

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
NOVEMBER 7, 2025
DRAFT**

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Elijah Massey, Chair; Diane Clemens, Vice-Chair; Elena Juodisius; Finn Hamilton (non-voting); Scott McCormick; Kirstie Paschall

CITY COUNCIL PRESENT: Amber Thibeault, President; Marcus Certa; Tim Miller, Brian Shelden

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Jeff Arango, Luke Brockmeier, Dave Contois, (illegible) Contois, Brendan Degraffi, Marshall Distel, Jack Evans, Sarah Lukins, Maggie Massey, Rachel McCloud, Ella Ruehsen, Jak Tiano, Dave

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Massey called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:31 PM.

Ms. Thibeault called the City Council meeting to order at 6:31 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

None.

4. MINUTES

a. September 4, 2025

DIANE CLEMENS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to approve the minutes of minutes of September 4, 2025. Motion passed 5-0.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion and Consideration of Connect the Junction Transit Oriented Development Master Plan

Mr. Yuen discussed the history of this project and said that the most recent draft plan was made public in June of 2025. City staff and the project team have worked to engage the community, especially regarding building height and changes to the operations of Five Corners. Mr. Arango, of Framework Design, provided a presentation on the project. The Connect the Junction project is federally funded and ten communities in northern Vermont were selected for this funding. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) focuses on creating dense, walkable, mixed-use development near transit. Mr. Yuen said that the City currently adds around fifty new housing units per year. To achieve the mid-range housing targets set by the regional planning commission, the City would need to at least double housing production. Mr. Arango spoke of the benefits and differences between rental and owner-occupied units, and the importance of access to homeownership for the middle class. Mr. Certa said that much of the new development is rental properties, and that opportunities for homeownership are not being provided.

Mr. Arango discussed the big ideas that structure the plan. He said that local developers seem supportive of the plan and of working with the City in general. Mr. Yuen detailed public engagement efforts, noting that staff set up an ice cream stand in front of two apartment buildings on Pearl Street to gain public input. Mr. Arango discussed how additional housing could be added should Essex Junction allow higher buildings. He proposes that Essex Junction increase the height limit to seven stories, with an additional story possible for affordable housing units. Mr. Yuen said that staff are not assuming at every new building will be eight stories tall and believes that most new buildings will be between five and six stories. Mr. Miller asked if there was a possibility that the taller height limits could be for a specific area, Mr. Yuen answered affirmatively. Ms. Clemens discussed slowly increasing building height until the direct City Center area. Mr. Certa suggested creating a 3D rendering of what the area would look like with higher height limits. Mr. Sheldon said that the Pearl Street corridor seems to be the place best suited for higher heights. Ms. Mahony said that these height limits are not requirements, however housing is necessary and this appears to be a good place for it.

Mr. Arango discussed community support for increasing building height along the Pearl Street Corridor and reviewed the reasons that individuals cited for supporting or not supporting the height increase. Mr. Miller spoke of the potential cost differences between different types of building sizes. Mr. Arango discussed how inclusionary zoning has been incorporated into other communities. He said that the “missing middle” housing is the most difficult to deliver with inclusionary zoning projects. Ms. Mahony said that the intention of inclusionary zoning is to mix lower-cost and market rate housing. Ms. Clemens said that the PC may make a recommendation but is ultimately restricted by the City Council’s decisions on building heights.

Mr. Massey requested public comment. Mr. Brockmeier discussed views from higher buildings. Mr. Tiano said that he is the Policy Director at Lets Build Homes but is speaking as an individual. He finds this proposal very well-thought out and a very good way to incorporate affordable housing. Mr. Degraffi said that he is in support of the additional building height proposal. Mr. Evans, of Local Motion, urged the boards to go beyond allowing the seven stories to allow for additional housing. Ms. McCloud spoke of the need for more missing middle housing.

Mr. Arango said that changes in transportation patterns and the development of the Crescent Connector have assisted with traffic calming in the area, and that Essex Junction has always had a strong pedestrian-friendly nature. The Meet Me on Main events showed that pedestrianization can be a strong draw for the community, however permanently closing Main Street is not being recommended at this time. Mr. Arango discussed removing slip lanes and other roadway areas dedicated to turning. Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Miller questioned the closing of Memorial Way, as it is important for public safety and the easy movement of traffic. Answering a question from Ms. Clemens, Mr. Arango said that he did not hear any complaints from business owners regarding food truck competition at the Meet Me on Main event. Essex Junction is only served by one bus route and restricting turns on Memorial Way would not impact this. Mr. Certa said that he is open to short-term tests of restricting turns, however, is unsure of the long-term impact. Answering a question from Mr. Certa, Mr. Arango said that many of the streets in Essex Junction have a slow enough speed limit so that many people may feel comfortable biking in the winter. He believes that there is community support for biking and walking infrastructure. Mr. Yuen said that having the ability to use both bikes and public transit makes living without a car much more tolerable year-round, even if there is a seasonality to cycling. Mr. Evans spoke of the year-round benefits of cycling and said that

winter cycling is one of the largest questions that Local Motion answers. Mr. Arango said that bicycle facilities can be designed at a raised, sidewalk height, rather than with on-street painted bike lanes. Answering a question from Ms. Clemens, Mr. Yuen said that the state retains the responsibility of paving class one state routes however the City can make other changes.

Mr. Arango discussed the installation of a mural on the fire station, activating Railroad Avenue for better community usage and public space investment. He said that additional work needs to be done to move these ideas forward. The next steps include finalizing revisions to the plan, work on the Land Development Code updates, and project completion by mid-2026. Mr. McCormick said that there was significant discussion about building height at the engagement meetings, and that it appears to many are not opposed to taller buildings. He believes that additional discussion needs to be had regarding where the best places are in the City for higher buildings. Ms. Mahony said that approving this plan tonight would not prevent the PC and City Council from making additional changes in the LDC. Ms. Thibeault said that she does not expect the PC to decide tonight. Mr. Massey said that the PC will discuss accepting or adopting the document at the December meeting. Ms. Clemens said that the content of the document has improved since the last draft but noted several errors.

DIANE CLEMENS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to table the report until the December meeting. Motion passed 5-0.

b. Introduction of 802 Homes / Homes for All Phase project

Mr. Yuen said that the state of Vermont is working on an initiative to create ready-to-build, code-compliant plans to assist with infill housing. The City is participating as a development-ready community.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

Mr. McCormick said that he recently attended the Agency of Natural Resources Municipal Day. The Climate Action office is developing plans for integrating climate action into municipal plans. He is meeting with the agency to discuss Essex Junction becoming a pilot community. Ms. Clemens said that she attended the Regional Housing Convening meeting, as the Planning Commission serves as the de facto Housing Commission for Essex Junction.

7. STAFF UPDATES

None.

8. ADJOURNMENT

BRIAN SHELDEN made a motion, seconded by TIM MILLER, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:58 PM.

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by DIANE CLEMENS, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0. Meeting adjourned 8:58 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville