

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD
MINUTES OF MEETING
APRIL 17, 2025
DRAFT**

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Alden, Chair; Luke Brockmeier; Cristin Gildea; Maggie Massey; Dylan Zwicky

ADMINISTRATION: Michael Giguere, City Planner

OTHERS PRESENT: Ryan Augustine, David Burton, Scott Homsted, Kris McEwing, Chris Vaughn, Chris Welch

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Alden called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. ADDITIONS OR AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA

None.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

None.

4. MINUTES

a. Regular Meeting – March 20, 2025

MAGGIE MASSEY made a motion, seconded by CRISTIN GILDEA, to approve the minutes of March 20, 2025. Motion passed 5-0.

5. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Final plat review for a three-lot subdivision for one residential lot and two lots for future development; road connection of Taft Street to Meadow Terrace in the R1 District by Center for Technology Essex, owners.

Mr. Giguere noted that this is a hybrid meeting, and that staff are present at 6 Lincoln Street to ensure public participation. While efforts will be made to accommodate remote public participants, in-person participation is the only legally mandated form of public participation. If there are technical difficulties the meeting may be paused and resumed on May 15th, 2025. All votes that are not unanimous will be done via roll call.

All participants were sworn in.

Mr. Homsted, of Krebs & Lansing Consulting Engineers, and Mr. Welch, of the Center for Technology Essex (CTE) presented. Mr. Homsted said that most technical comments from staff have been addressed. He discussed changes to the roadway and the extension of a handicap access ramp to the proposed new sidewalk. This project is a continuation of the CTE homebuilding program and would permit for one new lot. Additional lots will be requested in future years. Answering a question from Ms. Gildea, Mr. Homsted said that additional stop signs have been added to address neighborhood concerns about traffic calming. No concerns have been raised by the Tree Advisory Committee regarding landscaping. Mr. Alden noted

that the lot design of Lot 7a is different. Mr. Homsted said that this has been done to keep the open space area contiguous. A “disconnected roof” will be used for stormwater purposes.

LUKE BROCKMEIER made a motion, seconded by DYLAN ZWICKY, that the DRB approve the boundary line adjustment for the proposed three-lot subdivision and road connection of Taft Street to Meadow Terrace at 11 Meadow Terrace in the R1 District with conditions. Motion passed 5-0.

DYLAN ZWICKY made a motion, seconded by CRISTIN GILDEA, that the DRB approve the final plat for the proposed three-lot subdivision and road connection of Taft Street to Meadow Terrace at 11 Meadow Terrace in the R1 District with the proposed conditions listed in the staff report. Motion passed 5-0.

b. Final site plan review to add three dwelling units to an existing three-story mixed-use building with two dwelling units and commercial space at 34 Park Street in the Village Center District by Park Street Ventures, LLC, owner.

Mr. Augustine, of Trudell Consulting Engineers, and Mr. McEwing, of Park Street Ventures, presented. Mr. McEwing said that the building is existing, and that current site conditions have been documented. The only visual change is two exterior windows. Park Street Ventures does not own the entire building, and Mr. Giguere described this as a “commercial condominium.” The applicant has a footprint lot, but the parcel as a whole will be reviewed for the purposes of zoning. Mr. McEwing said that outdoor amenities, such as a picnic table, could be included to meet LDC requirements. Ms. Gildea said that aesthetic improvements could make the property more desirable to renters. Mr. Alden said that he is happy to see that the lighting will be replaced with dark sky compliant lighting. Mr. Giguere said that the review of the exterior lighting in the building was focused on due to the footprint lot. Regarding landscaping requirements, Mr. Alden said that he would like to see a focus on the front entrance. He suggested potted plants or greenery, and Ms. Gildea suggested creating a welcoming residential feel. Mr. Alden suggested adding a condition that some landscaping efforts, more residential in scale or nature, centered around the residential entry, be included. Mr. Giguere said that a condition of approval is screening the dumpster from view, Mr. McEwing said that the screening would need to be moved when the Chittenden Crossing master plan is implemented. Mr. Alden said that he does not believe that the dumpster will need to be screened until the rest of construction is complete. After some discussion, it was decided that, in the staff report, Condition #5 will be eliminated, as this will be addressed later.

MAGGIE MASSEY made a motion, seconded by CRISTEN GILDEA, that the DRB approve the final site plan to add three dwelling units to an existing three-story mixed-use building with two dwelling units and commercial space in the Village Center district by Park Street Ventures, LLC, owner with the conditions as adjusted. Condition #5 will be stricken, and the DRB requests that there will be some additional landscaping that is residential in nature but does not require concrete to be moved. Motion passed 5-0.

c. Site plan review for a pocket park at 1 Main Street by the City of Essex Junction, owner.

All participants were sworn in.

Mr. Burton, of Ginkgo Design, presented on behalf of the applicant. He was hired to design a pocket park for the space at 1 Main Street. He said that the park was designed with potential changes to the Five Corners area in mind, using elements that could be moved if need be. Mr. Alden said that the site is

contaminated, as it was an old gas station. There is a desire not to disturb the underlying surface. Mr. Burton said that not as much remediation is required as was initially expected. Mr. Giguere said that the City hopes to plant street trees in the future, however trees will not be included in the initial phase of the project. The park will be maintained year-round. Easy to clean, graffiti-resistant surfaces will be included.

Mr. Giguere said that, in the deed, the park is to be named “The Gabe and Diane Handy Park.” Mr. Handy has requested a memorial plaque sign for the entrance of the park. This parcel also fulfills the Firebird Café property landscaping requirements, which is also owned by Mr. Handy. Mr. Alden expressed a desire to have the currently shown improvements in the park, but have additional greenery and features included in the future. He said that he would like to see the Firebird space improved, however this is not within the DRB’s jurisdiction as it is located on a separate parcel with private ownership. Mr. Giguere said that it is the City’s desire to have more pedestrian improvements included with future changes. Mr. Brockmeier said that he is concerned that residents and visitors will think that the park is seating for the Firebird Café and would like to see it connected with other municipal features. Mr. Brockmeier suggested that the signage match the color palate developed by the branding committee. Mr. Handy has proposed a 3x3 memorial sign above the archway. Planning staff needs to review this prior to implementation. The DRB discussed how to incorporate the new public park with other public spaces, such as Lincoln Hall and Memorial Park. Mr. Giguere discussed lighting, including filtering lights through the shades and said that the lights will be on timers.

- The Development Review Board should confirm the proposed 100% lot coverage limit for this application. **Confirmed.**
- The DRB should determine the applicability of evaluating this site plan application as a commercial or mixed-use building with no setback requirement. **No setback required.**
- The Development Review Board should evaluate the proposed development using the Design Review Standards outlined in Section 604.E.4.a. **Confirmed.**
- The Development Review Board should determine if the proposed lighting plan meets the requirements of Section 704. **Does not meet the requirements, however it is not possible for it to do so.**
- The Development Review Board should determine whether the proposed application meets the standards of visual impact in Section 718.G. **Mr. Alden suggested that wood facades be selected carefully to ensure that fading does not occur.**

Mr. Alden suggested that the applicant continue to work on the lighting and eliminate the hot spots. He also suggested that the boundary line between the park and Firebird Café be considered for improvement.

JOHN ALDEN made a motion, seconded by CRISTIN GILDEA, that the DRB approve the site plan application for a pocket park at 1 Main Street by the City of Essex Junction, owner, with conditions to improve the lighting scheme to be more intentional and to consider additional improvements along the boundary edge by the Firebird Café. Motion passed 5-0.

The City has been in conversation with the owner of the Firebird Café.

d. Variance application requesting relief from the 6-foot height requirement for a fence to construct a stockade fence 7’ – 7’ 6” at the rear property line at 120 Main Street in the R1 District by Chris Vaughn, owner.

Mr. Vaughn discussed grade differences between his property and 35 Drury Drive. He would like to create a level fence line across the back to provide safety and privacy for his family. The current fence will not be removed.

In accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 4469, the Board may grant Variances if it finds that all the following standards of review are met, and such findings are included in its written decisions.

1. There are unique physical circumstances or conditions, including irregularity, narrowness, or shallowness of lot size or shape, or exceptional topographical or other physical conditions peculiar to the particular property, and that unnecessary hardship is due to these conditions, and not the circumstances or conditions generally created by the provisions of the bylaw in the neighborhood or district in which the property is located. **Confirmed.**
2. Because of these physical circumstances or conditions, there is no possibility that the property can be developed in strict conformity with the provisions of the bylaw, and that the authorization of a variance is therefore necessary to enable the reasonable use of the property. **Confirmed.**
3. Unnecessary hardship has not been created by the appellant. **Confirmed.**
4. The variance, if authorized, will not alter the essential character of the neighborhood or district in which the property is located, substantially or permanently impair the appropriate use or development of adjacent property, reduce access to renewable energy resources, or be detrimental to public welfare. **Confirmed.**
5. The variance, if authorized, will represent the minimum variance that will afford relief and will represent the least deviation possible from the bylaw and from the plan. **Confirmed.**

JOHN ALDEN made a motion, seconded by LUKE BROCKMEIER, that the DRB approve the variance request seeking relief from the 6-foot height requirement for a fence to construct a level stockade fence to a maximum of 7' 6" at the rear property line at 120 Main Street in the R1 District by Chris Vaughn, owner. Motion passed 5-0.

6. OTHER DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD ITEMS

Mr. Giguere said that City staff will be reaching out to those whose terms are up for renewal. The City Council and Planning Commission will be holding a joint meeting on May 1st. Updates on the train station redesign should be available in the near future.

7. ADJOURNMENT

MAGGIE MASSEY made a motion, seconded by LUKE BROCKMEIER, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:32 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville