

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
FEBRUARY 5, 2026
DRAFT**

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Elijah Massey, Chair; Diane Clemens, Vice-Chair; Elena Juodisius, Scott McCormick; Kirstie Paschall

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Finn Hamilton (non-voting)

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Jeff Arango, Bethany Clark, Leslie & Evan Golding, David Knox, Katherine Magee, Nick Meyer

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

Mr. Meyer expressed concern about the housing policy included in the Connect the Junction Transit Orientated Development (TOD) Master Plan. Walkability, greenspace and care of the urban canopy should not be lost sight of with the focus on housing. He said that developers should be pushed to do more than they currently are required to regarding greenspace and landscaping. It is important to balance livability with the need for additional housing.

4. MINUTES

a. January 15th, 2026

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELIJAH MASSEY, to approve the minutes of January 15th, 20206, with corrections. Motion passed 5-0.

Corrections:

-In Item 2, The 802 Homes project and Vermont Arts Council mural grant will be discussed during staff updates,” will be clarified to state, “The 802 Homes project and Vermont Arts Council mural grant will be discussed during staff updates and member updates.”

-In the last sentence of Item 6, “These three options will then be chosen by the community,” will be clarified to state, “These three design options will then be chosen by the community.”

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion of Form-Based Code to Implement the Connect the Junction TOD Plan

Mr. Yuen said that the Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan is an effort that the City has been undertaking to plan for the future of the Pearl Street Corridor and the City Center. This project focuses on housing and transportation needs, and that future developments are done in a sustainable manner. The plan was adopted by the City Council in December of 2025. Mr. Arango, Managing Principal of Framework, presented to the Planning Commission (PC) regarding how to implement the TOD Master Plan into Land Development Code updates via form-based code. He detailed mapping changes to the

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TOD district and said that the goal is to support more housing near transit. Some additional goals include ensuring pedestrian comfort as density increases, protecting and maintaining historic character, supporting activate and inviting streets and addressing other specific City Council concerns. An additional goal is to remove more subjective criteria from the LDC and simplify the development review process.

Mr. Arango said that his firm reviewed standards in the Village Center and TOD districts, as well as applicable overlay districts. Some of the key recommendations include clarifying the role and applicability of historic preservation v. character compatibility, improving predictability and efficiency in development review, replacing subjective design/character language with objective standards and implementing the TOD master plan. Mr. Arango said that he is proposing to apply the Historic Preservation standards to clearly identified historic resources, regulating design and compatibility with form-based standards, re-establishing administrative approval pathways and requiring DRB review for projects that require discretion. Regarding implementing the form-based code standards, Mr. Arango discussed managing height transitions between buildings of different heights. He said that the PC could consider if a buffer is necessary between areas of the district that are crossed by a street. He discussed options to manage height differences between properties, including upper-level setbacks. He also discussed options for preventing long, monotonous facades, such as limiting the façade length, requiring articulation and activating the street level. There is no requirement for retail on the first floor of buildings, including in the Village Center. He reviewed the street room standards, which provides a sense of enclosure and comfort for pedestrians, and methods for complying with such. Different frontage types, such as plazas, landscaped or stoop/porch can be utilized. It is important to promote good design and neighborhood compatibility throughout the district.

Mr. Arango said that his firm would complete the edits to the code and hopes to have a draft prepared by March. He believes that changes to the regulations will remedy some concerns about building heights in the Village Center. Mr. Arango noted a tradeoff between the amount of housing and step-ups/setbacks. There is no parking requirement in either district however the market will most likely demand it. Mr. Arango discussed second-story parking and how to make it aesthetically pleasing. Mr. Massey asked if it would be too restrictive to require step-backs on all sides, especially the street-facing sides. Mr. Arango said that he does not believe that this will be a concern in most areas but could be applicable to certain lots. He will look at specific property examples and discuss this with the PC further. Mr. McCormick encouraged the PC to consider how many housing units would be lost should this be implemented.

Ms. Clemens encouraged there to be a way to include more trees and vegetation in development. Mr. Arango said that “the Green Factor” could be a system for design good system. This is a points system for which is applied to landscaping improvements and developments. He also suggested looking into the minimum better right of way standards. Ms. Juodisius said that many of the parcels being looked at are fairly small and constrained, and that it would be helpful to test the regulations on are larger variety of parcels. Mr. McCormick encouraged additional greenspace in the area near the railroad tracks. He said that he would like to see the landscaping lead to community connections in the downtown area. Mr. Massey said that he wants to ensure that this district is space that people can enjoy being in. Mr. Arango encouraged the PC to collectively decide what is most important to them and said that the tools are available to implement this. Ms. Clemens said that the overlays were put in because developers were not conforming to the ideals of the community. Mr. Arango said that there are different manners in which an

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application would rise to a Development Review level. Mr. Yuen said that there are some design review standards that apply to what seems like very small projects.

Mr. Massey requested public input. Ms. Golding said that she is encouraging the PC to continue to allow Essex Junction to be a great place with an urban canopy and a livable feel. Mr. Meyer said that the Pearl Street and Village Center areas are very different and encouraged the balance between housing and livability. Answering a question from Mr. McCormick, Mr. Yuen said that this plan would be incorporated into the full plan, but updates will primarily be focused on updates to the districts. Mr. Arango said that staff and the PC will be able to review the draft code, and that additional meetings will be held.

b. Administrative Officer Nomination

Mr. Yuen said that he is the City's Administrative Officer, and that this appointment lasts three years.

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUODISIUS, to nominate Christopher Yuen to serve as the Administrative Officer for a three-year term beginning from March 22, 2026. Motion passed 5-0.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

Mr. McCormick said that Essex Junction has been selected as a pilot community by the Climate Action Office. They will provide free consulting services related to incorporating climate change into the municipal plan.

7. STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Yuen said that the 802 Homes Design Charette will take place this Saturday at 4 PM. He will attend the City Council meeting on February 11th to discuss the possibility for improving pedestrian crossings on Pearl Street. He will also give an introductory presentation on one of the goals of Connect the Junction project, restriping Park Street for better pedestrian accessibility. Changes to the proposed fee schedule related to planning and development, with the largest being a large change to excavation permit fees, will also be discussed.

8. ADJOURNMENT

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUODISIUS, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0. Meeting adjourned 8:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville