevelop the landscaped frontage of the City facilities on the northern parcel into a pathway, though this would not work well for cyclists heading towards Park St.







## **Big Idea** | PP Prioritize People Action | PP3 Focus on Railroad Ave. as a people street **Description** | Sandwiched between Central St. and Main St., Railroad Ave. is a naturally calm street that has the potential to serve as a pedestrian hub. Anchored at the north with the Amtrak Station and lined with local businesses, there

are opportunities to tailor the design and programming of the street to facilitate more public life. In the past, this stretch of roadway hosted Essex Junction's farmers market, showing its viability as a festival street.

Now, the City has begun the "Essex Junction Multimodal Train and Bus Station" project to make improvements to the Amtrak Station. This brings about the possibility to update the building in a way that better connects to and engages with its urban surroundings. This effort combined with upgrades to the streetscape and an effort to regularly program the area could result in a new hub for events and daily life in the City Center.







TOP: Railroad Avenue, existing (Source: Google Street View)

MIDDLE: For multiple vears, Railroad Avenue was used to Block Parties

BOTTOM: Railroad Avenue also served as the location for Essex Junction's Farmers Markets

# PP3.1

Big Idea | PP Prioritize People Action | PP3 Focus on Railroad Ave as a people street Subaction | PP3.1 Railroad Avenue Activation Program

Description | The angeled parking stalls adjacent to the Amtrak Station have been identified as possible sites for market structures, which could serve as venues for street vendors, events, and other activation opportunities. Until the Amtrak Station project is complete, it may not be possible to add permanent structures, but the City could allow tents and temporary elements.

One approach would be to include these spots as approved street vending locations, allowing vendors to set up and sell food to train riders and other passersby (see PP1.1). Another possibility is that the City could purchase tents and make them available for rent or loan through a Railroad Avenue Activation program. Similar to the City's existing Street Vending Permit and Street Closure for Community Event Permit, a new permit could be created to allow for the use of tents in Railroad Avenue parking stalls for vending and other events. The City could provide pre-approved site plans showing where the tents should be placed, where pedestrian access should be maintained, and other aspects of the event setup. This would ease staff burden in the long run, as there would not be a need to review individual site plans for each event.

Once the program is in place, the City can reach out to non-profits and other groups who could make use of the space, to let them know that these permits are available.

TOP: Railroad Avenue, existing (Source: Google Street View)

BOTTOM: In Washington, D.C., Eastern market makes use of right-of-way space for market space





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### Big Idea | PP Prioritize People

Action | PP3 Focus on Railroad Ave as a people street

Subaction | PP3.1 Add structures for market and community events on Railroad Ave, adjacent to the tracks

**Description** | What is currently used for parking adjacent to the railroad tracks could serve as space for flexible structures used to activate the street. These could be bespoke or off-the-shelf structures that provide infrastructure for events like farmers markets, festivals, and other street fairs.

Given the in-progress efforts to update the Amtrak Station, use of temporary structures may precede any more permanent fixtures. Setting and taking down these structures would require personnel, and may need to coincide with the formation of a new downtown or main street organization. Alternatively, the City could purchase tents and make them, and the space, available for rent by nonprofit or other organizations who wish to use the space for markets, festivals, and other events.





TOP: Eastern Market in Washington D.C. makes use of right-of-way space for market structures.

BOTTOM: Market structures in Seattle support the farmers market, restaurant dining, and crafts vendors. (Source: the Urbanist)



The above rendering shows the addition of market structures on Railroad Avenue, creating a hub of activity surrounding the Amtrak Station.



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### Big Idea | PP Prioritize People

Action | PP3 Focus on Railroad Ave as a people street

Subaction | PP3.3 Integrate public art and cultural elements

**Description** | Public art such as murals, sculptures, and pavement designs can help to tell the story of Essex Junction. Interpretive signage is another tol for communicating the history, ecology, and other important information about the City.



Big Idea | PP Prioritize People

Action | PP3 Focus on Railroad Ave as a people street

Subaction | PP3.4 Add more landscape and fun lighting

**Description** | A future redesign of Railroad Ave. should consider updated amenities for an improved pedestrian experience. These could include widening the sidewalk and planting strips, allowing more space for greenery. The addition of decorative lighting would also contribute to the road's function for events and daily pedestrian activity.

> Top: Sculpture along the Indianapolis Cultural Trail.

Bottom Left: Light projections onto a building

Bottom Right: Sculptural scaffolding with lighting creates a unique entrance to Sawyer Street in London, UK.







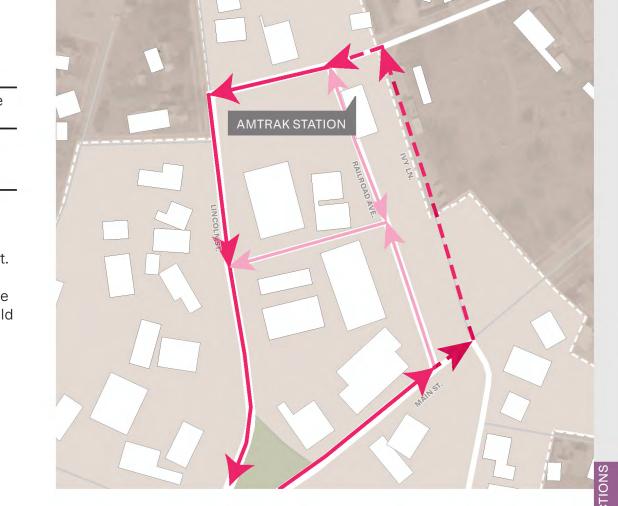


Big Idea | PP Prioritize People

Action | PP3 Focus on Railroad Ave as a people street

Subaction | PP3.2. Test temporary closures of Railroad Ave for events

**Description |** Permanently or intermittently closing Railroad Ave. would allow for its use during events or daily a a pedestrian street. Additional activation would be needed to ensure that this would be sucessful, and bus circulation would need to be rerouted.



# Legend

STUDY AREA



Secondary

# BUS LINES

- #2 ESSEX
  - CURRENT ROUTE RAILROAD AVE
  - POTENTIAL REROUTE

# CC **CAPITALIZE ON THE CRESCENT** CONNECTOR

Leverage the City's investment in the Crescent Connector with complimentary development of open space, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and supportive retail and housing.



Redevelopment	CC1. Park Street road diet	CC1.1		
Codes & Guidelines	]		CC1.2	
Temporary / Tactical				CC1.3
Roads & Circulation	<b>CC2.</b> Test road closures on Main	CC2.1		
Community Investment	Street		CC2.2	
Art & Public Space	, 		CC2.3	
	<b>CC3.</b> Main Street road diet			
			CC3.3	
<b>CC4.</b> Redevelopment at Maple	CC4. Redevelopment at Main &		CC4.1	
	Maple		CC4.2	
			CC4.3	
			CC4.4	
	Timeline (years)	Short (0-1)	Med. (1-5)	Long (5-20)

# CC1

Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector Action | CC1 Park Street Road diet

Description | Park St. is an important route for cars, cyclists, and pedestrians accessing the Five Corners area and moving around Essex Junction. Currently, much of the roadway lacks bicycle facilities, and its sidewalks are inconsistent with a pedestrian-oriented area.

The City can use short and longterm strategies to fill in gaps in bicycle infrastructure and expand pedestrian space. This will help improve connectivity between parks, provide safe and comfortable multi-modal access to and from Five Corners, and create a walkable place with engaging pedestrian experiences. Determining the correct diet will require capacity analysis for all modes.



# Legend



# STUDY AREA



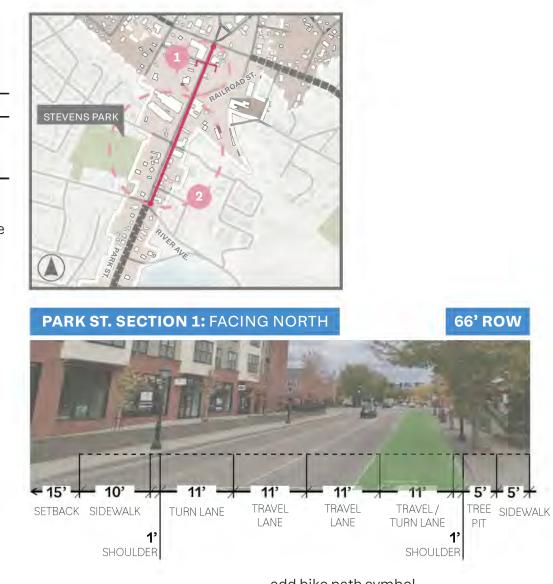


Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the **Crescent Connector** 

Action | CC1 Park Street road diet

Subaction | CC1.1 Stripe a bike lane between Fiver Corners and **River St** 

**Description** | While a complete redesign of Park St. may not be achievable in the short term, the use of an existing vehicle lane as a bike lane requires only restriping and the addition of a buffer. This would fill in the existing gap in bicycle infrastructure, allowing cyclists to safely move between Five Corners and Cascade Park.



add bike path symbol



Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the **Crescent Connector** 

Action | CC1 Park Street road diet

Subaction | CC1.2 Rechannelize Section 1

**Description** | The removal of the east-most travel/turn lane on Park St. will free up the ROW needed for bicycle facilities and additional pedestrian space. This will facilitate the safe passage of cyclists and will help create a comfortable pedestrian environment that can include amenities like benches and public art.

With bicycle facilities being added only on one side, a shared-use path facilitates traffic in both directions, while also allowng space for pedestrians. Shared-use paths in urban settings can serve as engaging corridors for public life. As cyclists near Five Corners, they should naturally slow down and may be looking for places to park their bicycles. The mixing of these groups thus functions well in this context.





ABOVE: The Indianapolis Cultural Trail winds through downtown, an avenue for cyclists and pedestrians to explore the area's museums, parks, and restaurants.

LEFT: The Cultural Trail assumes several typologies over its 8-mile span. Pictured here, an amenity zone alternates between planted areas, bus stops, and other paved areas.

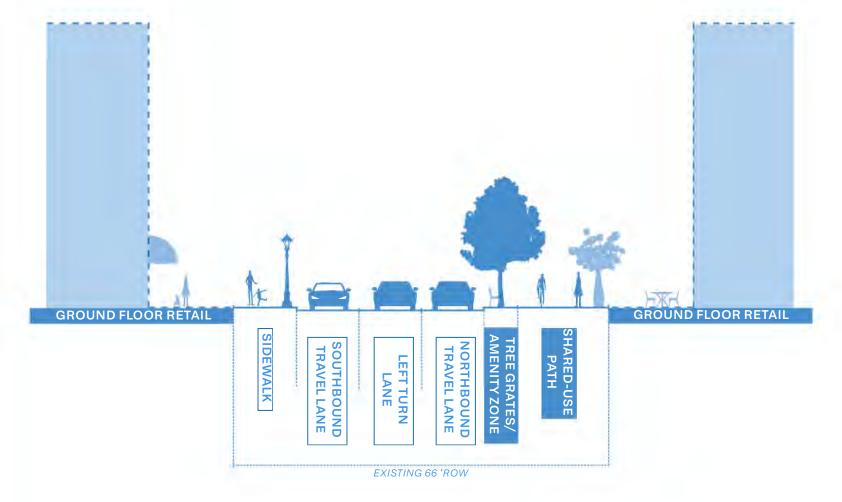


# PARK ST. SECTION 1: FACING NORTH

### USING 1 LANE REDUCTION FOR FLEXIBLE + ENGAGING PEDESTRIAN SPACE

The proposed section BELOW removes the eastern turn/travel lane and buffer, freeing up 12' of "people space." In this alignment, a 16' shared-use path accommodates bicycle traffic in both directions, as well as pedestrians. Art pieces and signage in this zone add interest, wayfinding, and opportunities to express Essex Junction's culture. Between car traffic and multi-modal facilities, a 6' buffer is interspersed with trees planted into grates, benches, bicycle racks, and other amenities.

On either side of the ROW, building setbacks function as additional pedestrian and cafe space, allowing building activities to spill out onto the streetscape.

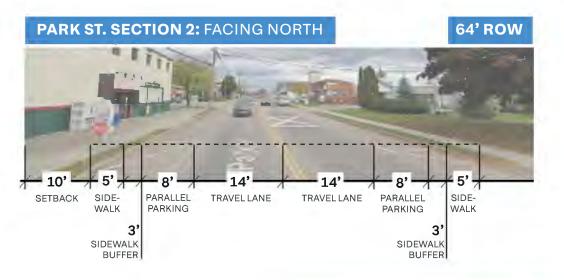




# Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector Action | CC1 Park Street road diet Subaction | CC1.2 Rechannelize Section 2

**Description** | The removal of the east-most travel/turn lane on Park St. will free up the ROW needed for bicycle facilities and additional pedestrian space. This will facilitate the safe passage of cyclists and will help create a comfortable pedestrian environment that can include amenities like benches and public art.

With bicycle facilities being added only on one side, a shared-use path facilitates traffic in both directions, while also allowing space for pedestrians. Shared-use paths in urban settings can serve as engaging corridors for public life. As cyclists near Five Corners, they should naturally slow down and may be looking for places to park their bicycles. The mixing of these groups thus functions well in this context.





## Turning movement revision



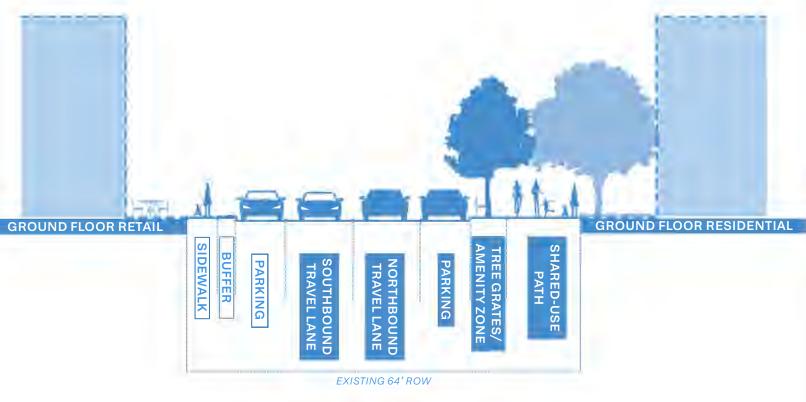
turning movement 
turning movement removed

CAPITALIZEONTHECONNECTOR 71



ROAD DIETING TO ACCOMODATE AN A 6' amenity zone separates cars from URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD SHARED-USE people, creating space for bike racks, PATH benches, trees, interpretive signage, On this stretch of Park St., reducing the and other amenities. The 12' sharedtravel lanes to 11' frees up 6' of space use path abuts buildings with setbacks for pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, sometimes planted with mature trees, plus an additional 4' of row from the east creating a green corridor for walking and setback. rolling.

Conceptual rendering for Park Street/Lincoln Inn Redevelopment



# PARK ST. SECTION 2: FACING NORTH

With a flexible amenity zone and a fairly wide path, this corridor could wind, allowing its construction to spare existing trees and create an engaging pathway experience.

Notably, this configuation allows the 2 parking spaces to remain.

CAPITALIZEON THE CONNECTOR 73



Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

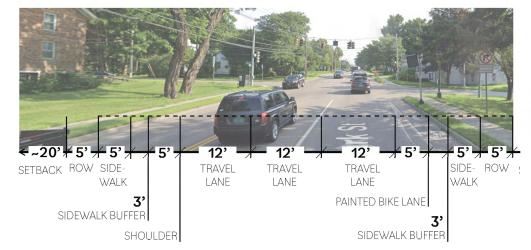
Action CC1 Park Street road diet

### Subaction | CC1.3 Rechannelize Section 3

Description | The next phase of a Park St. road diet will improve existing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, separating cyclists from the road with a curb and planted buffer.



PARK ST. SECTION 3: FACING NORTH





72' ROW

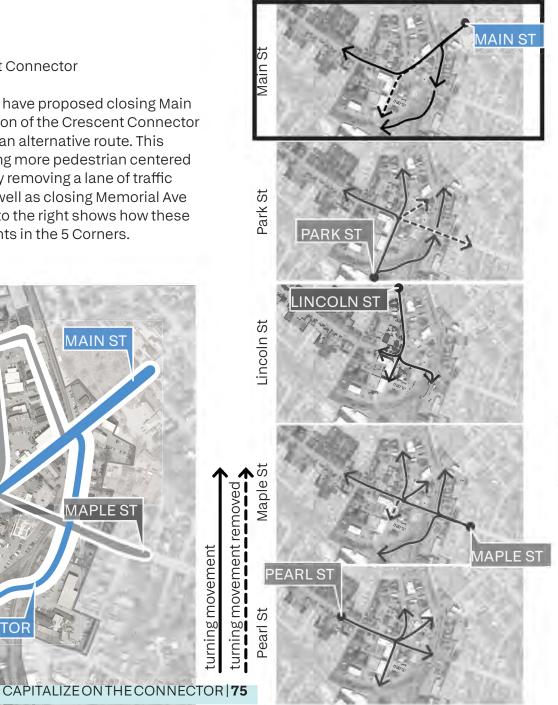
Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector Action | CC2 Main Street road diet **Description** | Previous planning efforts have proposed closing Main St. to car traffic, and the recent completion of the Crescent Connector helps to make this feasible by providing an alternative route. This plan suggests several options for creating more pedestrian centered space within the 5 Corners by potentially removing a lane of traffic on Main St and Parks St respectively as well as closing Memorial Ave and possibly Railroad Ave. The diagram to the right shows how these changes could impact turning movements in the 5 Corners.



MAIN S1

MAPLE ST

### **Turning movement revisions**





REMOVE PARKING

LANES TO ADD

PLANTERS

**CLOSE TO TRAFFIC** 

LINCOLNST

\$ 76 I A I I

BELOW: Rendering showing a Main Street road diet creating expanded pedestrian space buffered from car traffic with street trees. A mixed-use building is developed at Main and Park Street, with a plaza frontage offering space for people to gather, relax, and enjoy the greenery.



FLEXIBLE PLAZA

SPACE

PARKST.



Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector Action | CC2 Main Street road diet Subaction | CC2.1 Build pocket park **Description** | The City is in the process of designing a pocket park that will make use of the City-owned portion of the east-most parcel between Main St. and Park St. This will bring the addition of public gathering space that can support businesses by offering seating, greenery, and other amenities.



Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector Action | CC2 Main Street road diet people space

**Description** | With traffic diverted away from Main St., the segment between Five Corners and Railroad Ave. should have less traffic. A road diet can encourage its use by pedestrians, allocating an existing traffic lane for additional space for people to walk and gather.



Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector Action | CC2 Main Street road diet Main St

**Description** | A Main St. road diet will free up additional people space. The City can thus expand the pocket park to facilitate additional connectivity and gathering space within Five Corners.

# Subaction | CC2.2 Remove a lane of Main St and add sidewalk and

### Subaction | CC2.3 Update pocket park to include expanded use of



### **Big Idea |** CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector **Action | CC3 Test road closures on Main Street**

**Description** | The City should test Main St. closures before committing to a permanent resdesign. This will allow them to test activation strategies, work through storage options for the necessary materials, and document any issues that arise.



Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

Action | CC3 Main Street road diet

### Subaction | CC3.1 Close Main St. for a summer event on a weekend

**Description** | A summer event is the perfect time to test a street closure, allowing the City to work through details such as where they will store the necessary equipment and how they will coordinate with businesses with Main St. storefronts.



Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

Action | CC3 Main Street road diet

Subaction | CC3.2 Close Main St to test traffic flow during a weekday

**Description** A weekday closure of Main St. will be a test for how it functions during rush hour traffic, as well as how activated the street is during a more day-to-day scenario. The City can explore programming options and may consider partnerships with the library, teen center, or Main St. businesses.





**Big Idea** | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

Action | CC3 Main Street road diet Subaction | CC3.3 Consider long-term closure of Main St and potential design options

### design options

**Description |** Should the City decide that closing Main St. to cars is the best use of that block, there are several ways it can be designed to best function as a pedestrian street. Curbless streets, decorative paving, and catenary lighting are a few options.

ABOVE: In Boulder, CO, a pedestrian street integrates ample tree coverage, decorative lighting, and planters lined with seating.

*LEFT: One of many pedestrian streets in Montreal, QC, this one features decorative pavement and is lined with outdoor cafes.* 

CAPITALIZEON THE CONNECTOR 79



80

### **Big Idea** | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector Action | CC4 Redevelopment at Main & Maple

INCOLNST

**Description** | The parcel at Main St. and Maple St. has the potential to offer housing that connects to public transit, ground floor and pedestrian-oriented retail, and public space that brings additional trees and landscaping to Five Corners. The rendering below shows a five-story building fronted with a plaza space that blends into a streetscape along Main St., creating a hub and corridor of pedestrian-oriented greenery. BELOW: Rendering showing a Main Street road diet creating expanded pedestrian space buffered from car traffic with street trees. A mixed-use building is developed at Main and Park Street, with a plaza frontage offering space for people to gather, relax, and enjoy the greenery.

4 STORIES OF

HOUSING

**GROUND FLOOR** 

**COMMERCIAL OR** 

**OFFICE SPACE** 





TOP: Pulaski Park in Northampton, MA makes use of a small parcel as a seatir area with bike parking and space for performances, tucked behind trees.

MIDDLE: A flexible plaza in Salem, MA serves as a space for performance.



### Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

Action | CC4 Redevelopment at Main & Maple

# Subaction | CC4.1 Mixed-use building with housing and active street-level retail

**Description** | Essex Junction residents appreciate the mix of local businesses and want more options for eating, shopping, and activities. Mixed-use buildings provide space for these uses, while also addressing the urgent need for additional housing. The City could consider providing support for the use of retail space by nonprofit and organizations that can enrich the community.

# CC4.2

Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

Action | CC4 Redevelopment at Main & Maple

Subaction | CC4.2 Landscaping and open space provided in pocket park

Description | As the City develops, it will be important to preserve open and<br/>public space. Essex Junction residents also want more greenery within the<br/>urban environment. The redevelopment of Main & Maple is an opportunity to<br/>provide quality open space that works in tandem with Main St.'s streetscape<br/>and the adjacent Veterans Memorial park to create an enjoyable place for

pedestrians.

# CC4.3

Big Idea | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

Action | CC4 Redevelopment at Main & Maple

# ${\small Subaction}\,|\,{\small CC4.3}\,{\small Support\,concept\,of\,the\,Village\,Green}$

**Description** A village green or town center can be a place for events, gathering, and daily public life within a main area of a city. Creating this type of hub within Five Corners will mean thinking creatively to work within the existing street grid. Creating plazas in front of new development, closing off select portions of streets, and expanding pedestrian walkways can together create a sense of a pedestrian hub for Essex Junction.

# CAPITALIZEON THE CONNECTOR | 81



**Big Idea** | CC Capitalize on the Crescent Connector

Action | CC4 Redevelopment at Main & Maple

# Subaction | CC4.4 Programming and activation of public spaces

**Description** | If people are not in the habit of walking to and around Five Corners, they might not immediately begin using new and improve public spaces. The City can jumpstart this cycle by programming public spaces with games, events, and activities. This will require City staff time or significant partnerships with organizations that can take on the marketing and operation of this effort.

Until the formation of a Downtown Association, the City may consider working with local groups who can make use of new and existing public spaces in Fiver Corners.

ABOVE: The Freeway Park Association, a nonprofit group, hosts Dance in the Park events in one of Seattle's Downtown parks.

BELOW: Consultant Framework hosted World Cup viewings in a local alleyway, piloting a new use of this public space.





# DEVELOP TO ADD ACTIVITIES & AMENITIES

Ensure that new development includes amenities for residents and visitors through design guidelines and code updates.



Redevelopment Codes & Guidelines	<b>DA1.</b> Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and	DA1.2		
Temporary / Tactical	amenities		DA1.3	
			DA1.4	
Roads & Circulation	<b>DA2.</b> Add retail along Pearl St		DA 2.1	
Community Investment	frontage of Post Office Square		DA2.2	
Art & Public Space	<b>DA3.</b> Partner with the CVE on redevelopment opportunities that add amenities and enhance economic development			DA3
	DA4. Redevelopment at Main &			
	Maple		DA4.2	
			DA4.3	

Timeline (years)

Short (0-1) Med. (1-5) Long (5-20)

ACTIONS

DEVELOP TO ADD | 83



### Action | DA1 Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities

**Description** | Currently, much of Essex Junction is auto-oriented, producing an uninviting pedestrian environment without a lot of walkable amenities. Design guidelines can help to reshape the ground floor environment by creating more inviting building entrances, better transitions from outdoor to indoor spaces and greener, more comfortable sidewalks and bike facilities. Changes to development code can additionally encourage the siting of more community serving businesses.

PUBLIC-FACING RETAIL, HIGH TRANSPARENCY FRONTAGE ZONE (6-8'):

**GROUND-FLOOR:** 

RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

STREET FURNITURE, AWNINGS, LIGHTING



PUBLIC AMENITY ZONE (6-12') STREET TREES. STORMWATER PLANTINGS STREET FURNITURE, LIGHTING

PEDESTRIAN THROUGH-ZONE (5-10'



**Big Idea** | DA Develop to add activities and amenities Action | DA1 Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities Subaction | DA1.1 Height increases as a strategy to increase feasibility of adding amenities through redevelopment

Description | Allowing more dense residential and mixed-use development increases demand for and feasibility of siting amenities like like a grocery store, pharmacy, and small retail.

# **DA1.2**

Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities Action | DA1 Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities Subaction | DA1.2 Mixed-use development and active street-level use requirements

**Description** | This action would modify zoning regulations to encourage active ground floor uses that interact with the street. Having more community facing businesses at ground level provides a more inviting and active environment for the community. Mixed use development with downstairs retail and upstairs housing can help to create community hubs at 5 corners and along Pearl Street.

# **DA1.3**

Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities Action | DA1 Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities Subaction | DA1.3 Refine use charts for street-level uses **Description** | Typically use charts regulate what types of commercial, residential and industrial activities can take place within a zone. Essex Junction's use chart does not currently distinguish uses based on location within the building envelope. This action would modify ground floor uses in mixed use zones to encourage the siting of more interactive uses such as retail.

### DEVELOP TO ADD 85



Action DA1 Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities

### Subaction | DA1.4 Update the land development code (LDC) to include new standards that align with implementation of this plan and add amenities through redevelopment

**Description** | The Land Development Code should be updated to include height increases, density bonuses, mixed-use and active street level use requirements, and other mandates and incentives to encourage development of people-centered space and vibrant, walkable neighborhoods.



Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities

Action | DA1 Design guidelines for streetscapes, entrances, and amenities

### Subaction | DA1.5 Integrate form-based code elements in the LDC

**Description** | Form based codes regulate the physical attributes of buildings and the public realm rather than focusing primarily on uses. This type of regulation can create a more predictable and high-quality public realm. This subaction would help produce building frontages that are more human-centered by regulating level of transparency, landscaping, entrances, outdoor spaces, and building massing rather than simply what types of businesses or residential uses are allowed. In a form-based code, different types of buildings are allowed in different zones.



Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities

**Description** | Currently, Pearl St. is primarily fronted by parking lots, with commercial uses set back far from the street. Adding retail to the front of Post Office Square would begin to create a friendlier, more walkable thoroughfare that is more supportive of transit riders. This action suggests a phased approach starting with temporary liner buildings in the interim before full redevelopment.



### Action | DA2 Add retail along Pearl St. frontage of Post Office Square

BELOW: Rendering showing infill development fronting Post Office Square, creating a more pedestrianfriendly corridor along Pearl, increasing opportunities for small business development, and expanding the public realm with additions of plazas and greenspace.



Action | DA2 Add retail along Pearl St. frontage of Post Office Square

Subaction | DA2.1 Review the LDC to ensure development is feasible and has appropriate standards

**Description** | This subaction includes review and potential revision of the Land Development Code to reduce development barriers while ensuring a desireable built form. Possible changes could include increasing height limits to up to 7 stories. Updating the LDC to allow this level of density is not only necessary to meet the City's housing goals, but would additionally provide the population base necessary to support pedestrian-level amenities in close proximity to housing. Code update efforts will need to provide good design standards, landscaping and public space requirements to ensure that residents benefit rather that sacrifice from additional density.

# **DA2.2**

Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities

Action | DA2 Add retail along Pearl St. frontage of Post Office Square

Subaction | DA2.2 Consider parking modifications to allow infill development

**Description** | This subaction considers removing or adjusting parking minimums to increase buildable area on lots. Currently residential zones require 1 off street parking space per dwelling unit for most housing types. Minimum parking requirements could be removed for accessory dwelling units and potentially reduced for multifamily dwelling units, particularly those with proximity to transit. A decision to decrease off-street parking requirements will require study of the effect on on-street parking including winter parking restrictions.



Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities that add amenities and enhance economic development.

**Description** | The CVE is a 130 acre property in the heart of Essex Junction that hosts events and programming throughout the year, but is most active during the Champlain Valley Fair each summer. This action reflects a community desire to work with the CVE to consider new uses that could take place at the fairground that would contribute substantially to the community, particularly during the off-season.



Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities Action | DA4 Redevelopment of Pearl St. shopping centers **Description** | This subaction considers redevelopment on both sides of

Pearl Street in the existing shopping centers. Complimentary development on both sides of the street would create a secondary city hub to 5 Corners supported by mixed-use and multifamily residential development. The rendering below suggests approachable facades along Pearl Street with parking at back of lot or underground to create a more vibrant public realm.

# Action | DA2 Partner with the CVE on redevelopment opportunities



# **DA4.1**

Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities Action | DA4 Redevelopment of Pearl St. shopping centers Subaction | DA4.1 Update TOD District, HA District, and MF-MU1 District standards to align with the goals of this plan

**Description** | The zoning districts above run along the Pearl St. corridor. Potential updates would include greater height allowances, density bonuses, revised parking minimums, open space requirements, and active street level use requirements.

# **DA4.2**

Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities Action | DA4 Redevelopment of Pearl St. shopping centers Subaction | DA4.2 Develop requirements for active street level uses **Description** | This subaction expands on DA4.1 by developing specific requirements for street-level uses including ground-floor retail, cafes, publicfacing businesses, community spaces, or plazas to create a dynamic and engaging environment for pedestrians and encourage foot traffic.

# **DA4.3**

Big Idea | DA Develop to add activities and amenities Action | DA4 Redevelopment of Pearl St. shopping centers

## Subaction | DA4.3 Park and open space requirements for large scale development

**Description** | This subaction involves development of specific park and open space requirements for large-scale developments to enhance quality of life for residents and visitors. Requirements may include a minimum percentage of the site for public parks, plazas, or green spaces, with design guidelines for accessibility, sustainability, and community use. The LDC currently contains open space requirements for subdivisions.

### DEVELOP TO ADD 91



# **ADD HOUSING** THOUGHTFULLY

Increase housing capacity to align with city and state growth targets through design that fits within the historic City Center fabric and offers diverse options for residents.

Community Inves



Redevelopment Codes & Guidelines	<b>HT1.</b> Increase building heights in appropriate zones	HT1.1 HT1.2		
Temporary / Tactical			HT1.3	
Roads & Circulation			HT1.4	
Community Investment	HT2. Increase housing capacity		HT2.1	
Art & Public Space	<b>HT3.</b> Develop a land capacity model and monitoring program for housing production		HT2.2	НТЗ
	<b>HT4.</b> Consider permit streamlining approaches		HT4.2 HT4.3	
	Timeline (years)	Short (0-1)	Med. (1-5)	Long (5-20)



**Big Idea** | HT Add Housing thoughtfully

### Action | HT1 Increase building heights in appropriate zones

**Description** | Chittenden County is facing a significant housing shortage due to long term underproduction of housing. A significant barrier to building more housing is often restrictive height limits that prevent development from "penciling". Giving developers more flexibility in heights can make projects more profitable without negatively impacting the look and feel of an area (when accompanied with solid design criteria). Adding height also reduces impermeable surface coverage for equivalent un densities - allowing more pedestria space while increasing housing volume.

### The map to the right shows existing height allowance by zone prescribed by the LDC.

35' or 3 stories (whichever is less) 48' or 4 stories (whichever is less) 58' or 4 stories (whichever is less) 72' or 5 stories (whichever is less)

n e		MULTI-FAMILY/MIXED USE-1	HIGHWAY ARTERIAL	TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT	MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL 2	RESIDENTIAL OFFICE	RESIDENTIAL 2	MULTI-FAMILY MIXED USE-2	VILLAGE CENTER	MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL 3
20		58' MAX HEIGHT	58'	58'	35'	35'	35'	35'	58'	35'
rs Ke		72' AFFORDABILITY BONUS	72'	72'	48'			48'	72'	48'
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6)						1	41	T		
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ACTIONS



Big Idea | HT Add housing thoughtfully

Action | HT1 Increase building heights in appropriate zones

Subaction | HT1.1 Increase height limits to seven stories in the TOD **District and City Center** 

**Description** | As the map on the previous page shows, the current maximum height for the Village Center zone is 4 stories or 58' (whichever is less) with an affordability bonus of an additional floor (5 stories or up to 72').

Allowing more floors would provide more housing at the heart of Essex Junction that in turn can support vibrant retail activity at ground level. The code could increase the number of floors allowed without substantially increasing the height limit. A rule of thumb is to allow 12' floor height for residential floors and 14' for commercial. A 6 story mixed-use building can be accomodated under 72', and 86' with an additional floor for an affordability bonus (20% of units must be affordable to those making 80% of area median income).

BELOW: An example of a seven story mixed use building that matches the scale and materiality of the street. The additional height is balanced by the narrow frontage.



HT1.2

Big Idea | HT Add housing thoughtfully Action | HT1 Increase building heights in appropriate zones Subaction | HT1.2 Consider a lower height limit along certain street frontages including Pearl St.

**Description** | Existing Pearl St. development is primarily 1 and 2 stories high. A possible strategy for introducing more density is to have a lower height limit adjacent to Pearl St and to allow greater heights set back from the street. This can reduce the feeling of scale and create a comfortable transition zone that additionally buffers residential uses from the street.



Big Idea | HT Add housing thoughtfully Action | HT1 Increase building heights in appropriate zones Subaction | HT1.3 Consider changes to Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments to create more housing, encourage better design, add public amenities, and mitigate the impacts of height increases.

**Description** Zoning amendments and changes to the Comprehensive plan could update dimensional standards, design standards and allowed uses to regulate facade transparency, setbacks, green space and other site features that help to turn increased density from a challenge to an opportunity.



Ground floor (commercial)

BELOW: Rendering showing infill development fronting Post Office Square, creating a more pedestrianfriendly corridor along Pearl, increasing opportunities for small business development, and expanding the public realm with additions of plazas and greenspace. Multifamily residential buildings sit behind commercial reducing the feeling of scale.

NEW RETAIL DEVELOPMEN<sup>-</sup>

ACTIVE STREET FRONTAGE

HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL SET **BACK FROM PEARL STREET** 

NEW RETAIL

DEVELOPMENT



### **Big Idea** | HT Add housing thoughtfully

## Action | HT2 Increase housing capacity

Description | The City's tools for increasing density include allowing more types of housing at higher densities, updating zoning code to reduce restrictions on middle housing, and modifying dimensional standards to create more flexibility in lot configuration.

# HT2.1

## **Big Idea** | HT Add housing thoughtfully

Action | HT2 Increase housing capacity

# Subaction | HT2.1 Consolidate zoning districts

Description | Currently, Essex Junction has two residential zones, three multifamily zones, two multi-family mixeduse zones and allows residential uses in a number of other zones in addition. The City should consider consolidating like zones. Doing so would reduce the complexity of adhering to the code and could make the logic of the regulations more clear. Additionally, the code should utilize dimensional standard tables that help to elucidate differences between zones and that allow property owners and prospective owners to easily understand what is allowed on their lots.

# HT2.2

Big Idea | HT Add housing thoughtfully

Action | HT2 Increase housing capacity

# Subaction | HT2.2 Refine the zoning map to add housing capacity

**Description** Currently there is a large residential density step down outside of the 5 Corners where the Village Center transitions into Residential-Office zoning. Residential-Office is intended for residential to commercial conversions that do not substantially change neighborhood feel. However, much of this area particularly on Park St. already has significant multifamily developments. This area should be studied to see where mixed use multifamily should be allowed.



Big Idea | HT Add housing thoughtfully

# HT3.1

# Big Idea | HT Add housing thoughtfully as new development comes on line.

# HT3.2

# Big Idea | HT Add housing thoughtfully capacity model in the future.

# Action | HT3 Develop a land capacity model and monitoring program for housing production

Description | Many municipalities use land capacity models which identify vacant and under utilized properties and apply different market and zoning constraints to identify strategic places to add density and to assess whether housing goals are feasible under existing regulations and market conditions.

Action | HT3 Develop a land capacity model and monitoring program for housing production

# Subaction | HT3.1 Develop a land capacity model to address compliance with new VT growth targets

**Description** | Land capacity models apply a series of constraints that can include environmental encumberances, infrastructure deductions, allowed densities and market uptake to test different zoning strategies for housing and employment. This allows the City to plan more pragmatically to reach growth targets. Additionally, developing a capacity model can help the City plan for future infrastructure investments like water and sewer that will be needed

Action | HT3 Develop a land capacity model and monitoring program for housing production

# Subaction | HT3.1 Develop a monitoring program that tracks housing production in the City

**Description** A monitoring program could include a community dashboard that tracks the geographic distribution of added units, tracks trends and keeps track of affordability targets. A program such as this could help refine the land



# Action | HT4 Consider permit streamlining approaches

**Description** | This action includes conversations with permit applicants and developers to identify elements of the permitting process that are the most resource intensive for the applicant due to turn around time, material preparation and administration (how easy is it to identify and complete the required materials, how transparent is the process etc.)





# MAKE MORE CONNECTIONS

Create more connections for pedestrians, cyclists, and cars through new and updated crosswalks, public space, roadways, and thoughtful development.



St. Albans, VT

Redevelopment	ſ
Codes & Guidelines	r
Temporary / Tactical	
Roads & Circulation	ľ
Community Investment	_
Art & Public Space	5

<b>MC1.</b> Add crosswalks, especially near transit	MC1.1		
	MC1.2		
	MC1.3		
<b>MC2.</b> Establish pedestrian connections through the CVE		MC2.1	
<b>MC3.</b> Develop an official map with street and public improvements		MC3.1	
Timeline (years)	Short (0-1)	Med. (1-5)	Long (5-20)



**Big Idea** | MC Make more connections

# Action | MC1 Add crosswalks, especially near transit

**Description** | Safe and convenient crosswalks are key to the success of transit-oriented development, improving the pedestrian experience by slowing traffic and designating space for people (rather than cars). Strategically locating new crosswalks near existing bus stops businesses, and other amenities will improve pedestrian safety as well as create a more seamless transit experience for Essex Junction residents.

Crosswalks additionally pose a low-cost opportunity to be playful, express city character, and bring community members together through public art.



# Legend

### STUDY AREA

Primary Secondary BUS STOPS #2

## PARKS Park/Open Space CROSSWALKS STATUS Existing

Proposed



Action | MC1 Add crosswalks, especially near transit

### Subaction | MC1.1 ... on Pearl Street (several locations)

**Description** | A safer, more pleasant pedestrian experience will compliment the planned redevelopment of Post Office Square and infill along Pearl. Addition of quality crossings near new businesses and amenities will drive long-term change toward a more pedestrian-friendly city. Currently, there is a large gap in bus stops on the south side of Pearl Street. Efforts should be made to build Eastbound stops paired with crosswalks between West St Extension and Susie Wilson Rd. Additional stops will require pedestrian safety measures that improve visibility and slow traffic.

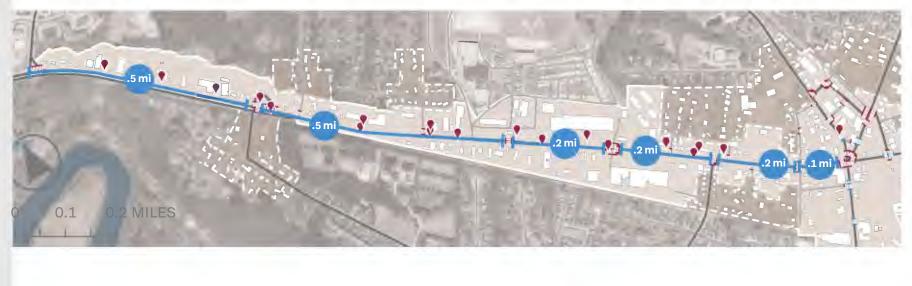


ABOVE: PAINTED CONNECTION, PROVIDENCE, RI

CROSSWALKS

**Existing** 

Proposed



### STUDY AREA

Primary

BUS STOPS

#2

Secondary

102

Conceptual rendering of Pearl St redevelopment with croswalk to bus stop between Susie Wilson and West St Ext.

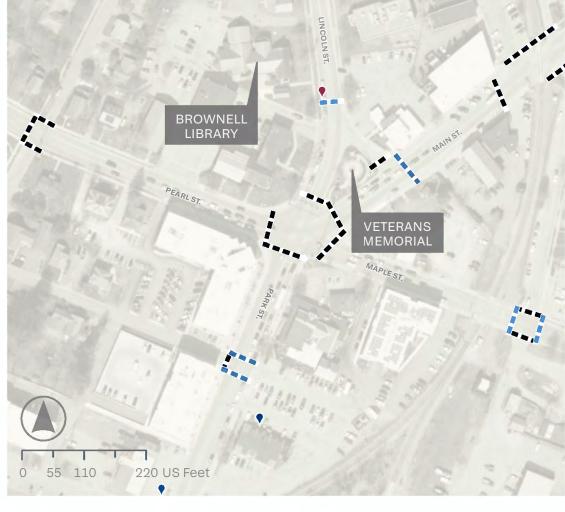
103



Action | MC1 Add crosswalks, especially near transit

Subaction | MC1.2 ... on Main Street

**Description** Adding crosswalks on Main Street will establish crucial pedestrian connections between the historic Main Street and the Five Corners. Raised and/ or painted crosswalks would further enhance traffic calming, helping to create a more cohesive downtown experience for both visitors and residents.



# Legend

BUS STOPS		CR	OSSWALKS
٠	#2		Existing
•	#10		Proposed
••	CONNECTION		



**Big Idea |** MC Make more connections

Action | MC1 Add crosswalks, especially near transit

Subaction | MC1.3 ...on Lincoln Street

**Description |** New connections from Lincoln Street to Main Street and the Five Corners will create continuity between existing Essex Junction assets and services on Lincoln and Main and new developments planned for the Five Corners. Connecting public spaces - like the library to the new pocket park - encourages longer visits and facilitates community cohesion.





### Action | MC2 Establish pedestrian connections through the CVE

**Description** | The CVE covers a large amount of land, restricting pedestrian movement between the Five Corners and development along Pearl Street. The addition of public pedestrian pathways through this space would create valuable connections between downtown and Pearl Street development while at the same time fostering new relationships and ventures between the CVE and Essex Junction residents.



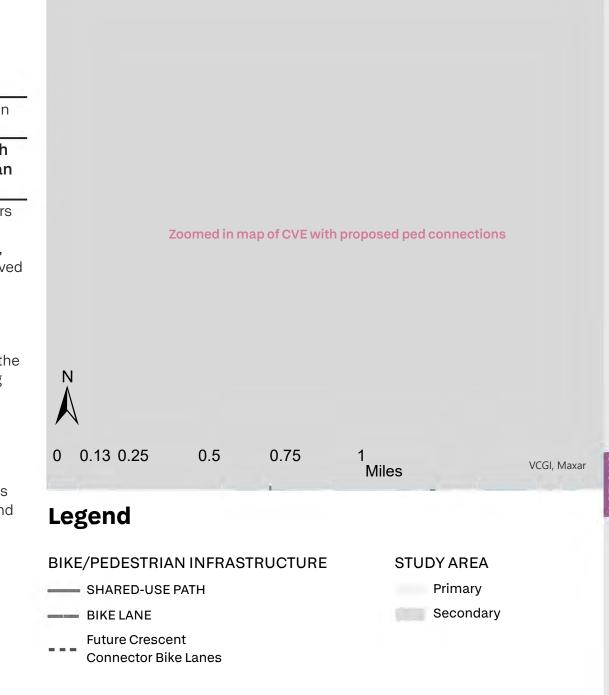


**Big Idea |** MC Make more connections

Action | MC2 Establish pedestrian connections through the CVE

# Subaction | MC2.1 Partner with the CVE to formalize pedestrian connections

**Description** | Currently, neighbors to the CVE regularly walk through the property to reach Pearl Street, however there is no formal improved path. Working closely with the CVE, pedestrian pathways can be thoughtfully integrated into the existing campus and broader pedestrian networks, preserving the Expo's character while enhancing mobility within Essex Junction. Formalizing these connections would promote a more walkable city and create opportunities for unique placemaking along trails, while also showcasing CVE events and activities to both residents and visitors.



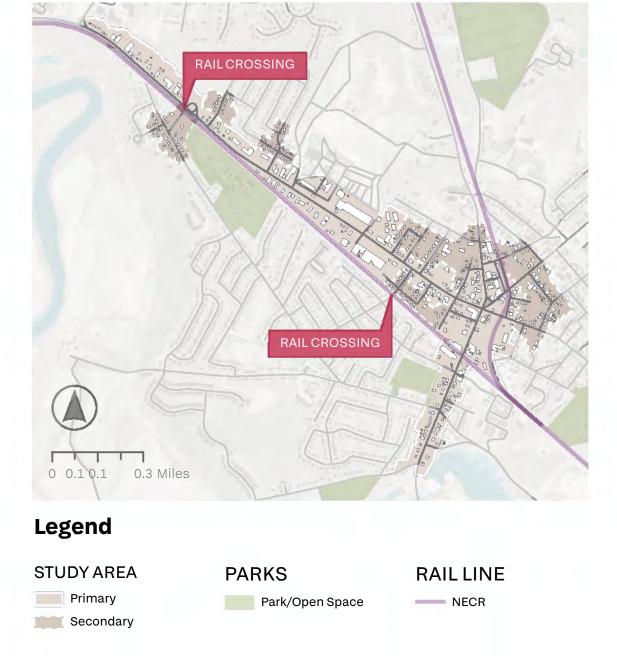
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ACTIONS



Action | MC3 Develop an official map with street and public improvements

**Description |** Vermont State Statutes allow cities to map future public improvements on an "official map" including streets, parks, infrastructure, and related improvements. Redevelopment and infill development, particularly along the Pearl Street corridor will require new public street connections that should be identified and adopted on an official map.





**Big Idea |** MC Make more connections

Action | MC3 Develop an official map with street and public improvements

Subaction | MC3.1 Adopt an official map with proposed streets and public improvements in the study area

**Description |** The official map can serve as a tool to establish both short- and long-term goals for improvements that support transitoriented, pedestrian-centered development, enhancing overall efficiency.



# Legend

# STUDY AREA



ROADS

—— Existing

--- Proposed

# **RAIL LINES**

= NECR

# PARKS

Park/Open Space



# MAKE THE ASSETS SHINE

Recognize and leverage existing community assets, including public space within and adjacent to the study area, the Champlain Valley Exposition Centre, historical infrastructure, arts and culture.



Redevelopment
Codes & Guidelines
Temporary / Tactical
Roads & Circulation
Community Investment
Art & Public Space

<b>AS1.</b> Enhance Stevens Park as a		AS1.1	
community asset		AS1.2	
<b>AS2.</b> Make use of CVE for employee parking	AS2.1		
<b>AS3.</b> Keep historic buildings and support them with quality public space	AS3.1		
<b>AS4.</b> Create and maintain a public	AS4.1		
mural program		AS4.2	
		AS4.3	
Timeline (years)	Short (0-1)	Med. (1-5)	Long (5-20)



Big Idea | AS Make the assets shine

### Action | AS1 Enhance Stevens Park as a community asset

**Description** | Open space within a developed city core is valuable, offering respite from urban elements and serving as a venue for art, recreation, and civic life. Once developed, converting land back to public space becomes difficult, making existing open areas crucial to maintain as the city grows. Although Stevens Park lies just outside of this project's secondary study area, it is an underutilized asset that warrants attention, particularly as the surrounding area adds housing and density. The 8-acre, largely undeveloped park is surrounded by single-family homes, with an entrance on South Street marked by a small sign and a trodden grass path leading into a forested area

Engagement with Essex Junction Recreation and Parks (EJRP) revealed an openness to ideas for Stevens Park could better serve the community. As a centrally located and open public space, Stevens Park has the potential to support a more vibrant City Center. With further planning by EJRP and community input, the park can be reimagined as a more people-oriented community resource through thoughtful enhancements, whether accessible paths and seating or more transformative interventions.





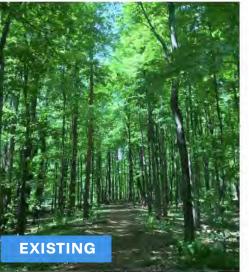
Big Idea | AS Make the assets shine Action AS1 Enhance Stevens Park as a community asset

### Subaction | AS1.1 Add signage and paths to Stevens Park to improve access

**Description** | The entrance into Stevens Park is easy to miss as you travel along South St., and the park is not accessible from other streets or locations. Inside the park, a lack of accessible pathways prevents some from enjoying it.

The City is currently working on improving accessibility into Stevens Park by adding signage and pathways. This is an important step in allowing people to find and navigate the park. As this work is done, consideration should be given to new, future entrances, such as through the adjacent parcels identified as being likely to redevelop in the next 20 years. Adding a park entrance that faces Park St. would welcome many more into the park, and could connect to future bicycle facilities, creating a more connected park system.





ABOVE: A sign denoting Stevens Park stands several feet from an informal path leading into the undeveloped park area.

LEFT: Inside Stevens Park on a sunny day.



**Big Idea** AS Make the assets shine Action | AS1 Enhance Stevens Park as a community asset concept plan to enhance Stevens Park

**Description** | Stevens Park is surrounded by single-family homes, the residents of which are likely invested in the outcomes of any future development. This group should be included in a process to develop a concept plan for enhancing the community benefits of Stevens Park.

Other residents of Essex Junction should also be involved in deciding the next steps for this centrally-located park. Its enhancement should increase the number of people who are able to access it, and people who access the area for work, errands, and other activities should also play a role in shaping how it evolves.

There are dozens of directions the development of Stevens Park could take, and that will be a community decision. The rendering on the following page shows how the redevelopment of a parcel adjacent to the park could highlight access into the park and create a hub of community gathering.

# Subaction | AS1.2 Conduct community engagement and develop a







Center City Park (Gastonia, North Carolina); Burnside Park (Providence, Rhode Island); Mill River Park (Stamford, Connecticut)



Big Idea | AS Make the assets shine

### Action | AS2 Make use of CVE for employee parking

**Description |** As infill and redevelopment occur around CVE parking may be reduced temporarily or require more management due to the increased costs of structured parking. CVE has ample land for parking that is within a short walking distance to the Pearl Street corridor. During the Fair and other large events parking will not be available, but other approaches such as increased transit use can be used to reduce parking demand in the short term.

Conceptual rendering for redevelopable property adjacent to Stevens Park





### Big Idea | AS Make the assets shine

### Action | AS3 Keep historic buildings and support them with quality public space

**Description** | Essex Junction has a national register historic district centered around Main St. and Railroad Ave. with several contributing and non-contributing buildings within the district. The Land Development Code (LDC) has standards regarding alterations and demolition of historic structures, which serves to preserve the architectural character.

Contributing buildings should be highlighted through public space improvements such as expanding public space by reducing vehicle lanes, testing the closure of Main St. and Railroad Ave. for events, and considering longer-term public space enhancements along Main St. and Railroad Ave. such as permanent street closures.



### **Big Idea** | AS Make the assets shine

Action AS3 Keep historic buildings and support them with quality public space

Subaction | AS3.1 Maintain the National Register Historic District in the City Center

**Description** | The City should continue to prioritize the preservation of historic buildings when possible, to maintain the historic character of the City Center.

> RIGHT: Some of the contributing properties within the Downtown Essex Junction Commercial Historic District





## Big Idea | AS Make the assets shine Action | AS4 Promote public and local art

**Description** | Local art can help people to feel connected to their community and to a place. Supporting local art can look a lot of different ways, but can include providing grant funding to artists, commissioning art for public buildings and outdoor space, creating or supporting arts programming, or promoting local artists using available marketing channels.



Big Idea | AS Make the assets shine Action | AS4 Promote public and local art Subaction | AS4.3 Explore opportunities to provide grants to businesses to commission murals and other artworks

**Description** | Business owners may be interested in adding art and creative elements to their buildings and frontages, and grant funding can be the helping push that gets them to commission and implement artworks that contribute to a sense of festivity, play, and sense of place in the City Center.



Big Idea | AS Make the assets shine Action AS4 Promote public and local art Subaction | AS4.4 Pursue grant funding from the Vermont Arts Council

**Description** | The Vermont Arts Council works to cultivate art and creativity throughout the state. Municipalities are eligible for funds such as the "Animating Infrastructure" grant, which projects that integrate public art into community infrastructure.





TOP: A rainbow trout mural brightens up a weathered wall in Bethel, Vermont thanks to an Animating Infrastructure grant.

BOTTOM: Also thanks to an Animating Infrastrcture grant, a 56' aluminum gateway piece celebrates the town of Waterbury.



**Big Idea** | AS Make the assets shine **Action** | AS4 Promote public and local art

# Subaction | AS4.1 Create and maintain a public mural program

**Description |** Establish a public mural program to streamline how murals are proposed, approved, and maintained. A coordinated program can identify priority locations, ensure community involvement in the selection of themes and artists, and develop long-term maintenance plans to preserve artwork, sparking creative energy and fostering community ownership.



**Big Idea |** AS Make the assets shine **Action |** AS4 Promote public and local art

Subaction | AS4.2 Commission murals on public buildings near Five Corners

**Description |** Use high-visibility public buildings near Five Corners as canvases for public art that reflects the community's values, stories, and cultural diversity. These murals can act as landmarks and conversation pieces, encouraging foot traffic and engagement.

BELOW: Rendering showing a mural painted on the Fire Department building.



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# E **ESSEX JUNCTION** FOR ESSEX **JUNCTION**

Support active community organizations and local businesses through programming, marketing, and public space improvements.



Redevelopment
Codes & Guidelines
Temporary / Tactical
Roads & Circulation
Community Investment
Art & Public Space

EJ1. Market and recruit desired		EJ1.1	
businesses		EJ1.2	
<b>EJ2.</b> More community events and programming		EJ2.1	
<b>EJ3.</b> Promote Essex Junction as a destination based on local industry, culture, and assets		EJ3.1	
EJ4. Explore a Main Street type		EJ4.1	
organization for Five Corners		EJ4.2	
Timeline (years)	Short (0-1)	Med. (1-5)	Long (5-20)



Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction Action | EJ1 Market and recruit desired businesses

Description | Essex Junction residents report traveling to other cities for art entertainment, dining, and leisure. This means more vehicle miles traveled, less money being spent in Essex Junction, and less of a feeling of local community.

Starting and sustaining a small business is challenging, and mixed-use building developers report difficulty populating their ground floor retail. It may require efforts by the City and its partners in order to create the hub of retail, dining, and social spaces.

# EJ1.1

Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction Action | EJ1 Market and recruit desired businesses Subaction | EJ1.1 Review recent public engagement efforts to determine what types of businesses are missing from the area

**Description** | Engagement efforts for this plan, the Strategic Plan, and others brought forth insights as to the types of businesses that Essex Junction residents desire to patronize. These responses should be taken into consideration as the City determines how to best recruit and sustain new businesses.



RIGHT: Essex Junction has many beloved businesses and there is an appetite for more. Recruiting businesses goes hand in hand with promoting development that increases foot traffic. 121









Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction

Action | EJ1 Market and recruit desired businesses

Subaction | EJ1.2 Market study and marketing strategy

**Description** | A market study will be helpful in determining which businesses have the greatest chance of succeeding in Essex Junction. This can guide and lend credibility to a marketing campaign targeted at recruiting businesses to come to Essex Junction.



Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction Action | EJ2 More community events and programming

**Description** | Local events and activities attract visitors and create opportunities for residents to socialize, learn new things, and have fun. These endeavors can also be taxing to City staff, who plan and oversee them; partnerships will be key in ensuring the longevity of such efforts.

# EJ2.1

Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction Action | EJ2 More community events and programming Subaction | EJ2.1 Bring back events like the block party and market **Description** | Events such as the Block Party and a weekly farmer's market used to be held along Main St. and Railroad Ave. in the historic district. The City and community should pursue bring these and other events back and focus on public space improvements to make hosting and managing these events easier. Allowing outside organizations such as non-profits and community organizations to host events should also be pursued.

# EJ2.2

Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction **Action** | EJ2 More community events and programming Subaction | EJ2.1 Invite groups to use public spaces in the study area **Description** | There may be many groups who would use public space for their activities if they knew that was an option. These could be dancers, musicians, artists... Especially during the warmer months, these activities can take place in the City's new and improved plazas and pedestrian streets. This could entail formal agreements for use of space, or simply marketing efforts and relationship building so that people know that space is available.





ABOVE: Currently vacant lot in front of Firebird Cafe is ripe for a cultural event. Second St in Langley, WA acts as a festival street where people gather for events.





### Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction

Action | EJ3 Promote Essex Junction as a destination based on local industry, culture, and assets

**Description** | While word of mouth will play a role in attracting visitors to Essex Junction's new businesses and public spaces, the City can also support via marketing efforts. This will entail an effort to develop a branding strategy, which might highlight why Essex Junction is a great place to live or spotlight cultural events.



Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction

Action | EJ3 Promote Essex Junction as a destination based on local industry, culture, and assets

Subaction | EJ3.1 Develop a marketing campaign that highlights strategic assets and qualities

**Description** | The City may want to work with a specialist to develop a branding and marketing strategy to highlight Essex Junction to surrounding communities. This strategy may evolve along with changing assets, such as new events, businesses, and public spaces.



Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction

**Description** | Essex Junction has had a designated village center under the VT Downtown Program since 2005. The village center designation has fewer requirements than a downtown designation and does not require a downtown association. Essex Junction has explored establishing a downtown association in the past but it has been a while since it was last considered. The City Council could establish a working group to explore the potential for downtown designation.

# EJ4.1

Big Idea | EJ Essex Junction for Essex Junction Action | EJ4 Explore a Main Street type organization for Five Corners Subaction | EJ4.1 Explore the feasibility of a main street type organization for the Five Corners **Description** | Essex Junction has had a designated village center under the VT Downtown Program since 2005. The village center designation has less requirements than downtown designation and does not require a downtown association. Essex Junction has explored establishing a downtown association in the past but it has been a while since it was last considered. The City Council could establish a working group to explore the potential for downtown designation.

### Action | EJ4 Explore a Main Street type organization for Five Corners

# **IMPLEMENTATION**



# ACTION

PP

PP 1.1 Public Space Manage

# ACTION

PP 2.1 Temporary bike lane

PP 2.2 Rechan Pearl between West

PP 2.3 Rechan Pearl by sho

PP 2.4 Rechan Pearl by Five

**PP 3: F** 

# ACTION

PP 3.1 Add market structure

PP 3.2 Test temporary closu Ave.

PP 3.3 Integrate public art an elements

GOAL: PRIORI	This		
1: FOOD TRUCKS	implementation page is an example and is		
			not complete. COST/FUNDING
ement Program	City	Near-term	\$
PP 2: PEARL S	T. ROAD DIET	r.	
	AGENCY	TIMELINE	COST/FUNDING
in Section 1	City	Near-term	\$
en Susie Wilson and	City	Mid-term	\$\$\$
pping centers	City	Near-term	\$\$\$
Corners	City	Near-term	\$\$\$
OCUS ON RAILROA	D AVE. AS A	PEOPLE ST.	
	AGENCY	TIMELINE	COST/FUNDING
es	City	Mid-term	\$\$
Ires of Railroad	City	Mid-term	\$
nd cultural	City	Mid-term	\$
IMPLEMENT	ATION   <b>127</b>		

# **APPENDICES**



a list of photo credits will go here.

APPENDICES | 129



#### MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission, City CouncilFrom: Christoher Yuen, Community Development DirectorMeeting Date: May 1, 2025Subject: Draft Housing Targets

**Issue:** The City Council and Planning Commission have an opportunity to comment on the CCRPC draft municipal housing targets.

#### Discussion:

To address the ongoing housing crisis, Act 181 of 2024 required that Vermont's Regional Planning Commissions consider the unmet housing needs identified in the Statewide Housing Needs Assessment and to assign housing targets for their member municipalities. The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) has created a draft of the region's municipal housing targets and is accepting feedback until mid-May.

Below are the draft housing targets for 2050.	. CCRPC has divided its regional target range (15,783 - 47,407) into LOW,
MID, and HIGH targets for each city and town.	

	EXISTING HOUSING UNITS (2023) 550	2000 HOUSING TARGET RANGES					ANNUAL	2050 ANNUAL #5*			
		LOW # and %		HILD # and %		HIGH # and %		GROWTH (2000-23)	LOW	HID	HIGH
BOLTON		59	11%	118	21%	177	32%	6	2	5	7
BUEL'S GORE	12	1	11%	3	21%	4	32%	0	0	0	0
BURLINGTON	18,245	3,557	19%	7,120	39%	10,683	59%	77	142	285	427
CHARLOTTE	1,643	176	11%	353	21%	530	32%	6	7	14	21
COLCHESTER	7,673	848	11%	1,697	22%	2,546	33%	39	34	68	102
ESSEX	4,889	1,233	25%	2,467	50%	3,702	76%	51	49	99	148
ESSEX JUNCTION	4,955	1,462	30%	2,927	59%	4,392	89%	52	58	117	176
HINESBURG	2,071	375	18%	752	36%	1,128	54%	16	15	30	45
HUNTINGTON	876	94	11%	188	21%	282	32%	6	4	8	11
JERICHO	2,014	210	10%	419	21%	629	31%	10	8	17	25
MILTON	4,515	640	14%	1,282	28%	1,923	43%	42	26	51	77
RICHMOND	1,729	202	12%	404	23%	606	35%	8	8	16	24
SHELBURNE	3,529	802	23%	1,605	45%	2,409	68%	33	32	64	96
SOUTH BURLINGTON	9,921	3,788	38%	7,583	76%	11,378	115%	142	152	303	455
ST. GEORGE	314	34	11%	67	21%	101	32%	2	1	3	4
UNDERHILL	1,313	141	11%	282	21%	423	32%	9	6	n	17
WESTFORD	899	96	11%	193	21%	290	32%	6	4	8	12
WILLISTON	4,725	1,402	30%	2,807	59%	4,212	89%	70	56	112	168
WINOOSKI	3,665	663	18%	1,327	36%	1,991	54%	27	27	53	80
COUNTY TOTAL	73.538	15,783	21%	31,595	43%	47.407	64%	602	631	1.264	1.89

Important points to consider when evaluating the targets:

- 1. The 2050 housing targets are presented as a range: low (mimics the status quo growth rate), mid (mid-point between the low and high target) and high (intended to address all the housing shortage needs as identified in the State's Housing Needs Assessment).
- 2. The overall county target does not change if one municipality's individual target changes. Thus, decreasing one municipality's total raises other municipalities' totals and vice versa.
- 3. The targets are not mandatory, however, Comprehensive Plan approval by the CCRPC will likely require that the City demonstrate effort toward meeting the target.

- 4. Note the four cities have approximately 50% of the current existing housing stock, and the draft targets increase the four cities' combined share to 60%. This aligns with the smart growth principles adopted in the regional plan and aligns with all the associated benefits and resources, such as access to transit. When you look at each City's change in housing stock share, Burlington goes from 25% to 23%; So. Burlington goes from 13% to 24%; Winooski goes from 5% to 4%; and Essex Junction goes from 7% to 9%. Staff have reviewed and support this approach.
- Our current zoning limitations will likely prevent the City from meeting the high targets. The draft Connect the Junction master plan provides recommendations for Land Development Code adjustments that would set the stage for meeting the targets<sup>1</sup>.

City Staff have reviewed the housing targets and have prepared a draft comment letter for Planning Commission and City Council consideration. In short, the letter includes support for the targets and approach and expresses some caution about our ability to accommodate the medium and high targets assigned to Essex Junction.

Further details on the targets are attached. CCRPC staff will attend the May 1 meeting to answer any questions about the targets.

Cost:

N/A

### **Recommendation:**

I recommend that the Planning Commission and City Council consider the draft comment letter and approve or edit it as needed. If there is any further information or detailed edits that the Council would like before approving the letter, a second draft of the letter can be prepared and presented to the Council at their May 14<sup>th</sup> meeting.

### **Recommended Motion:**

For the Planning Commission: "I move that the Planning Commission approve the letter to the CCRPC regarding the draft housing targets as [presented or amended]."

For the City Council:

"I move that the City Council approve the letter to the CCRPC regarding the draft housing targets as [presented or amended]."

### Attachments:

CCRPC Act 181 and housing target info sheet

CCRPC housing target FAQ sheet

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Framework was able to complete a rough land capacity analysis on the acreage within the Connect the Junction project area that we anticipate will likely redevelop over the next 20 years. If you assume 60% lot coverage, with an average unit size of 1200 sq.ft. and our current height limitations 2,361 units could be built; 2,951 units with the bonus story for affordability. Only with that bonus affordability floor do we hit the medium housing target (2,927). If you assume 60% lot coverage, with an average unit size of 1200 sq.ft. and the recommended by right heights in the Connect the Junction Plan 3,648 units could be built; 4,239 units with the bonus story for affordability. Only with that bonus affordability floor do we get closer to the high housing target (4,392).







# SUMMARY OF ACT 181

Act 181, passed into law June 2024, overhauls Vermont's planning framework for coordinating state, regional, and municipal land use. This document provides a summary of Act 181 and a Community Engagement Plan specific to the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC).

# Goals of New Future Land Use Map & Housing Targets

The new **Future Land Use (FLU) Map** will guide development in Chittenden County by designating areas for growth, conservation, and other purposes based on **environmental**, **infrastructure**, and **community** factors.



The FLU Map will be used to determine Act 250 location-based jurisdiction. It will be adopted by the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) and approved by the State Land Use Review Board (LURB) based upon statutory definitions.



Additionally, The Department of Housing and Community Development has set regional housing targets, which will be disaggregated by municipality. CCRPC will work with each municipality to develop municipal plans that can meet these housing targets.

# **Location-Based Jurisdiction & Designated Centers**



Act 181 modernizes how Vermont maps and directs public investments to designated centers and speeds up Act 250's transition to location-based jurisdiction.

This change is intended to recognize that some areas of Vermont are:



CONTAIN NECESSARY INFRASTRUCTURE (E.G. WATER, WASTEWATER)



HAVE SUFFICIENT MUNICIPAL ZONING REGULATIONS IN PLACE TO ADEQUATELY REGULATE DEVELOPMENT

# Who Makes What Decisions?



When updating the FLU map, CCRPC will attempt to build community consensus between all Interested and Affected Parties (IAPs) in each municipality.

Ultimately, the CCRPC Board must ensure the FLU Map complies with legal requirements (24 V.S.A. 4348a) in order to be approved by the State's Land Use Review Board (LURB).

### **Meaningful Participation & Environmental Justice**



Act 181 revises the adoption process that regional plans undergo to provide the opportunity for a more robust and comprehensive public participation process, with a specific focus on environmental justice (EJ) focus populations as defined in 3 V.S.A. 6002.

It necessitates that RPCs evaluate the distribution of environmental benefits and burdens of regional plans, including the Future Land Use Map.

Interested and Affected Parties (IAPs) include:



MUNICIPAL SELECTBOARDS, PLANNING COMMISSIONS & OTHER COMMITTEES



MUNICIPAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND INTEREST GROUPS REPRESENTING EJ FOCUS POPULATIONS



MUNICIPAL HOUSING TARGETS

# WHAT ARE MUNICIPAL HOUSING TARGETS?

### Purpose

The **HOME Act** (Act 47 of 2023) introduced new requirements for regional and municipal plans. One is that the housing chapters must now include housing targets for 2029 and 2050 to ensure an adequate supply of safe, affordable housing in locations that keep transportation costs low.



As:



The process starts with the **Vermont Statewide Housing Needs Assessment**, which includes a statewide housing target and targets assigned to each region.

Regional Planning Commissions are then responsible for allocating this regional housing target to their member municipalities.

### Why it Matters



Housing targets are estimates of the number of housing units needed at the state, regional, and municipal levels to achieve and maintain a stable housing market. The targets are aspirational goals, not projections or quotas, that will help guide where and how communities plan for new homes to meet the needs of current and future residents while supporting compact, affordable, and environmentally responsible development.

These targets may require that some municipalities:



Plan for water and wastewater systems that can support strategic housing growth.

Analyze if local regulations allow for the development needed to meet targets.

# What This Means for Municipalities

Municipalities are required to plan for housing by:



Including housing targets provided to them by the Regional Planning Commission;

Laying out the actions they'll take (a "recommended program") to achieve those targets and meet local housing needs.

Municipalities must plan to accommodate the substantial majority of the housing target in:



PLANNED GROWTH AREAS



0-0-0-0

There is no penalty for failing to achieve the municipal housing targets provided that municipalities can demonstrate (through the process regional approval and confirmation of the municipal plan) that they're making substantial progress toward meeting the targets.

# CONTACT

For more information, contact Taylor Newton, CCRPC Planning Program Director, at: tnewton@ccrpcvt.org (802) 846-4490 x115

# OVERVIEW OF CCRPC'S ACT 181 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

# **Goals of Engagement**



Ensure all 19 municipalities are fully informed about the Act 181 (H.687) requirements.

Collect detailed input from each municipality and IAPs to help inform the new Regional Future Land Use Map through multiple forms of engagement.

Foster a collaborative environment to attempt to build community consensus on the Regional Future

Land Use Map, including with marginalized communities. Provide clear, accessible information and resources to all participants throughout the process.

Develop a draft Regional Future Land Use Map with housing targets by **June 2025**.

# **Engagement Activities & Timeline**

### PHASE 1 | CCRPC Internal Planning & Coordination (August 2024 - Ongoing)



Develop initial draft FLU maps and housing target disaggregation methodology.

Create educational materials. - including summaries and municipality-specific two-pagers.

Develop municipal engagement templates and materials.

### PHASE 2 | Inform & Educate about Act 181 & Engagement Process (Fall 2024):



Hold educational meetings with selectboards and city councils to introduce the project, explain 🔶 relevant regional and state Act 181, and outline the engagement process.

Distribute informational materials to municipalities. agencies, and planning commissions.

**Develop customized** engagement plans for each municipality based on their input.

# PHASE 3 | Assess Environmental Benefits & Burdens (Fall - Spring 2025; Ongoing):



Map environmental justice focus populations within Chittenden County.

Define and visualize environmental benefits and burdens.

PHASE 4 | Engagement to Review Draft FLU Map (Winter 2025):



Conduct municipal and regional meetings to review and amend the draft FLU map.

Hold discussion groups and community meetings as per the municipal engagement plans.

map changes affect environmental justice (EJ) populations.

Assess how the proposed

Distribute an interactive map to gather public feedback.

# PHASE 5 | Review Final FLU Map Draft & Discuss Housing Targets (Spring 2025):



Conduct review meetings with all interested and affected parties to reflect their input and reach consensus.

Discuss housing target methodology and implications.

Hold selectboard and planning commission meetings to review the final draft and housing targets.

# PHASE 6 | Finalize Map & Housing Targets, Prepare for Formal Approval (Summer 2025):



Present final map and housing targets to the LRPC, CCRPC Board, and the State Land Use Review Board for approval.

# CONTACT

For more information, contact Taylor Newton, CCRPC Planning Program Director, at: tnewton@ccrpcvt.org (802) 846-4490 x115



# CHITTENDEN COUNTY HOUSING TARGETS | FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Last updated: 4/7/25

### **OVERVIEW**

Finding a place to live in Chittenden County, particularly a home that is affordable, has become more difficult over the years. For decades, housing production hasn't kept up with the needs of our communities, making it difficult for families to put down roots, workers to live near their jobs, and employers to find staff. To help communities plan for the future, the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, at the direction of the Vermont Legislature, has introduced new statewide and regional housing targets. CCRPC has divided the regional housing targets into targets for each city and town in Chittenden County. Residents, business owners, and community leaders are invited to review the draft housing targets and provide feedback and generate ideas to help increase housing in Chittenden County.

These targets, once adopted, will be integrated into city and town plans to help address the urgent need for housing in Chittenden County.

#### WHAT ARE HOUSING TARGETS?

<u>Housing targets</u> are estimates of the number of homes needed at the state, regional, and municipal levels to achieve and maintain a stable housing market. The targets are aspirational goals, not projections or quotas, that will help guide where and how cities and towns plan for new homes. These homes will help meet the needs of current and future residents while supporting compact, affordable, and environmentally responsible development.

### WHERE DID THE HOUSING TARGETS COME FROM?

Vermont's Municipal and Regional Planning and Development statute (<u>24 §VSA Ch. 117</u>) requires that regional<sup>1</sup> and municipal<sup>2</sup> plans now include housing targets for 2030 and 2050. The purpose of the targets is to help communities plan to ensure an adequate supply of safe, affordable housing in locations that keep transportation costs and carbon emissions low.

The Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development has assigned housing targets to each region while considering our housing crisis and our state land use goals. The HOME Act also requires regional planning commissions to allocate the targets by municipality.

The housing targets were developed as part of the <u>Vermont 2025 Statewide Housing Needs Assessment</u>. The state's Department of Housing and Community Development contracted with the Vermont Housing Finance Agency to research and analyze Vermont's housing needs.

### HOW WERE THE REGIONAL HOUSING TARGETS CALCULATED?

Housing targets are estimates of the number of housing units needed to achieve and maintain a stable housing market. The housing targets consider how many homes will be needed to replace homes that become uninhabitable, to replace homes that are converted to seasonal homes, to accommodate new Vermont

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> <u>24 §VSA 4348a(a)(9)</u>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> 24 VSA §4382(a)(10)



households, to address homelessness, and to bring vacancy rates back to a healthy level (a 5% vacancy rate is considered "healthy.")<sup>3</sup>

### HOW WERE THE REGIONAL HOUSING TARGETS DEVELOPED?

The Chittenden County region received a broad range of targets (15,783 – 47,407), that CCRPC then divided into low, medium, and high <u>estimates for each city or town</u>.

CCRPC worked with its <u>Planning Advisory Committee</u>, made up of city / town planning directors and commissioners to develop a method to assign housing targets to each city and town in Chittenden County. Housing targets consider factors like infrastructure availability, historic growth rates, and land available for development. These targets also reinforce and support the land use and transportation goals of the ECOS plan. CCRPC assigned housing targets in this draft to cities and towns based on town type:

- **Cities:** The region's four cities (Burlington, Essex Junction, South Burlington, and Winooski) are home to 50% of all housing in our region. The draft housing targets by municipality allocates **60%** of the target to these areas where infrastructure, social services, and transportation options are strongest, keeping these as the core of our built environments.
- **Rural:** The region's rural communities (Bolton, Buel's Gore, Charlotte, Huntington, St. George, Underhill, and Westford) have limited infrastructure, but have villages, hamlets, rural areas, working lands, and more that are essential components of our region. In this draft, **3.8%** of the regional housing target is allocated to these areas so that housing in a variety of locations can be available.
- **Mixed urban and rural:** The region's mixed urban and rural towns (Colchester, Essex Town, Hinesburg, Jericho, Milton, Richmond, Shelburne, and Williston) have hubs of activity and infrastructure and significant rural areas that together support the goals of our region. In this draft, **36.2%** of the total housing target is allocated to these communities, with a recommendation that 90% of the housing takes place in areas planned for growth within those towns.

### HOW WILL THE HOUSING TARGETS BE USED?

Housing targets must now be included in the housing chapters of regional<sup>4</sup> and municipal<sup>5</sup> plans. Cities, towns, and regions have planned for housing for decades; adding these numbers to the planning process will help focus conversations about the scale of housing need, and the possible local solutions that could help achieve the housing goals.

Municipal targets do not assume that every city and town can absorb the entire target today, nor do the targets assume municipalities will become developers – but the targets do provide cities and towns with context to lay out a thoughtful, strategic approach to planning, regulation, and investment over the next 25 years.

### WHY DOES VERMONT NEED MORE HOUSING?

Housing is the foundation for well-being. Housing choices across the state allow people to live affordably, near jobs, and in communities that sustain them. Housing is also essential for businesses looking to fill the jobs that strengthen Vermont's economy. Employers in Chittenden County are finding it increasingly challenging to attract

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Appendix 1 – Vermont Housing Needs Assessment, p. 14 - <u>Housing-Targets-Appendix.pdf</u>

<sup>4 24 §</sup>VSA 4348a(a)(9)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> 24 VSA §4382(a)(10)



and retain employees due to the lack of housing availability. In fact, only 65.4% of County workers lived here in 2021, down from 75% in 2002, indicating a lack of available, affordable homes within the County.<sup>6</sup>

Ensuring that people have the choice to live near where they work also helps shorten commutes, save money, reduce pollution, and free up time for friends, family, recreation, and civic engagement – all key to keeping our communities strong.

Providing housing choices that are affordable can also help build economic equity. Data from the Vermont Housing Finance Agency shows home ownership for Black Vermonters lags behind home ownership rates for white Vermonters: 27% of Black Vermonters owning their homes, compared to 74% of white Vermonters.<sup>7</sup>

For too long, Chittenden County has not had enough housing to meet demand, forcing workers into longer commutes, increasing environmental impacts, and limiting opportunities for young families and aging residents alike. By making progress toward the new housing targets, cities and towns will:

- Increase housing options and affordability to support local families and workers;
- Strengthen schools and local economies by retaining existing and attracting new residents;
- Protect farmland and forests by concentrating housing in areas designed for growth, such as those able to accommodate or already served by public transit, water, sewer, and social services; and
- Ensure public dollars are spent efficiently, maximizing investments.

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES WITH THE HOUSING MARKET?

- The county has an extremely low rental vacancy rate. The June 2024 vacancy rate was 1.2%; a 5% rental vacancy rate is considered a healthy market for both renters and owners. The rental vacancy rate increases slightly with more new construction, but those new apartments are absorbed quickly by the market, indicating too little supply.
- Median home prices are up. According to Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA)<sup>8</sup>, the median sales price of primary homes in Vermont reached \$358,000 in 2024 a 57% increase over median home sales prices in 2019 (\$227,500). The median sales price of primary homes was higher in Chittenden County in 2024 (\$505,000, but with a comparable increase also 57% from 2019).<sup>9</sup>
- Low housing construction rates and high interest rates are creating a gridlocked homeownership market. The number of houses sold in Vermont dramatically dropped in 2023 by nearly 26%, according to VHFA. 2023 saw the lowest number of homes sales since 2012. Limited options in the housing market has resulted in home buyers acting quickly when there is available housing. The median number of days on the market for homes less than \$300,000 has continued to decrease over the last eight years, indicating a lack of supply of homes at this price point.
- High construction costs create challenges for affordability. The rise in construction costs has a direct impact on the number of housing units affordable housing providers can construct given their fiscal constraints. According to the Vermont Housing Financing Agency (VHFA), the cost of materials used in the construction of multi-family housing rose by 38% between February 2020 and May 2024. Similarly, labor costs for multi-family housing construction rose by 24% during the same time period.<sup>10</sup> The Agency of General Contractors cites labor availability as the #1 challenge for many contractors.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics section of the Census Bureau. Last updated in 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Homeownership rate by race | HousingData.org - Directory of affordable rental housing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Home | HousingData.org - Directory of affordable rental housing

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> VT Department of Taxes: Property Transfer Tax (PTT) records. (accessed via housingdata.org on October 7, 2024).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> VHFA, "The Cost of Development," (accessed October 14, 2024).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> VHFA, "The Cost of Development," (accessed October 14, 2024).



### WHY DOES MY TOWN NEED MORE HOUSING?

No one community is going to solve the housing crisis. However, building homes throughout the county and state increases housing choices and affordability, giving people a fair chance at finding a place to live that works for them.

Building more homes in each city and town helps both people who live there and people who may want to live there in the future. Housing choices help older community members downsize but stay in their towns, give people choices about what type of town they want to live in, ensure that young families can remain in Vermont, and help keep schools vibrant.

This is an "all hands on deck" moment – it will take efforts, large and small, at the local, regional and state levels, through the public and private sectors, to make Vermont's housing market resilient, affordable, and inclusive. It took years to get into this situation, and it will take time to get out. All communities have a role to play as we work together to address the housing crisis and build stronger communities.

#### WHAT IF MY TOWN OR CITY DOESN'T MEET ITS HOUSING TARGET?

Housing targets are meant to be a planning tool, and there are no penalties for not reaching these goals at this time. However, cities and towns are required to include the housing targets in their municipal plans and identify actions they'll take toward meeting them.<sup>12</sup>

# WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS TOWNS AND CITIES CAN MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD THEIR HOUSING TARGETS?

Determining where and how housing gets built is decided at the local level.

While cities and towns typically don't build housing, they can create conditions that make housing development easier. Options include updating zoning and subdivision laws to allow more types of housing, expanding infrastructure like water and wastewater systems, and working with the private sector. Cities and towns may also establish and fund housing committees, promote home share programs, support people developing accessory dwelling units, start a housing trust fund, or undertake other programs to promote housing. Cities and towns choose the options that are right for them.

CCRPC staff are available to help cities and towns brainstorm ideas, evaluate regulations to identify opportunities, and support (and sometimes funding) studies to promote housing and infrastructure.

### WITHIN THE HOUSING TARGET, WHAT SHOULD THE MIX OF HOUSING BE?

A mix of housing types – in terms of size, cost, location, and whether they're rented or owned – is needed for a healthy housing market. A variety of housing helps people stay in their communities through different life stages, and allows for more inclusive, vibrant places. CCRPC will be working with member municipalities and partners to develop a recommended housing mix for each municipality. CCRPC expects to share this information by the fall of 2025.

# HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE REGIONAL FUTURE LAND USE MAP BEING DEVELOPED BY CCRPC IN COLLABORATION WITH ITS CITIES AND TOWNS?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> 24 §VSA 4382(a)(10)



CCRPC is developing an updated regional future land use map. This map, as required in <u>24 §VSA 4348a(12)</u>, is spurring conversations with Chittenden County cities and towns about where development should and could happen. State statute has a goal that the majority of the housing go into these areas planned for growth.<sup>13</sup> Towns and cities can influence the future land use mapping process, and then access multiple resources to help implement this goal – whether with zoning, landowner support, infrastructure investment, or other steps - in a way that works for each city or town.

#### **MORE INFORMATION + CONTACT**

For more in-depth information about the draft housing targets and to review the targets for each city and town in Chittenden County, visit <u>ccrpcvt.org/housing</u>. If you would like to speak to someone directly to ask questions or submit comments, please contact Taylor Newton, CCRPC Planning Program Manager: <u>tnewton@ccrpcvt.org</u>.

<sup>13 24 §</sup>VSA 4302(c)(1)(a)



May 1, 2025

Taylor Newton Planning Program Director Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission sent via email: tnewton@ccrpcvt.org

Re: Feedback on Draft Chittenden County Housing Targets

Dear Members of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission,

On behalf of the City of Essex Junction's City Council and Planning Commission, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft municipal housing targets and commend the CCRPC for its proactive leadership in addressing the region's housing challenges.

The City acknowledges that the housing shortage in recent years has had a substantial impact on affordability, local economic growth, and community well-being. Rising housing costs have put pressure on working families, strained our labor market by making it harder for employers to attract and retain employees, and have led to increased rates of housing insecurity across the region.

We also recognize that the housing crisis does not respect municipal boundaries. Vermonters often live, work, and study across different municipalities, and a shortage of housing in one community inevitably affects the affordability and availability of housing in others. A regional problem demands a regional response.

To that end, we strongly support the need to increase the availability of housing and appreciate the coordinated regional approach to setting housing targets. The CCRPC's effort to develop a shared vision for growth rooted in equity, sustainability, and realism is essential to making meaningful progress on this issue.

We agree with the smart growth principles that guide the proposed distribution of new housing units. Understanding 50% of the existing housing units are within the four urban municipalities—Burlington, South Burlington, Winooski, and Essex Junction—concentrating 60% of the region's new housing is a sound strategy that builds on our existing density, proximity to jobs and educational institutions, and access to public transit. Essex Junction is proud to be a key part of this growth strategy, where we currently house 7% of the housing units, and have a target of 9% of the whole.

However, while we are broadly supportive of the proposed housing targets, we wish to express some caution about our ability to accommodate the medium and high targets assigned to Essex Junction. The range of 2,927 (medium) to 3,702 (high) new housing units by 2050 represents a significant increase from our historic rate of growth. Reaching even the medium target will require overcoming considerable challenges.

Some our challenges we must consider include:

### Zoning and Land Use Regulations

The City is actively developing a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan for the City Center, Pearl Street, and Park Street corridors, which we have identified as priority growth areas. However, accommodating the scale of growth proposed will likely require changes to our current height and density regulations. While these changes are under consideration, we must navigate complex tradeoffs and address neighborhood sensitivities associated with expedited growth. Addressing parking and parking management will also likely become a necessity.

### Sewer Capacity

The City shares a wastewater treatment facility with the Towns of Essex and Williston. Of the capacity allocated to Essex Junction, only approximately 145,000 gallons per day remain—enough to support an estimated 692 new housing units. Expanding this capacity would require:

- Engineering investments to reduce inflow and infiltration of groundwater into the wastewater collection system and alleviate capacity bottlenecks;
- Potential reductions in the acceptance of septage from non-sewered properties, which could shift the burden to other municipalities which also face the same growth pressures;
- Larger-scale facility upgrades, which will require more planning and will require significant capital investment; and/or
- Pump station upgrades or installations and collection system upgrades, requiring significant capital investment.

### Schools and Social Infrastructure

While recent demographic trends have freed up some capacity in our schools, this capacity is limited. Additional planning and investment will be necessary to ensure our school system and social infrastructure can support the expected growth.

### Market Conditions

Even with favorable zoning and infrastructure planning, actual development will depend on market dynamics—including construction costs, interest rates, and demand for housing. Municipal actions alone cannot guarantee that targets will be met without coordination with state partners and the development community.

In closing, we are committed to working collaboratively with CCRPC and our regional partners to address the housing crisis. We support the proposed targets as an important planning framework, but we emphasize the need for flexibility, continued technical and financial assistance, and ongoing collaboration to ensure that these goals are achievable.

We look forward to engaging further as CCRPC refines the housing targets and develops strategies for implementation.

Sincerely,

Diane Clemens,

Chair, Essex Junction Planning Commission

[Name]

President, City of Essex Junction

cc: Essex Junction City Council

Essex Junction Planning Commission

Town of Essex

Town of Williston