

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
JANUARY 15, 2026
DRAFT**

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

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Elena Juodisius

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Maya Balassa, Darren Schibler, Loren

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

The 802 Homes project and Vermont Arts Council mural grant will be discussed during staff updates.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

None.

4. MINUTES

a. December 4th, 2025

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by DIANE CLEMENS, to approve the minutes of December 4th, 2025, with corrections. Motion passed 4-0.

Corrections:

-In Business Item 5, first sentence, the word “a” will be placed between “prepared” and “memo.”

-Mr. McCormick said that he feels that the discussion on building heights was very complicated and not all the points made were captured in the minutes.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Introduction and Discussion of Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Schibler (Senior Project Manager) and Ms. Balassa (Planner), both of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), presented. The CCRPC has a contract with the City to lead a collaborative, community-driven update of the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Schibler provided an overview of planning in Vermont as well as updates to state law. He discussed the goal of municipal plans, and the tools that it provides to move forward and fund specific goals of the community. Ms. Balassa discussed the process behind obtaining a regionally approved plan and the fifteen statutory planning goals that must be met for such. The current plan meets all the required elements, except for new state laws that have been established since 2019. Answering a question from Mr. McCormick, Mr. Schibler said that Essex Junction can choose how to set up the plan as long as all required elements are met. Municipal plans are now on an eight-year timetable, rather than five. Two City Council meetings are required for approval, and two Planning Commission (PC) meetings are recommended. The plan will be in effect once adopted. Answering a question from Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Schibler explained Act 250 and Tier 1a and 1b and their impact on development in Vermont. Mr. Yuen said that Tier 1a and 1b status can be discussed by the PC

during the Comprehensive Plan process. Answering a question from Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Schibler explained “advanced zoning,” which is several specific standards which are required to be present in zoning documents for Tier 1a status.

Mr. Schibler reviewed the draft contract, noting the scope of work and budget. The public participation plan will be provided at the March meeting. Mr. Schibler said that the CCRPC will work to support the City in changing their zoning map, however everything else is anticipated to be a more routine update. Answering a question from Ms. Clemens, Mr. Schibler said that meetings will be monthly and align with the PC schedule. Answering a question from Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Schibler said that a minimum of four stories is necessary to achieve Tier 1a status, however there is no maximum. Mr. Schibler said that updates to the plan could be begun immediately, due to Essex Junction’s recent engagement efforts. Public engagement could be done after the plan is drafted. Mr. McCormick said that public outreach has not been representative and that public hearings have not been held on the Connect the Junction project. Mr. Schibler said that the public participation list is not all-encompassing, and that different projects could be proposed than what is included. Mr. McCormick noted that the project budget is \$40,000, and that there may be elements, such as online surveys, that could be cut out. Ms. Clemens suggested offering specific topics for focused discussions. She encouraged interested parties to attend PC meetings to make their voices heard. Mr. Schibler discussed participation and non-traditional approaches to engage residents.

Mr. Massey read comments from absent PC member Ms. Juodisius. Ms. Juodisius discussed the idea of the CCRPC utilizing the public outreach efforts of PC members and looking at existing resources. Community engagement should be targeted to groups who have been missed in the past. She also asked if the update of the Comprehensive Plan would be an opportunity to hold a charette where design review could be discussed. Regarding leveraging existing stakeholder groups, Mr. McCormick said that Essex Junction has a stakeholder list that could be used for targeted outreach. Mr. Schibler said the CCRPC will use targeted outreach based on the groups needed to be reached and the questions that need to be answered. Answering a question from Ms. Balassa, Mr. Massey said that it is difficult to reach members of the community who are not middle to upper middle-class homeowners. He said that the exception to this was ice cream social events held at apartment buildings. Mr. Yuen said that tabling at community events often brought a different set of responses to questions. Mr. McCormick described his business outreach in previous projects. Mr. Schibler said that the CCRPC could assist in helping individual PC members in reaching out to contacts. He will review the existing stakeholder list and possibly complete a visual community map. Mr. McCormick suggested working with specific “champions” in various communities and said that stakeholder mapping could be helpful for future outreach.

Mr. McCormick suggested the creation of project working groups. Mr. Schibler said that delegation will help the CCRPC focus on higher-level project issues. Ms. Clemens discussed the past Comprehensive Plan update process. Mr. McCormick asked if the working groups or CCRPC would be responsible for data collection. Mr. Schibler said that much of the data necessary is already available, however the CCRPC is responsible for routine updates. He said that housing targets and how they can be achieved will need to be included in the plan, as well as reexamining the plan to ensure that all new City and educational policies are integrated. He suggested that the City may wish to create a new conceptual land use plan. Mr. McCormick suggested looking at the Williston Comprehensive Plan as an example. He also suggested including non-formal education and childcare in the Comprehensive Plan, and Ms. Clemens noted new legislation related to preschool and childcare.

Mr. Schibler will summarize the background research that the CCRPC has been doing and will consider how to approach some of the topics that have been discussed. He said that it would be helpful to hear the PC's additions to the stakeholder list. Mr. McCormick said that Essex Junction applied with the Climate Change Office to be a pilot community to integrate climate change into the municipal plan. Answering a question from Mr. Massey, Mr. Schibler presented an estimated schedule with specific chapters on certain dates.

b. Acting Administrative Officer Nomination

Mr. Yuen said that Essex Junction has always had the Community Development Director serve as the Administrative Officer. The two other community development department employees assist and can sign on projects up to duplexes. Upon further review of state statute, it is necessary to formalize this process.

DIANE CLEMENS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, that the Planning Commission nominate Assistant Zoning Administrator Terry Hass and City Planner Michael Giguere as Acting Administrative Officers for a three-year term. Motion passed 4-0.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

Mr. Massey said that the City has solicited and collected thematic subject material from students in Essex Junction for the Vermont Arts Council mural grant. Eighty-one responses have been received. Seven responses have been received from artists for the request for qualifications. The top three eligible artists will be invited to prepare a draft response to the thematic content. These three options will then be chosen by the community.

7. STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Yuen said that Connect the Junction's February meeting will be focused on form-based code. Essex Junction has requested volunteer homeowners to use their lot as a design project example for the 802 Homes project. A design charrette will be held on February 7th from 4-6 PM at the Aspire Room at Maple Street Park. The consultants will be displaying ideas of the ten prototype designs that they are considering and receiving feedback. The consulting team will conduct targeted outreach this spring as well as additional online public engagement. The project is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2026. Mr. Yuen said that the Community Development department has worked on redesigning its website and has included a "current initiatives" tab and project archive. Answering a question from Ms. Clemens, Mr. Yuen said that there are no current plans to upload a list of all zoning permits online.

8. ADJOURNMENT

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by DIANE CLEMENS, to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0. Meeting adjourned 8:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville