



**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 2 Lincoln St.  
Essex Junction, VT 05452  
Thursday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
6:30 PM

E-mail: [cyuen@essexjunction.org](mailto:cyuen@essexjunction.org)

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Phone: 802-878-6944, ext. 1607

This meeting will be held in-person at 2 Lincoln St and remotely. To participate remotely:

- **JOIN ONLINE:** [Join Zoom Meeting](#)
- **JOIN CALLING:** (toll free audio only): (888) 788-0099 | Meeting ID: 953 1240 7791; Passcode: 040339

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [6:30 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
  - a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda
4. **MINUTES**
  - a. January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
  - a. Discussion of Form-Based Code to Implement the Connect the Junction TOD Plan\* [6:35 PM]
  - b. Administrative Officer Nomination\* [8:10 PM]
6. **READING FILE**
  - a. Comprehensive Plan Update- Initial Plan Review Memo from CCRPC\*
7. **MEMBERS UPDATES** [8:15 PM]
8. **STAFF UPDATES** [8:20 PM]
9. **ADJOURN** [8:21 PM]

\*attachments included in the packet

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

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**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 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by DIANE CLEMENS, to approve the minutes of December 4<sup>th</sup>, 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.

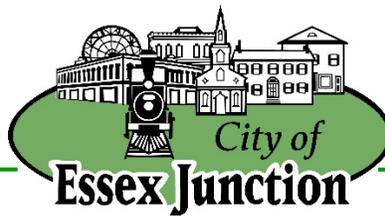
#### **7. STAFF UPDATES**

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 7<sup>th</sup> 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



## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Planning Commission

**From:** Christopher Yuen, Community Development Director

**Meeting Date:** February 5, 2026

**Subject:** Form-Based Code Discussion to Implement the Connect the Junction TOD Plan

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**Issue:**

Introduction of a discussion on the use of form-based code (FBC) to implement the Connect the Junction Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan.

**Discussion:**

The Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan was adopted by City Council on December 17 2025 and identifies form-based code as a key tool to guide redevelopment, support increased building heights and transit-oriented growth, and maintain compatibility with historic and lower-scale areas. The approved plan document is expected to be available on [connectthejunction.org](http://connectthejunction.org) by Monday February 2, 2026

This meeting is intended to introduce how form-based standards could replace or supplement existing design review requirements and help implement TOD Plan priorities such as building height transitions, façade articulation, pedestrian-oriented design, and multimodal connectivity.

Framework Cultural Placemaking will be in attendance to discuss these concepts. Framework has prepared a separate memorandum for the Planning Commission that identifies issues in the current Land Development Code and outlines options for clear, objective form-based standards aligned with Planning Commission and City Council concerns. That memo is attached for reference.

**Cost:**

N/A

**Recommendation:**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review Framework's memo and to provide feedback on the described policy options.

**Attachments:**

Framework Memorandum

## **Purpose**

This memo summarizes areas for potential updates to the City of Essex Junction Land Development Code related to community and City Council concerns such as historic preservation, design quality, and implementation of the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan. It identifies specific issues in the current code and presents options for clear, objective standards that could address concerns and priorities while improving predictability, efficiency, and alignment with adopted plans.

## **Key Focus Areas**

### **1. Protect Historic Resources and Character**

**Context:** Essex Junction's existing historic buildings and neighborhoods are key to its economic success and unique historic character. New development in and around historic areas must balance reinvestment with preservation of defining architectural and urban form characteristics.

**Current Code Implementation:** The **Historic Preservation Overlay district (HRO, LDC Chapter 621)** applies national historic preservation standards (the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Structures) and limits eligibility for demolition to all buildings within the map area, except where historic significance has been compromised or de-listed, determined by a qualified consultant and/or the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. These standards limit the ability for additions or alterations to destroy or detract from historic significance. The **Design Review Overlay district (DRO, LDC Chapter 620)** applies general design standards to all development within the same area to ensure compatibility with surrounding historic resources.

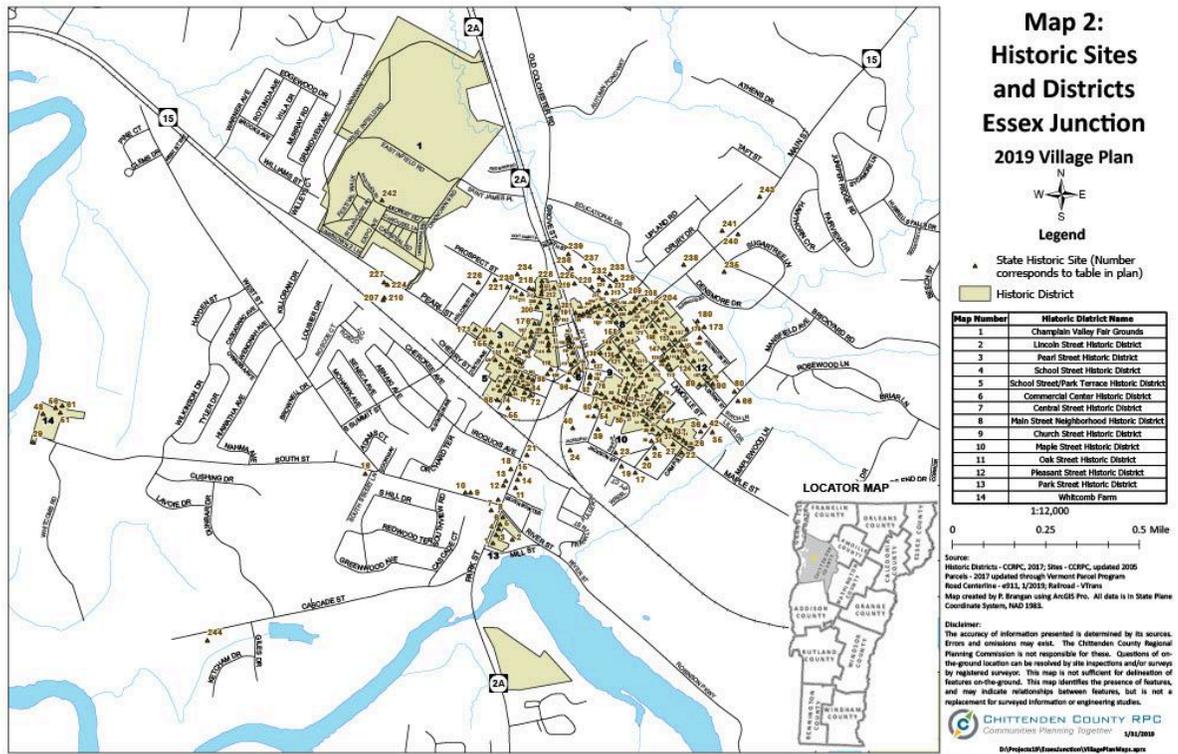
#### **Issues/Challenges:**

- Vague applicability of the HRO due to an “all except” approach rather than clearly defined contributing resources
- Overlap between HRO and DRO creates redundancy and uncertainty for applicants
- Design standards rely on subjective interpretation, leading to inconsistent review processes and outcomes
- Limited differentiation between historic core areas and transition areas

#### **Recommendation: Simplify and clearly define the roles and applicability of Historic Preservation vs. Design Standards**

- Clarify HRO applicability by explicitly identifying contributing and non-contributing resources. Update/expand the Historic Sites Map in the Comprehensive Plan. **See Figure 1.**
- Reduce overlap by assigning historic protection of designated historic resources to HRO and form/compatibility standards to objective standards tailored to each zone.
- *Also consider:* Add criteria/review of reconstruction plan prior to demolition within Village Center zone (if there are non-designated/mapped structures that need additional protection but are not within HRO)

Figure 1. Historic Sites and Districts Map cited in the Comprehensive Plan



## 2. Streamline Review Processes

**Context:** The HRO and DRO districts were established in a 2023 update. Prior to this update, design and historic preservation review applied primarily within the Village Center, with standards embedded within the Village Center chapter (LDC Chapter 604). Development in the TOD zone followed standard zoning procedures, with Development Review Board (DRB) review required only for Site Plan Review of projects with five or more housing units; smaller projects were eligible for staff review.

**Current Code Implementation:** Under the Design Review Overlay, *all* development within the TOD and Village Center zones requires DRB approval and compliance with DRO standards, HRO standards (where applicable, and zone-specific standards).

### Issues/Challenges:

- Multiple overlapping review frameworks (HRO, DRO, and zone-specific standards) create confusion and potential conflicts for applicants and reviewers. [See Figure 2.](#)
- Expanded DRB review requirements increase review time/workload for routine development; review effort is not calibrated to project scale or impact.
- DRO criteria rely on subjective interpretation, leading to inconsistent review timelines and outcomes.

**Recommendation: Re-establish administrative approval pathways for projects that meet clear, objective standards**

- Dissolve the Design Review Overlay district and incorporate design standards into each applicable zone as clear, objective requirements. *See Figure 3.*
- *Also consider:* Limit DRB review to projects exceeding defined thresholds (i.e. historic significance, size, height). Consider a threshold higher than the current five-unit trigger for Site Plan Review.

Figure 2. The current review framework requires multiple layers of approvals for parcels in the Village Center and TOD zones.

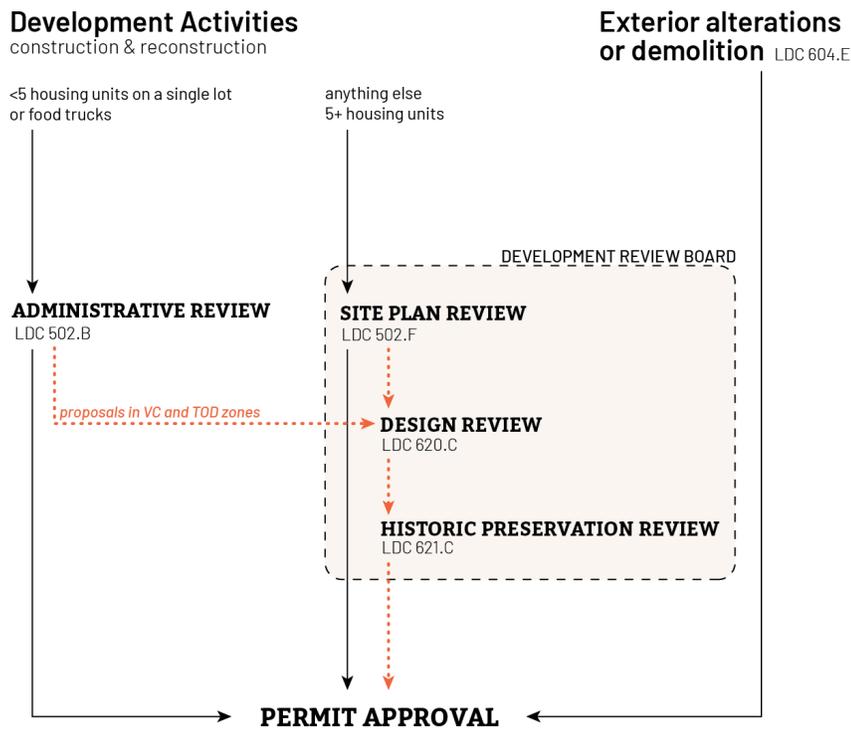
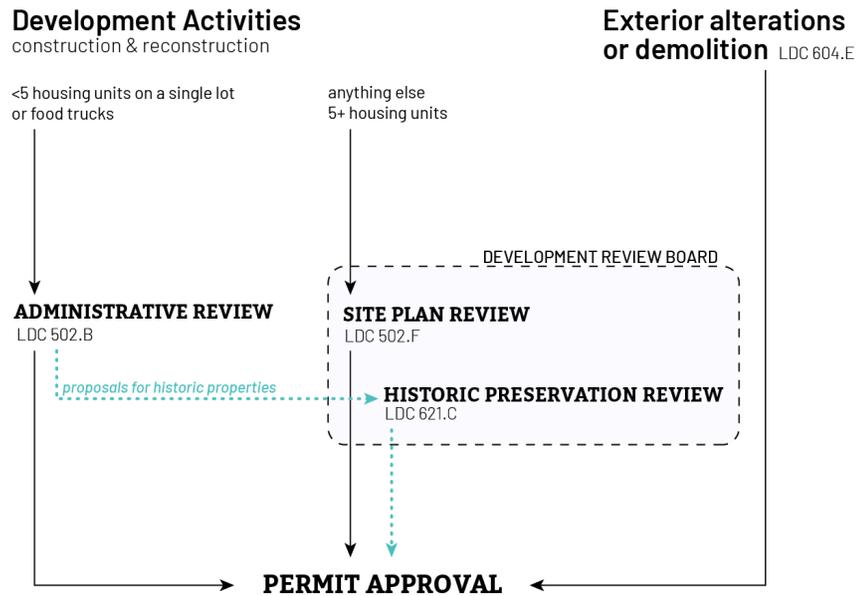


Figure 3. Proposed streamlined review framework



### 3. Achieve desired design quality and character in new development

**Context:** With increased development pressure in historic and transitional areas, community and Council members have expressed concern about maintaining design quality as density increases and building heights grow. Clear, objective design expectations will impact how new development is perceived and integrated into the existing urban fabric.

**Current Code Implementation:** Design Requirements are listed in a subsection of the Village Center zone (LDC Chapter 604) and are reiterated almost verbatim in the DRO (LDC Chapter 620), to be applied beyond the Village Center into adjacent areas and the TOD zone. Standards emphasize an active public realm and a 'harmonious' relationship between new development and existing context (in building massing and architectural details) but rely heavily on subjective interpretation.

**Issues/Challenges:**

- Redundant standards across multiple chapters create confusion and inefficiency
- Lack of clear, zone-specific form guidance (other than 'harmonious relationship') limits predictability of design outcomes

**Recommendation: Consolidate and translate Design Review Overlay District goals into objective form-based standards for each applicable zone**

- Dissolve the Design Review Overlay district
- Translate existing DRO standards into form-based standards tailored to each zone. Assess established massing and architectural patterns in each applicable zone and codify them as clear, objective requirements in each zone's chapter. *See Code Recommendations Section below.*

#### 4. Implement actions of the TOD Plan

**Context:** The City's TOD Master Plan *Connect the Junction* was approved by City Council in December 2025. Key actions include increased building heights, infill development, enhanced pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, multi-modal connectivity, and strategies to mitigate the visual and contextual impacts of increased height while maintaining historic character. The Planning Commission specifically highlighted the importance of incorporating form-based standards that address height transitions, facade articulation, and multi-modal transportation connections. The TOD Master Plan outlined the following 'Big Idea' areas for action, which should be incorporated into Land Development Code Updates:

- Prioritize people (PP)
- Capitalize on the Crescent Connector (CC)
- Develop to add activities and amenities (DA)
- Add housing thoughtfully (HT)
- Make more connections (MC)
- Make the assets shine (AS)
- Essex Junction for Essex Junction (EJ)

**Recommendation: Incorporate Plan Actions into the form-based standards for each zone (Village Center and TOD).** [See Code Recommendations Section below.](#)

- Encourage/require pedestrian-oriented street-level frontages: facade features, setbacks, and uses ('Community-serving' businesses), public art/murals (Related Big Ideas: PP, CC, DA, AS)
- Add more pedestrian connections: crosswalks, transit stops/shelters, street furniture, public art, lighting, landscaping/trees, wayfinding, new plazas/public spaces (Related Big Ideas: PP, CC, AS, MC)
- Consider parking: reduce/remove parking minimums (especially within certain radius of transit), limit or prohibit parking frontages (Related Big Idea: DA)
- Maintain scale: site taller buildings behind shorter commercial buildings, establish neighborhood transition standards, facade composition considerations (Related Big Idea: HT)

**Recommendation: Address specific Council and community concerns within new form-based standards.** [See Code Recommendations Section below.](#)

- Employ height transitions between higher-density and lower-scale residential areas and/or incorporate neighborhood transition standards for stepbacks or reduced max height.
- Integrate design standards to mitigate impacts of height and prevent long, monotonous facades.
- Establish pedestrian and multimodal transit connections.

## Code Recommendations

Changes to the Land Development Code to facilitate implementation of the TOD Master Plan should focus on replacing subjective Design Review standards with clear, objective requirements and incorporating new standards to guide future development that supports Essex Junction’s character, walkability, and historic context. The code recommendations below are organized to directly implement the recommendations outlined in the preceding section, specifically:

- Achieve desired design quality and character in new development
- Implement actions of the TOD Master Plan
- Address specific City Council and community concerns

### 1. Manage scale and transitions between lower- and higher-density areas.

**Goal:** Lessen the visual and physical impact of increased height and density adjacent to historic areas and lower-scale residential neighborhoods. *See Figure 4.*

**Regulatory Focus:** Building massing and form(s); Building placement and orientation

- Required upper-level building stepbacks or reduced maximum height in neighborhood transition areas
- Increased setbacks or buffers where higher-intensity zones abut residential areas

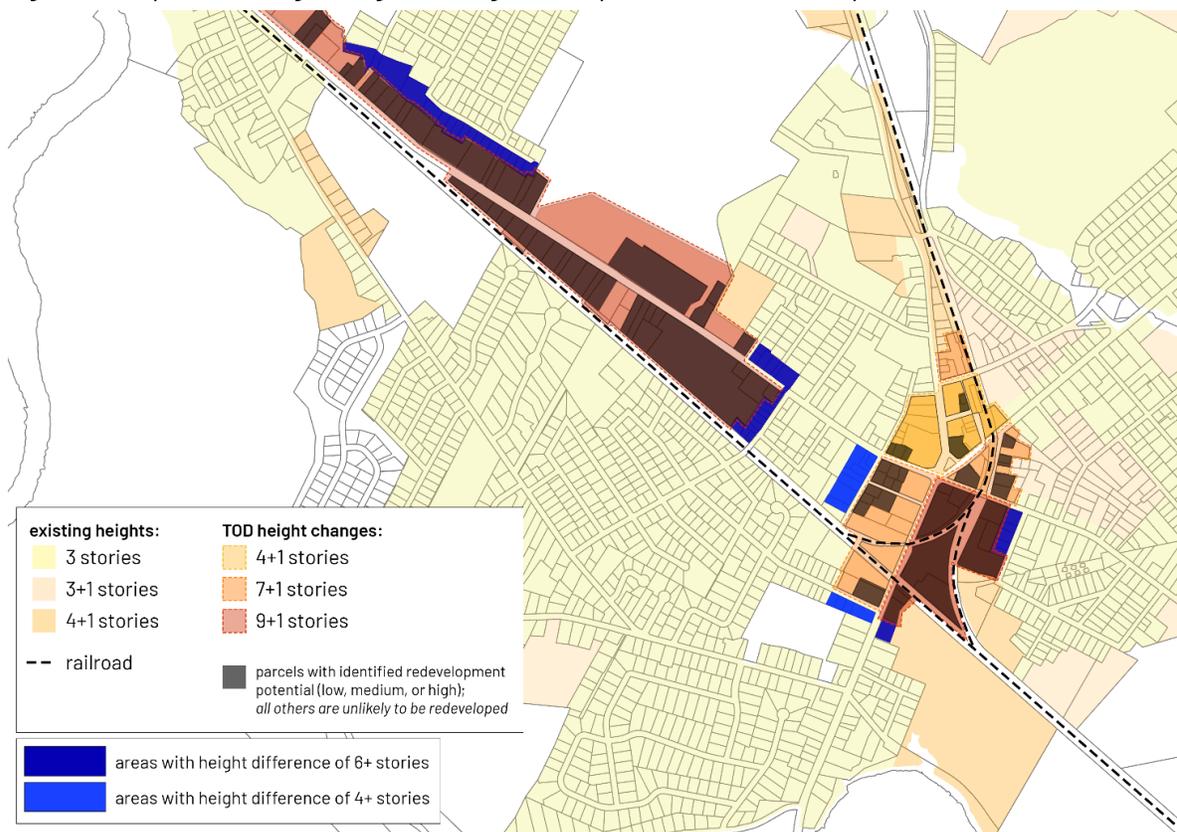
**Recommendation:** Pick one of two options to mitigate height differences.

OPTION 1: more intervention	Village Center	TOD
<p><b>Upper level stepbacks</b> where directly abutting a zoning district with a lower maximum height.</p>	<p><i>Upper-level stepbacks are required where a building directly abuts a zoning district with a lower maximum building height. Stepbacks shall have a <b>minimum horizontal depth of 30 feet</b>, measured perpendicular to the facade and shall extend along at least <b>75% of the facade length</b> facing the lower-intensity district.</i></p> <p><i>No vertical building wall above a required stepback shall exceed three (3) stories without an additional stepback.</i></p> <p><i>Required stepback areas shall be <b>designed as functional building elements</b> and used as terraces, balconies, green roofs, stormwater management, and/or common space accessible to building occupants.</i></p>	

OPTION 2: less intervention*	Village Center	TOD
<p><b>Minimum side and rear setbacks</b> where directly abutting a zoning district</p>	<p><i><b>10-foot minimum side and rear setbacks</b> shall be required where a parcel directly abuts a zoning district with a lower maximum building height.</i></p>	

<p>with a lower maximum height.</p> <p><i>*Recommended</i></p>	<p>Where the difference in maximum building height between abutting zoning districts is four (4) or more stories, the <b>required setback shall be increased to 30 feet</b>, and a landscaped buffer shall be provided along the shared property line. Buildings may encroach provided the portion of the building within the 30-foot setback does not exceed the maximum building height permitted in the abutting zoning district and a minimum 10-foot setback is maintained along the shared property line.</p>
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Figure 4. Map illustrating changes in heights and potential areas of impact



## 2. Prevent long, monotonous building facades

**Goal:** Prevent uninterrupted facades that create a “canyon-like” experience. Ensure a pedestrian-scaled rhythm.

**Regulatory Focus:** Facade composition and articulation; Building massing and form(s)

- Minimum and maximum proportions for facade elements
- Required variation in material, plane, or architectural detailing above a set height and/or facade width
- Transparency requirements for upper and lower floors

**Recommendation:** Employ multiple techniques that work in tandem to implement facade variation.

	<b>Village Center</b> *new regulations should be informed by existing Village Center proportions. <i>See Figure 5.</i>	<b>TOD</b>
<b>Maximum facade length</b>	<i>Building facades shall <b>not exceed 120 feet</b> in width.</i>	<i>Building façades shall <b>not exceed 180 feet</b> in width without required articulation.</i>
<b>Vertical articulation</b> with options that may include changes in plane, material variation, recessed bays, expressed structural modules, or grouped window patterns. <i>See Figure 6.</i>	<i>Building facades of <b>60 feet or greater in width</b> shall incorporate vertical articulation to establish a rhythm that reflects the historic lot patterns and traditional storefront widths. Vertical articulation shall occur at <b>intervals of approximately 30 feet.</b></i>	<i>Building façades <b>80 feet or greater in width</b> shall incorporate vertical articulation to reduce perceived scale. Vertical articulation shall occur at <b>intervals of approximately 40 to 60 feet.</b></i>
<b>Horizontal articulation</b> with options that may include material changes, fenestration patterns, or architectural detailing to clearly define the base of the building from the upper portion. <i>See Figure 7.</i>	<i>Buildings shall visually differentiate the building base (the first one or two floors, relating to the construction and use of the building) from upper floors.</i>	
<b>Minimum facade transparency</b> and/or Active treatment of street-level facade. <i>See Figure 8.</i>	<i>Minimum facade transparency standards shall apply as follows: Ground floor: 60% Upper floors: 20%</i>	<i>Minimum facade transparency standards shall apply as follows: Ground floor: 40% Upper floors: 20%  Ground-floor transparency may be increased along priority pedestrian corridors or streets and/or for certain ground-floor uses.</i>

Figure 5. Existing facade proportions of Village Center



Figure 6. Vertical Articulation diagram example from Palo Alto Municipal Code (2026).

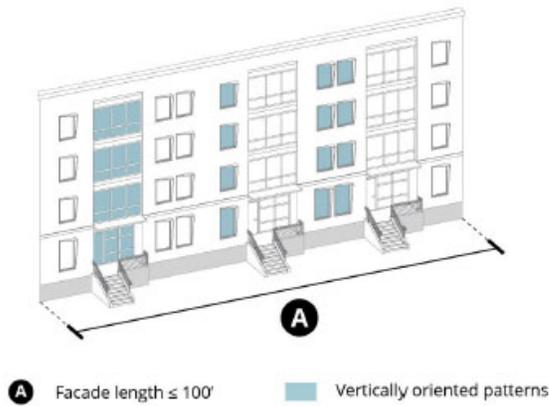


Figure 7. Horizontal Articulation options diagrammed for Kirkland, WA design standards.

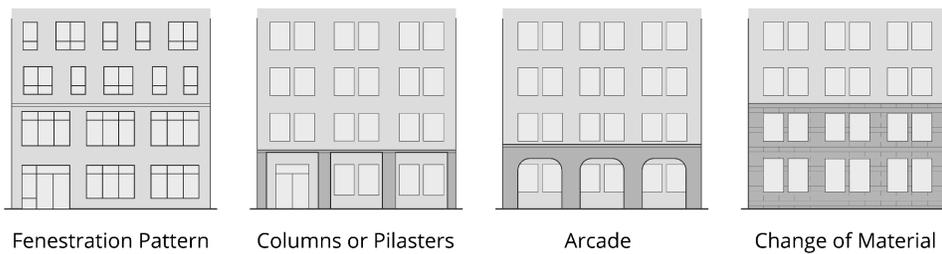
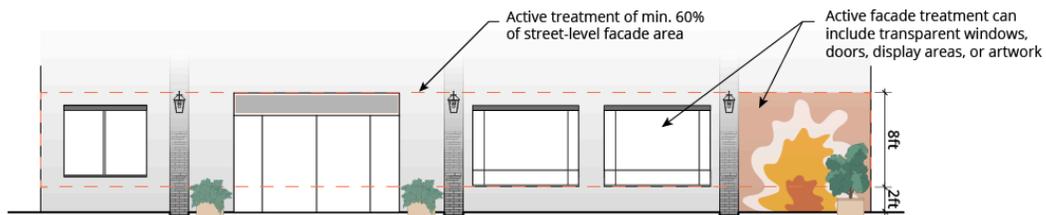


Figure 8. Active street-level facade treatment diagram for Kirkland, WA.



### 3. Reinforce human-scaled streets and strengthen pedestrian and multimodal connections

**Goal:** Ensure that new development supports active, walkable streets and maintains a comfortable, human-scaled environment consistent with the community’s vision for Essex Junction. Implement TOD Master Plan goals related to pedestrian connectivity, access to transit, and multimodal circulation.

**Regulatory Focus:** Street-level / public interface; Building placement and orientation; Building massing and form(s)

- Ground-floor use requirements along designated streets
- Minimum ground-floor transparency standards
- Required frequency of pedestrian entrances
- Front setback ranges tied to frontage type and use
- Building height to street width ratios / “street room” standards
- Required or menu-based pedestrian amenities (weather protection, seating, lighting, landscaping, public art)
- Orientation of buildings towards streets, paths, and transit facilities
- Required pedestrian connections through large sites or blocks

**Recommendation:** Use coordinated street-level standards, “street room” proportions, and frontage types to shape a lively, pedestrian-scaled public realm that encourages walking and transit use.

	Village Center	TOD
<b>Ground-floor use requirements</b> for active or community-serving uses in certain locations	<p><i>Active or flexible ground-floor uses such as retail, service, hospitality, or community-serving spaces shall be required along designated streets and near transit stops.</i></p> <p><i>Parking areas shall be located behind a Principal Building. At-grade structured parking shall not be allowed unless the parking is on the interior of the structure and a liner building is present along the street frontage on the first floor. See Figure 9.</i></p>	
<b>Frequency of pedestrian entrances</b>	<p><i>A minimum of <b>one pedestrian entrance every 60 feet</b> of façade width, or one per tenant, whichever is greater.</i></p> <p><i>Entrances shall be clearly visible from the public right-of-way.</i></p>	
<b>Building orientation</b> to support pedestrian comfort and transit use	<p><i>Principal buildings shall orient primary façades and entrances toward public streets, civic spaces, or pedestrian routes.</i></p> <p><i>Development adjacent to transit routes shall coordinate building placement to support shelters, lighting, and pedestrian access.</i></p>	

<p><b>Street Room standards</b> to guide appropriately scaled building massing</p> <p>The “street room” is the space formed between building facades, including sidewalks, front-yard setbacks, and the public right-of-way. Street room standards ensure streets feel comfortable, walkable, and well-proportioned rather than overly wide or canyon-like.</p> <p><b>See Figures 10 and 11.</b></p>	<p><i>Building height, upper-level setbacks, and front-yard setbacks shall be coordinated to maintain a height-to-width ratio between 1:2 and 1:1 along the Principal Frontage. To determine compliance, use the following formula: <b>Building Height / (ROW width + Front Setback)</b>.</i></p> <p><i>A ratio between 0.5 and 1.0 (equivalent to 1:2-1:1) complies and requires no further adjustment.</i></p> <p><i>For ratios greater than 1.0, one or more upper-level setbacks above the ground floor shall be provided. Setbacks must be deep enough to reduce the effective ratio to 1.0 or less, calculated as: <b>Total Building Height / (ROW Width + Front Setback + Stepback Depth)</b>. Stepback areas are encouraged to be designed as usable space, such as public terraces or green roofs; OR, increase the front setback within the limits of an approved Frontage Type to achieve a compliant ratio.</i></p> <p><i>For ratios less than 0.5, a pedestrian-oriented frontage type (See Frontage Types) shall be incorporated; OR, reduce the front setback within the limits of an approved Frontage Type to achieve a compliant ratio.</i></p> <p><b>Street Room ratios can be modified within each zoning chapter or along different corridors if desired. See Figures 12 and 13.</b></p>
<p><b>Frontage Types</b> to tailor front setbacks, ground-floor transparency, and pedestrian amenities to the intended intensity and character of different zones or corridors.</p> <p>Different frontage types establish front setbacks as a minimum-maximum range, with design features applied to support different levels of pedestrian activity and maintain a consistent street wall.</p>	<p><i>Each development shall <b>designate an approved Frontage Type</b> consistent with the intended ground-floor use, adjacent street character, and applicable Street Room standards.</i></p> <p><i>Permitted Frontage Types may include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Shopfront (0-5’ setback): Applicable to commercial uses. Requires high ground-floor transparency and pedestrian-oriented amenities including awnings, lighting, and frequent entrances.</i></li> <li>● <i>Pedestrian-Oriented Frontage (5-12’ setback): Applicable to any building use. Requires active ground-floor design elements and pedestrian amenities. See Figure X.</i></li> <li>● <i>Stoop (5-8’ setback): Applicable to residential uses. Includes a landscaped buffer and raised platform entries that provide a semi-private transition between the sidewalk and dwelling units.</i></li> </ul>

<p>See Figures 14 and 15.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Landscaped/Park Frontage (5-20' setback): Applicable to any building use. Emphasizes landscaping with or without other pedestrian amenities. Must include circulation elements that reinforce connections to the broader pedestrian and transit network.</i></li> <li>● <i>Plaza (10-30' setback): Applicable to any building use. Provides publicly accessible open space with pedestrian amenities. Must incorporate circulation elements that reinforce connections to the broader pedestrian and transit network.</i></li> </ul> <p>Specific Frontage Types may be tailored or modified within each zoning chapter if desired.</p>	
<p><b>Street connections</b> to ensure new streets function as public, multimodal connections and extend existing pedestrian, bike, and transit networks.</p>	<p>Likely not applicable.</p>	<p><i>All new streets shall be provided as <b>public streets</b> and shall have a block length no greater than 600 feet. Sidewalks of at least 8 feet are required, and bike lanes of at least 5 feet are required where connecting to other streets with bike connections and transit corridors.</i></p> <p><i>Bus stops should be incorporated in coordinating with GMT.</i></p> <p><b>Public pedestrian paths</b> may be provided in lieu of new streets provided they are publicly accessible and reinforce connectivity between public streets, transit stops, open spaces, and/or planned public networks in adjacent development. Clear standards for width, length, lighting, and pedestrian amenities shall be established.</p>

Figure 9. Diagram illustrating standards for structure parking including a liner building with pedestrian-oriented uses.

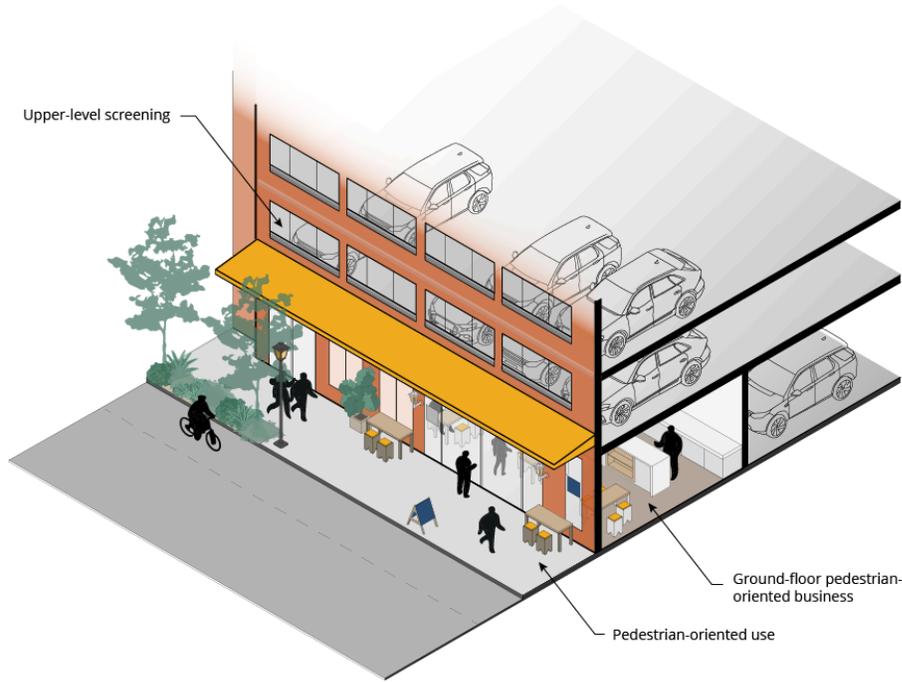


Figure 10. Kirkland, WA intent graphic demonstrating use of Street Room ratio for building massing and modulation



Figure 11. Street Room ratio diagrams demonstrating options for compliance in Kirkland, WA.

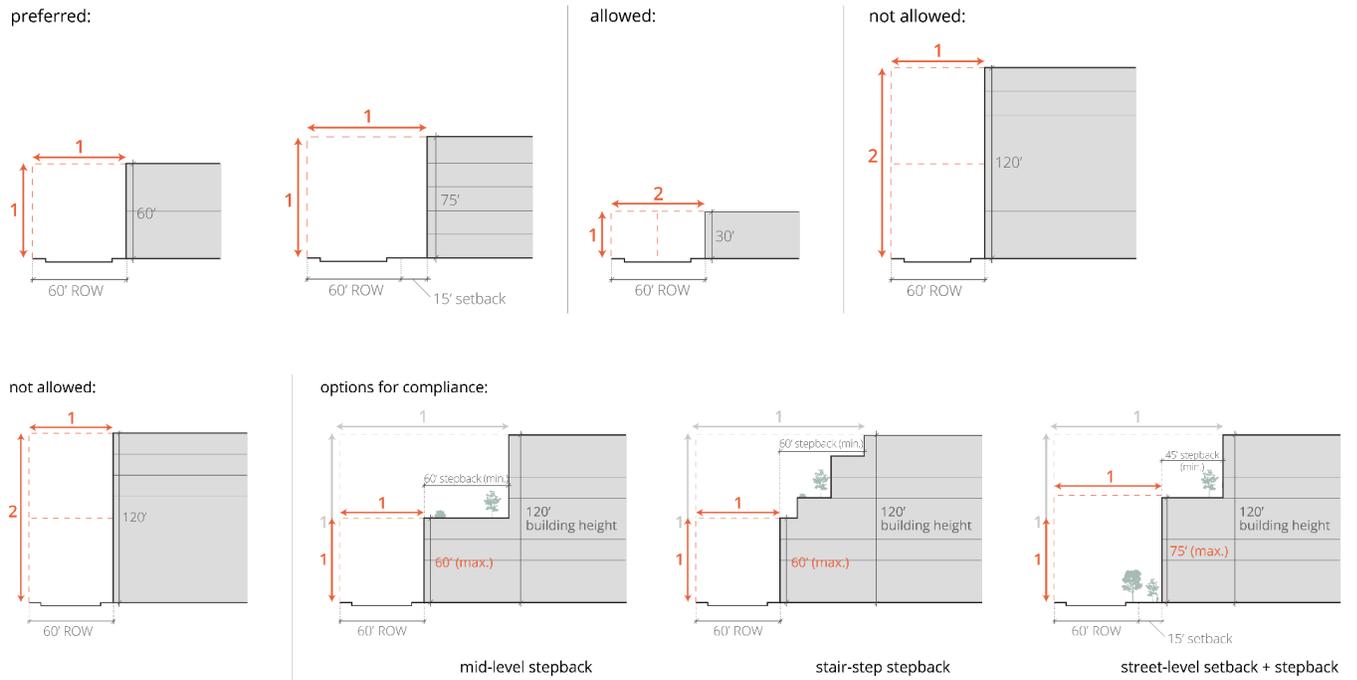


Figure 12. Existing proportions in the Village Center include height-to-width ratios between 0.5 and 1.

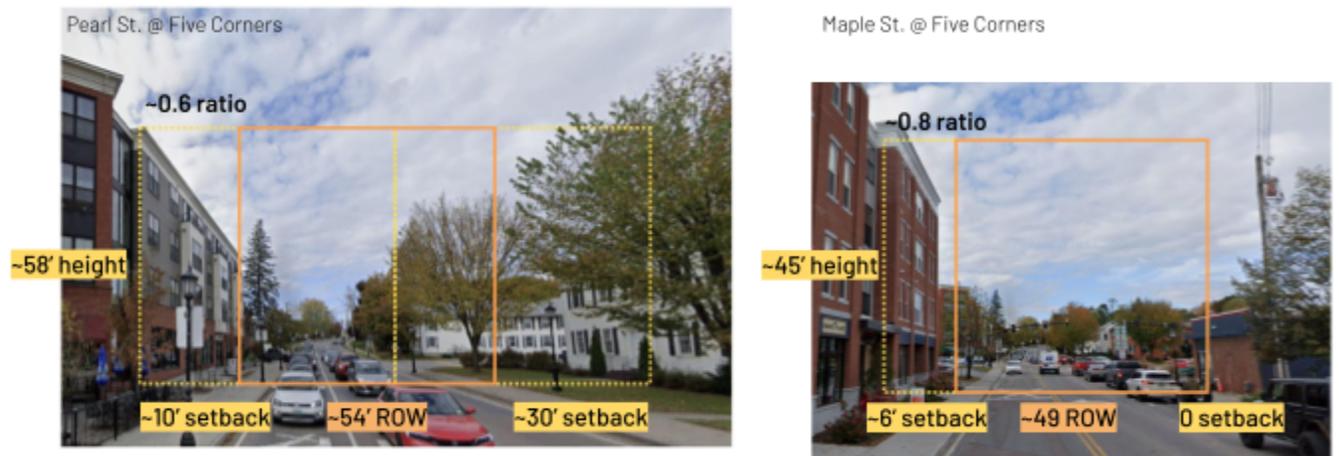


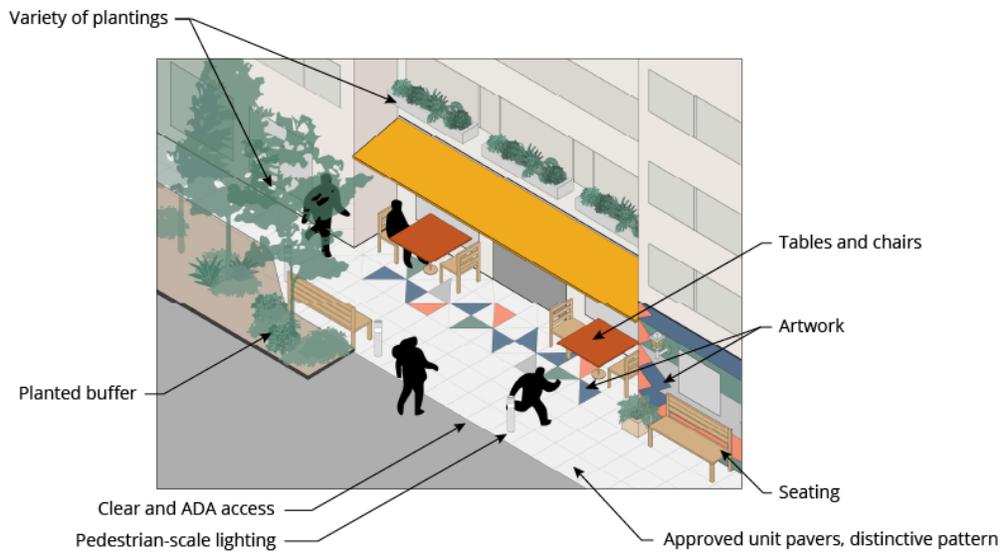
Figure 13. Street Room ratios in comparable Vermont cities.



Figure 14. Example of Frontage Types, adopted in Sammamish, WA.



Figure 15. Example of pedestrian-oriented frontage features, applied in Kirkland, WA.



#### 4. Promote quality design and neighborhood compatibility

**Goal:** Balance compatibility with historic and neighborhood character while allowing contemporary design and efficient review. Ensure design with high-quality materials, thoughtful detailing, and a cohesive streetscape that reflects Essex Junction's character.

**Regulatory Focus:** Architectural details

- Allowed or preferred material palettes by zone
- Requirements for material transitions above certain heights or facade widths
- Options for roof forms or parapet treatments
- Landscaping and ground-cover requirements tied to setbacks and frontage types

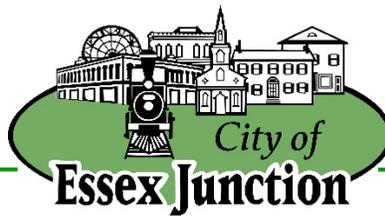
**Recommendation:** Implement a balance of broad, enforceable standards and optional design guidelines to support quality design while maintaining flexibility and predictable review. Focus regulatory requirements on measurable elements such as facade composition, massing, and material transitions (covered in sections above) rather than prescribing detailed architectural features. Apply more specificity in the Village Center to ensure compatibility of infill with the surrounding historic fabric.

	<b>Village Center</b> *new regulations should be informed by existing characteristics. <i>See Figure 16.</i>	<b>TOD</b>
<b>Material palette</b>	<i>Primary materials shall be used on at least 75% of the Principal facade(s). Primary materials for the Village Center include <b>wood or high-quality fiber cement siding, brick, natural stone, and stucco.</b></i>	<i>Primary materials shall be used on at least 75% of the Principal facade(s). Primary materials for the TOD District include wood or high-quality fiber cement siding, brick, natural stone, stucco, and certain metal (copper, titanium, and stainless steel, 18-8 or better).</i>
<b>Roof requirements</b>	<i>Roofs can be flat with articulated parapets or overhanging eaves, or pitched between 3:12 and 12:12. Pitched roof slopes shall be appropriate to local climatic conditions and roofing materials. Eaves shall overhang at least 6" where provided.</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>
<b>Window proportions</b>	<i>The horizontal dimension of any individual window opening may not exceed its vertical dimension except where implemented as part of an approved Frontage Type or otherwise prescribed in the Code. Windows may be grouped horizontally if each opening is visually separated by a mullion, column, pier or wall section.</i>	<i>Not applicable</i>

<p><b>Design guidelines</b> can be included to illustrate preferred building character, materials, details, and massing without being regulatory.</p>	<p>Guidelines could include intent graphics or photos to illustrate building character, facade rhythm, and massing that is compatible with the historic context.</p>	<p>Guidelines could include intent graphics or photos to illustrate desired character, streetscape rhythm, and massing to support flexibility and innovation in new TOD development.</p>
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Figure 16. Existing design features and materials in the Village Center





## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Planning Commission  
**From:** Christopher Yuen, Community Development Director  
**Meeting Date:** February 5, 2026  
**Subject:** Nomination of Administrative Officer

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**Issue:**

Whether to nominate Christopher Yuen as Administrative Officer for a new three-year term.

**Discussion:**

Under Section 304 of the Land Development Code and 24 V.S.A. § 4448, the Community Development Director serves as the Administrative Officer (AO) responsible for administering the City's zoning bylaws, including zoning permit review and issuance, enforcement, and referrals to the Development Review Board as required.

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4448(a), the Administrative Officer is nominated by the Planning Commission and appointed by the legislative body for a three-year term.

Christopher Yuen was appointed as Administrative Officer by the City Council on March 22, 2023. That appointment expires on March 22, 2026. Re-nomination at this time allows for uninterrupted zoning administration and timely City Council consideration of reappointment.

This is separate from the nomination of Acting AO in January 2026.

**Cost:**

N/A

**Recommendation:**

Nominate Christopher Yuen to serve as Administrative Officer for a three-year term beginning March 22, 2026.

**Recommended Motion:**

*I move that the Planning Commission nominate Christopher Yuen to serve as Administrative Officer for a three-year term beginning March 22, 2026.*

**TO:** Chris Yuen, Planning Director, City of Essex Junction  
**FROM:** Darren Schibler, Senior Planner & Project Manager  
**DATE:** January 30, 2026  
**RE:** Regional approval of the Essex Junction municipal plan and confirmation of the planning process  
**CC:** Neighboring Municipalities Planning Staff and CCRPC Board Members

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This Initial Plan Review memo summarizes CCRPC staff recommendations for updates needed for Essex Junction’s municipal plan to be regionally approved and confirmed. Delivered 18-24 months before the plan’s expiration, it includes:

- Feedback on the extent to which the municipal plan advances the **state planning goals** ([24 V.S.A. §4302](#));
- Recent **statutory updates**, and general options for addressing new requirements;
- General and specific comments on the **required elements** of a municipal plan ([24 V.S.A. §4382](#)) including discussion of **compatibility between local and regional future land use maps**; and
- A review of progress toward **plan implementation**.

### Regional Approval and Confirmation Context

A municipality adopts a plan to define the kind of community it desires to be, and the steps to get there. Having a Regional Planning Commission (RPC) *approve a municipal plan* and *confirm a municipality’s planning process* can help strengthen and support local goals and facilitate plan implementation. Approval and confirmation are two different things:

- *Regional approval of the municipal plan* ensures that the plan meets the requirements of statute, including any new requirements since last plan adoption.
- *Confirmation of the municipal planning process* ensures that a municipality is progressing with plan implementation. This helps verify that the plan is being actively used to advance local and state goals.

Vermont municipalities are not obligated to adopt a plan, have it approved by an RPC, or have their planning process confirmed by an RPC, but there are several benefits for municipalities that pursue this option. These include the ability to charge impact fees, apply for municipal planning grants, and participate in the state’s Designation Programs. Plans must also be approved, and have their planning process confirmed, for a municipality to be eligible for Tier 1B (partial Act 250 exemption for housing development) for portions of the municipality that meet the criteria of [10 V.S.A. §6033\(c\)](#). (For additional benefits, see [24 V.S.A. § 4350\(d\)](#))

## Contents

Snapshot: Plan Elements and State Planning Goals – Essex Junction .....	3
Statutory Changes Since Last Plan Adoption (2019).....	4
The HOME Act – Housing Data, Programs, and Targets (Act 47 of 2023).....	4
Act 181 of 2024 – Land Use Mapping, State Designation Programs, and Housing.....	5
Environmental Justice (Act 154 of 2022).....	8
Required Plan Elements (24 V.S.A. §4382).....	9
General comments .....	9
Statement of Objectives, Policies, Programs to Guide Future Development .....	9
Land Use .....	10
Transportation .....	10
Utility and Facility Plan.....	11
Rare and Irreplaceable Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Resources .....	12
Educational Facilities.....	13
Implementation program .....	13
Development Trends and Surrounding Municipalities.....	13
Energy .....	13
Housing.....	17
Economic Development.....	17
Flood Resilience .....	18
Implementation .....	20
Compatibility of Local and Regional Future Land Use Maps .....	21

## Snapshot: Plan Elements and State Planning Goals – Essex Junction

<b>Required Plan Elements <u>24 V.S.A. § 4382</u></b>		<b>Meets Statute</b>	<b>Changes Needed</b>
1	Statement of Policies to Guide Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Land Use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Utility and Facility Plan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Rare and Irreplaceable Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6	Educational Facilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Implementation Program	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Development Trends and Surrounding Municipalities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10	Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Economic Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Flood Resilience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Specific Planning Goals <u>24 V.S.A. § 4302(c)</u></b>		<b>Meets Statute</b>	<b>Changes Needed</b>
1	Development Pattern	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Education	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Natural and Historic Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Quality of Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Energy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	Recreation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	Agriculture and Forest Industries	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	Use of Resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11	Housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12	Public Facilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13	Child Care	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14	Flood Resiliency	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15	Environmental Benefits and Burdens	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## Statutory Changes Since Last Plan Adoption (2019)

This section summarizes important statutory changes since the plan was last adopted and provides general guidance on how to address these changes. Any suggestions specific to the municipality are incorporated into the applicable “[Required Plan Elements](#)” section of this memo.

### The HOME Act – Housing Data, Programs, and Targets (Act 47 of 2023)

The HOME Act (Act 47 of 2023) of 2024 amended [24 V.S.A. § 4348a\(a\)\(9\)](#) to require regional planning commissions to adopt regional housing targets published in the State Housing Needs Assessment and to establish municipal housing data and targets. Updates to [24 V.S.A. §4382\(a\)\(10\)](#) require that the municipal housing targets be included in municipal plans. CCRPC provided initial municipal housing targets to all its municipalities in March of 2025 and updated them in the [regional plan first public hearing draft, Supplement 7](#). These will be finalized throughout the regional plan review and adoption process, with targets formally adopted by June 2026.

The HOME Act also amended [24 V.S.A. § 4382\(a\)\(10\)](#) to require that municipal plans have housing goals to “*meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income, and consistent with housing targets.*” Plans must include “*specific actions to address housing needs of low- and moderate-income households.*”

#### Municipal plan updates related to the HOME Act:

- **Required:** Add the housing targets provided by the Regional Planning Commission to the plan’s Housing section.
- **Required:** While the current plan includes several actions to help address housing needs of low-and moderate-income households in the Land Development Code, the legislative intent of the HOME Act calls for more specific plan actions beyond passively allowing affordable housing. This could include actions that:
  - Connect residents to housing support programs and funding;
  - Pursue planning or implementation grants for the creation of affordable housing through the Department of Housing & Community Development, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and other sources;
  - Ease the development of Accessory Dwelling Units beyond statutory minimums;
  - Pursue Tier 1A and/or Tier 1B status to reduce permitting requirements for housing;
  - Support options for multi-modal transportation within the community to reduce the share of household income spent on transportation;
  - Advance new / upgraded infrastructure necessary to support housing development, including use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP);

Additional resources for sample plan actions to increase housing supply and affordability:

- [Actions to Enable Housing Development in Your Community](#) and associated [Funding Opportunities](#) (Vermont League of Cities and Towns)
- The [Index of Housing Challenges and Solutions](#) section of HUD’s [Eliminating Zoning Barriers to Affordable Housing Guidebook](#).
- [Vermont’s Enabling Better Places Guide](#) (specific regulatory actions).
- **Required:** Incorporate data about year round and seasonal homes per HOME Act ([Act 47](#) of 2023) updates to [24 VSA §4382\(a\)\(10\)](#).
- **Optional:** The municipality could highlight the HOME Act in the Municipal Plan. (This is optional, not required.) Here is sample language:

The legislature passed the Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone (HOME) Act (Act 47) during the 2023 session. This included municipal regulatory reforms and programs to support the construction and preservation of housing. The regulatory reforms in the HOME Act focused on creating housing opportunities in existing settlement areas by allowing incremental, infill development in areas that have adequate infrastructure already and are planned for growth in their municipality. The HOME Act also created several programs that aim to assist homeowners and renters by directing the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) to create a Middle-Income Homeownership Development Program to subsidize developers constructing perpetually affordable housing and a Rental Housing Revolving Loan Program to provide subsidized loans for rental housing developments serving middle-income households.

## Act 181 of 2024 – Land Use Mapping, State Designation Programs, and Housing

### Municipal Plan Updates Related to Act 181 – State Planning Goals

The passage of Act 181 in 2024 led to significant changes in [24 V.S.A. § 4302](#) (State Planning Goals) that must be addressed in plan updates.

**State Planning Goal 1A, Residential Development:** One change calls for plans to encourage residential development primarily in areas planned for growth. Underlined text indicates new goal language, with strikethrough showing what was deleted: *(A) Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers downtown centers, village centers, planned growth areas, and village areas as described in section 4348a of this title, and strip development along highways should be discouraged avoided. These areas should be planned so as to accommodate a substantial majority of housing needed to reach the housing targets developed for each region pursuant to subdivision 4348a(a)(9) of this title.*

**Goal 15, Benefits and Burdens:** In addition, statute now includes a planning goal to “equitably distribute environmental benefits and burdens.”

These changes have the following implications for municipal plan updates.

- **Required:** As before, municipal plans must demonstrate that they are striving to meet state planning goals. Municipal plan updates after June 25, 2024 must address the revisions to the goals as noted above. Examples include:
  - Actions related to planning for (or upgrading existing) water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure in areas planned for growth to support new housing.
  - Policy statements and/or plan language showing how the downtown centers, village centers, planned growth areas, and neighborhoods have been planned to accommodate a “substantial majority” of the housing target.
- **Required:** Municipal plans must now address the statewide goal of equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. Examples of how to address this goal include:
  - Add the state’s planning goal 15, or write a local goal crafted to context, and explain why it is important.
  - Update demographic information that identifies the presence of any environmental justice focus populations as these groups are defined in statute ([3 V.S.A. §6002\(4\)](#)).
  - Identify groups or locations that may experience disproportionate benefits or burdens and describe the ways the plan seeks to address the issues of environmental benefits and burdens. For example:
    - Manufactured home communities in floodplains that have experienced repeated damage
    - Wealthy neighborhoods that have greater access to bike and pedestrian infrastructure
  - Benefits and burdens could also be highlighted in a plan’s implementation section, for example with an indication of which actions help improve environmental benefits and reduce burdens for marginalized groups.

### Municipal Plan Updates Related to Act 181 – Regional Future Land Use Mapping, Municipal Plans, and Designations

**Regional Future Land Use Maps:** Act 181 included changes to how RPCs develop the Regional Future Land Use Map.

- While RPCs have always developed Future Land Use maps, Act 181 requires RPCs to develop new regional future land use maps based on 11 land use districts defined in statute. The Regional Future Land Use Map, adopted by the RPC and approved by the new State Land Use Review Board (LURB - formerly the Natural Resources Board), is the map used to determine location-based Act 250 jurisdiction and state designation boundaries.
- CCRPC developed a [draft regional future land use map in the summer of 2025](#) according to the new requirements. This work included conducting outreach with our member municipalities and other interested and affected parties to build consensus on the maps. CCRPC will continue to refine the map as needed based on feedback from municipalities, the public, and the Land Use Review Board during the plan review process. CCRPC will

finalize the map as part of the readoption of the ECOS regional plan in Spring/Summer 2026.

**State Designation Programs:** Act 181 revises the [state designation programs](#) in several ways.

- Most significantly, the boundaries of designated areas will no longer be approved by the State Downtown Board (which is now the State Community Investment Board). Instead, CCRPC will be responsible for mapping local designated areas as a part of the Regional Future Land Use Map.
- Another significant change to the state designation program is the consolidation of five state designation programs into two state designation programs: centers and neighborhoods. The center area program will have three “steps” that relate to how much planning and investment has been done by the municipality for those areas.
- In reference to these changes, Act 181 slightly updated [24 V.S.A. § 4382\(a\)\(2\)\(C\)](#), the land use element of the municipal plan, with the following: *“Identifies those areas, if any, proposed for designation under chapter 76A of this title and for status under 10 V.S.A. §§ 6033 and 6034, together with, for each area proposed for designation, an explanation of how the designation would further the plan’s goals and the goals of section 4302 of this title, and how the area meets the requirements for the type of designation to be sought.”*

These changes have the following implications for municipal plan updates.

- **Required:** Municipalities must continue to address conformance of their municipal future land use map with the future land use maps of the region as well as abutting municipalities. While this is not a new requirement, and the regional map was created in deference to municipal maps within the constraints of statute, municipal plan language on conformance may need to be updated depending on how the regional map has changed for a given area. As the Act 181 Regional Future Land Use map is implemented, CCRPC will be staying in close communication with its municipalities regarding conformance of local and regional plans. (More on conformance below.)
- **Optional:** Municipalities may still use locally defined categories in their own future land use map, or adopt the regional map as their municipal future land use map.
- **Required:** Per [24 V.S.A. §4382\(a\)\(2\)\(C\)](#), municipal plans must identify areas proposed as centers or neighborhoods. The plan should also include statements on how these areas further the plan’s and the state’s goals.
  - A municipality may choose to show these areas on a municipal future land use map or a separate map.
  - Plan text and policies can be updated to show how these areas meet the requirements for designation, including steps, and advance local and state goals.
  - Municipalities wishing to apply for or maintain Step 2 centers must include goals for investment in said center within their plan under [24 V.S.A. § 5803\(f\)\(2\)\(A\)\(iii\)](#).

## Municipal Plan Updates Related to Act 181: Location-Based Act 250 Jurisdiction

**Location-based Act 250 Jurisdiction:** The passage of Act 181 makes Act 250 jurisdiction primarily location-based. Specifically, the bill creates two areas that are exempt from Act 250 jurisdiction or subject to limited Act 250 jurisdiction – Tier 1A and Tier 1B:

- **Tier 1A:** Tier 1A status means that all development in that area is exempt from Act 250. Areas that are eligible for Tier 1A status are downtowns or village centers and planned growth areas in 24 V.S.A. § 4348a. After the regional plan and map are adopted, interested municipalities apply directly to the State Land Use Review Board (LURB) to have areas designated as Tier 1A.
- **Tier 1B:** Tier 1B areas allow for limited exemption from Act 250 for residential or mixed-use development projects of 50 units or fewer on ten acres or fewer of land. ([10 VSA §6081](#)). The Regional Future Land Use map identifies these areas. Areas that are eligible for Tier 1B status are downtown centers and village centers, planned growth areas, and village areas as defined in 24 V.S.A. § 4348a. RPCs will include Tier 1B areas on the Regional Future Land Use Maps upon municipal request (via a resolution of the legislative body). The LURB may approve requested areas for Tier 1B status if they meet the criteria in 10 V.S.A. § 6033(c).

These changes have the following implications for municipal plan updates.

- **Required:** As noted above, if a municipality wants to opt in to Tier 1A and 1B, these areas must be identified and discussed in the municipal plan.
  - Municipalities still deciding whether to opt in to Tier 1A or 1B jurisdiction may include an action in the plan regarding undertaking research, public outreach, or analysis needed to make a decision.

## Environmental Justice (Act 154 of 2022)

Vermont's Environmental Justice Law establishes policies and procedures to address environmental health disparities affecting marginalized communities on a state level. The law highlights the disproportionate impacts of environmental hazards on BIPOC and low-income individuals and emphasizes equitable access to environmental benefits. The bill also defines “meaningful participation:”

*“Meaningful participation” means that all individuals have the opportunity to participate in energy, climate change, and environmental decision making. Examples include assessments, planning, implementation, permitting, compliance and enforcement, and evaluation. Meaningful participation also integrates diverse knowledge systems, histories, traditions, languages, and cultures of Indigenous communities in decision-making processes. It requires that communities are enabled and administratively assisted to participate fully through education and training. Meaningful participation requires the State to operate in a transparent manner with regard to opportunities for community input and also encourages the development of environmental, energy, and climate change stewardship. ([3 V.S.A. § 6002](#)).*

Relatedly, [Act 181 of 2024](#) added a new statewide planning goal ([24 V.S.A. §4302\(c\)\(15\)](#)) regarding the equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens as referenced in the Environmental Justice Law.

### Municipal Plan Updates Related to Environmental Justice

- **Required:** See the section of this memo addressing [Municipal Plan Updates Related to Act 181 – State Planning Goals](#).
- **Optional:** Municipalities can use the law to guide their own consideration of environmental justice focus populations and community engagement in planning and their municipal decisions.
  - Consider the idea of “meaningful participation,” and how the municipality might achieve this, when embarking on the Municipal Plan update and community engagement to meet the goal of participation in [24 V.S.A. § 4302\(b\)\(2\)](#).

## **Required Plan Elements (24 V.S.A. § 4382)**

### **General comments**

- The General Planning Background chapter provides good, succinct context for how planning is approached in Essex Junction.
- While the text is generally very direct, additional edits could be made for brevity to reduce the length of the document or provide space for more details on certain topics.
- **Required:** Updated data may influence or change trends identified in the plan, which may change goals and actions. All data in the plan will need to be updated to the most recent data available. This will be done by CCRPC staff as part of their contract to update the Plan.
- **Required:** References to the ECOS plan or its data and policies should be updated after its readoption in the spring/summer of 2026.
- **Optional:** Consider reaching out to Melissa Needham ([Melissa.Needham@vermont.gov](mailto:Melissa.Needham@vermont.gov)) at the Burlington District Office of the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) for assistance with updating public health data and goals into the Plan. VDH is available to review the Town Plan to provide feedback and advice about the public health implications of implementing the plan. VDH also has experience conducting health equity assessments at the municipal level.

### **Statement of Objectives, Policies, Programs to Guide Future Development**

- **Recommended:** Chapter 2 provides a detailed and well-structured framework for translating community outreach efforts into values, vision, and goals in the plan. However, most of this was based on joint efforts with the Town of Essex when a municipal merger was

still anticipated, specifically the Heart & Soul and Thoughtful Growth in Action campaigns. The results of this outreach should be re-evaluated in light of separation as well as subsequent public engagement efforts, such as the 2024 Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan as well as Connect the Junction.

## Land Use

- **Required:** See comments in the “Statutory Changes” section of this memo for required / recommended changes related to future land use areas, state designation program, Act 250, and compatibility with the regional plan.
- **Recommended:** The current future land use map is the zoning map. To avoid issues of conformance with the municipal plan when changes to zoning are contemplated, it is recommended to make the future land use map less specific and more vision-based. CCRPC’s regional future land use map and the existing land use areas described in this chapter can serve as a starting point for the municipal map.
- **Recommended:** References to plans for the Crescent Connector project can be updated to reflect that this has been completed and new development along it has been enabled.
- **Recommended:** Land use outcomes from Connect the Junction should be incorporated into this chapter.
- **Recommended:** Some of the land use objectives (specifically Objective 2.1) do not seem well connected to the respective goal, and some goals do not have associated objectives. These should be consolidated and reorganized to clarify how the land use goals will be implemented.

## Transportation

CCRPC staff offer the following ideas for updating and strengthening the plan’s Transportation Chapter (4.10).

The transportation section would benefit greatly from including a clear introductory overview. Currently, it dives directly into specific topics without providing context or framing the importance of transportation within the City’s broader goals. An introduction would help orient readers by summarizing the scope, key challenges, and guiding principles of the transportation plan, making the section more accessible and cohesive. Adding this would strengthen the overall readability and set the stage for the goals and objectives that follow.

- **Data**
  - **Required:** Update all travel characteristics and transportation-related data in the plan. Consider adding traffic volume data (AADT) where available. CCRPC will work with the Town to assist with updating these data.

- **Recommended:** Incorporate information from the most recent studies and plans, including:
- Connect the Junction Master Plan:  
<https://www.connectthejunction.org/documents>
- Pearl Street Multimodal Improvements Study:  
[https://studiesandreports.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Essex\\_Pearl-St\\_Multimodal\\_Improvements\\_Report.pdf](https://studiesandreports.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Essex_Pearl-St_Multimodal_Improvements_Report.pdf)
- Essex Junction Parking Study: [https://studiesandreports.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-07-10\\_Report.pdf](https://studiesandreports.ccrpcvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-07-10_Report.pdf)
- **Traffic Calming Policy:** The second paragraph praises the interconnected street network for offering multiple route options and reducing arterial congestion, yet it simultaneously points out that this same network leads to increased cut-through traffic in residential areas, which the City would like to discourage. The tension between encouraging connectivity and discouraging cut-through traffic should be better addressed via a traffic calming strategy/policy.
- **Main Street Pedestrianization:** The third paragraph on page 91 mentions the pedestrianization of a short section of Main Street. As part of the Connect the Junction Plan, this recommendation has been revised to pursue a road diet that repurposes the existing right-turn lane and on-street parking into expanded space for sidewalks, seating, landscaping, and other pedestrian amenities. There is more discussion on pages 92 - 96 that outlines the pedestrianization that should be updated with recommendations from the Connect the Junction Plan.
- **Parking:** On pages 96 and 97, the discussion should consider mentioning parking modifications to allow for more infill development.
- **Public Transportation:** The public transportation landscape has changed significantly since this plan was last updated. Consider removing the reference to commuter rail, as it is no longer considered feasible in the region at this time. This section could also be strengthened by incorporating discussion of transit-oriented development (TOD).
- **Electric Vehicles:** Consider including a discussion related to the need to prioritize electric vehicle adoption and associated EV infrastructure.
- **Transportation Demand Management (TDM):** Consider adding a goal that emphasizes the need for TDM with a focus on decreasing use of Single Occupancy Vehicles (SOVs) and increasing the use of other modes of transportation.

## Utility and Facility Plan

- The utilities and facilities section provides a good overview and covers the topics required. Data on water, wastewater and solid waste as well as progress on meeting stormwater permit obligations should be updated.

- **Recommended:** The description of Total Maximum Daily Load on p. 67 is somewhat inaccurate – it should address water contaminants, not flow capacity.
- **Recommended:** The section on wastewater treatment capacity should be re-evaluated in terms of whether the housing targets for Essex Junction as well as the other municipalities served (Essex Town and Williston) can be accommodated with current capacity, or if plant expansions will be needed.
- **Recommended:** The section under Solid Waste Disposal could be updated with what is relevant to Essex Junction.
- **Optional:** The plan states with regard to natural gas, “The following areas currently are not yet served: Whitcomb Farm area on the Westerly portion of South Street” Has this area been served since the last update?
- **Recommended:** The Communications section should be updated to note the expansion of fiber internet to the City.
- **Optional:** The section on Underground Storage Tanks could include the following text: The [Chittenden County Brownfields Program](#) provides funding to assess and clean up petroleum and hazardous substance contamination to protect public health and enable properties to be put into productive reuse.
- **Optional:** What is the current status of the Brownell Library Strategic Plan? Is there a new plan since the 2014-2019 plan? Some of these plan elements could be referenced in the Education section as well.
- **Recommended:** The plan should clarify which municipal services Essex and Essex Junction still share (police, assessing, etc.)
- **Optional:** Consider referencing the [Clean Water Service Provider](#) program and note its importance as new robust source of funding for voluntary, water quality improvement projects.

## Rare and Irreplaceable Natural Areas, Scenic and Historic Resources

- The Natural Environmental Resources chapter adequately addresses this statutory element, including treatment of forest blocks and habitat connectors under Act 171.
  - **Optional:** The explanation of Vermont Conservation Design could be made clearer and more succinct.
- **Required:** The short statement that there are no sand or gravel deposits in Essex Junction is accurate. However, it is not a clear policy on the extraction of earth resources as required under 24 V.S.A. § 4302(c)(10) – a sentence could be added to say that earth resource extraction is not an appropriate land use within the City.
- **Optional:** Information on air quality in Chittenden County can be updated with information from the 2026 ECOS Regional Plan.
- **Recommended:** Consider whether to consolidate Natural Environmental Resources Objectives 1.1 – 1.3 and 2.3 (related to urban and community forestry) under Goal 4 and its related actions in the Agriculture and Community Forestry section.

## Educational Facilities

- Section 4.7 provides a good overview of the child school system and childcare programs in Essex Junction; this should reference recent legislation such as Act 73.
- **Recommended:** Additional information could be added about adult educational opportunities.
- **Recommended:** The Education Goals section should be rewritten and reorganized so that there are discrete actions associated with every goal. Some of the goals read more as actions and could be grouped under a broader goal.

## Child Care

- The plan demonstrates that Essex Junction has taken an active role in providing safe and affordable child care in the community through the partnership between Essex Westford School District and Essex Junction Recreation and Parks.
- **Optional:** As noted in Education above, more could be said about current challenges in child care and its importance to meeting economic development goals.

## Implementation program

- **Recommended:** Chapter 5 generally, and specifically Table 13 (Implementation Schedule), should be updated to remove or document actions that have been completed, and new actions should be added based on revisions to the plan. See the Implementation section of this memo for further comments on how the plan has been implemented since it was adopted.

## Development Trends and Surrounding Municipalities

- **Recommended:** Sections 3.3 (Recent Trends) and 3.4 (Future Trends) should be updated with the latest population and demographic data and forecasts.
- **Required:** Chapter 1.5's analysis of consistency with adjoining municipal plans and land uses along boundaries is generally sufficient to meet statutory requirements. However, more specificity is needed for boundaries with the Town of Essex. Also note that the ECOS Regional Plan is scheduled for re adoption in the summer of 2026, and language regarding compatibility with the regional plan will need to be updated especially due to the changes to regional future land use areas.

## Energy

In addition to the required energy element for municipal plans under 24 V.S.A. § 4382, municipal plans may include an enhanced energy plan or refer to a stand-alone enhanced energy plan under [24 V.S.A. § 4352\(c\)](#). If a Municipal Plan meets the Public Service Department's Energy Planning Standards for Municipal Plans, it will be given an affirmative "determination of energy compliance,"

and its land conservation measures, and specific policies will be given “substantial deference” in the Public Utility Commission’s review of whether an energy project meets the orderly development criterion in the Section 248 process. There are several new requirements that need to be incorporated into enhanced energy plans ([see updated Energy Planning Standards for Municipal Plans here](#)):

- **Required:** The energy section needs to be updated with the new goals in Vermont’s 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan. Here is some sample language:
  - *The state’s [2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan \(CEP\)](#) is structured to meet the greenhouse gas requirements of [Vermont’s Global Warming Solutions Act](#), and to be consistent with [Vermont’s Climate Action Plan](#) as required by 10 V.S.A. § 592. The State’s energy and climate goals are:*
    - *To obtain 90% of all energy across all sectors (transportation, heating and electricity) from renewable sources by 2050, with the interim goals of 25% renewable by 2025 and 45% renewable by 2035.*
      - *In the transportation sector, 10% of energy needs will be met with renewable energy by 2025, and 45% by 2040.*
      - *In the thermal sector, 30% of energy needs will be met with renewable energy by 2025, and 70% by 2042.*
      - *In the electric sector, 100% of energy needs will be met with carbon-free resources by 2032, with at least 75% from renewable energy.*
    - *Reductions in greenhouse gas emissions:*
      - *26% reduction from 2005 levels by 2025;*
      - *40% reduction from 1990 levels by 2030; and*
      - *80% reduction from 1990 levels by 2050.*
- **Required:** Updated energy and emissions data for the municipality must be incorporated into the energy plan section. [CCRPC’s Municipal Energy Data Guides can be found here](#). Note that some data may not be available, or still combined with the Town of Essex.
- **Required:** Energy Planning Standard 10 in the [Energy Planning Standards for Municipal Plans](#) was added requiring an assessment of the potential equity impacts of energy, land use, and transportation planning policies. Because of this, a commitment to considering how actions may impact vulnerable populations should be added. Here is some sample language and a diagram illustrating the concept.
  - *Certain populations are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and to policies that are developed to address it. As actions and policies are considered, it is important to ask the questions below to empower more inclusive decision-making:*



Who is helped?



Who is harmed?



Who is missing?

Things to consider from the State of Vermont Climate Council's [Guiding Principles for a Just Transition](#):



All recommendations directly identify and support relevant impacted and frontline communities.



Investments, policies, administration, and oversight tackle the needs of impacted people first, providing the greatest benefits of transitions to these communities.



Future climate goals must be broad for the well-being of all Vermonters and include targeted strategies for different groups that take into account their specific histories, sociocultural and economic realities.



Where plans and policies create burdens, these burdens are shifted away from impacted communities.

- For more information, see the [State of Vermont Climate Council's Guiding Principles for a Just Transition](#).
- **Required:** Energy Planning Standards 12B and C were updated to clarify that Confirmed Vernal Pools must be mapped as State Known Constraints. Unconfirmed Vernal Pools must be mapped as State Possible Constraints. “Highest Priority Surface Water and Riparian Areas” from VT Conservation Design were also added as a State Possible Constraint.
  - Note: This requirement is met if the municipality uses the maps provided by CCRPC in the Municipal Energy Data Guide.
- **Required:** Energy Planning Standard 13F was added to require plans to evaluate if forest blocks and habitat connectors, as defined in [24 V.S.A. § 4303\(34\)](#) and [§ 4303\(36\)](#), should be treated as possible constraints in the land conservation measures and siting policies.
  - The Comprehensive Plan refers to Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) in identifying forest blocks, though habitat connectors should be more clearly identified (perhaps in reference to the Connectivity Blocks, Surface Waters and Riparian Areas, and/or Wildlife Road Crossings elements in VCD).
  - Also, as required under Act 174 and the PSD standards, Appendix D (Essex Community Energy Plan) already lists as State Possible Constraints the *Highest Priority* elements of Vermont Conservation Design – Interior Forest Blocks, Connectivity Blocks, and Physical Landscape Blocks (which are now called “Geological Diversity Blocks”). As noted above, Surface Water and Riparian Areas should be added to this list to comply with the latest standards.
  - With the *updated* requirements of Energy Planning Standard 13F, the municipality should evaluate whether VCD’s *Priority* Interior Forest Blocks, Connectivity Blocks, Surface Water and Riparian Areas, and Geological Diversity Blocks should also be included as possible constraints. As part of this analysis, the municipality should:
    - Determine whether Priority elements of VCD should be protected from development to achieve state and local goals;

- If so, establish specific land conservation measures that specify how impacts to these resources by any type of development (not just renewable energy development) must be avoided, minimized, or mitigated;
  - If land conservation measures are applied to Priority forest blocks and habitat connectors, determine whether there is still sufficient land available for renewable energy development.
- **Optional:** The energy element of the 2019 Comprehensive Plan is mainly addressed in Appendix D, the “Essex Community Energy Plan,” which was drafted as a joint document with the Town of Essex. The City should consider whether to update Appendix D or merge it into the main Comprehensive Plan. Either way, the Climate Change section of Chapter 4.5 (Natural Environmental Resources) and its associated goals and objectives should be consolidated with the energy section.
  - **Required:** The content of Appendix D should be updated to reflect the fact that the municipalities are now separated, including removal of any policies specific to the Town of Essex such as:
    - Local Known Constraints, including:
      - Slopes of 20% and steeper
      - Recreation / Conservation areas within the Resource Preservation District – Industrial
    - Local Possible Constraints, including:
      - Industrial designated areas of the Resource Preservation District – Industrial
      - Scenic Resource Protection Overlay District
      - Slopes between 15-20%
      - Vermont Conservation Design *Priority* Landscape Scale Components (forest blocks, connectivity blocks, surface water and riparian areas, and physically diverse landscapes)
    - Reference to the Town of Essex zoning and overlay districts and local constraints in the Siting Policies.
2. **Required:** The Siting Policies in Appendix D (Essex Community Energy Plan, adopted 2019) currently list the Designated Village Center Historic District as a local constraint based on the Design Control Best Practices in effect. This was not included as a possible constraint in CCRPC’s 2018 Regional Plan, nor in the draft 2026 regional plan, nor in the energy mapping for Essex Junction’s municipal energy data packet. This is because the language in siting policy 6 does not indicate that development in this area is prohibited or limited, only that it must follow design control practices
3. **Optional:** Consider including new actions such as:
- Consider adopting [Vermont Building Energy Stretch Code](#) for all development in the Zoning Regulations.

- Consider implementing a minimum housing code ordinance for rental housing. Ensure that new policies do not increase costs for low-income residents and work with landlords to meet targets.
- Consider adopting an ordinance regulating the heat sources for new buildings like the City of South Burlington. [https://www.southburlingtonvt.gov/news\\_detail\\_T7\\_R1061.php](https://www.southburlingtonvt.gov/news_detail_T7_R1061.php). Ensure that new policies do not increase costs for low-income residents. Consider exemptions for affordable housing.
- Ensure that the Land Development Code allows charging stations wherever there is parking and update sign standards to encourage installation of electric vehicle charging stations.
- Require EV ready buildings in the LDC – adopt a specific use standard for multi-unit dwellings that requires those uses to provide resident access to EV charging.

## Housing

- See comments in the “Statutory Changes” section of this memo for the following:
  - Information on housing targets and how they relate to regional land use categories, designations, and Act 250. Descriptions of the state designation program should be updated under the new program
  - Recommendations for more specific actions the City can take to address the needs of low- and moderate-income households
  - New requirements for housing data that must be included in municipal plans. Note that data should be updated throughout this section, and it should address the increase in demand the area has seen since 2020. Also, It may no longer be necessary to include data for the Town of Essex, though it may be helpful to compare the Junction to the county for select data points.
- Policy changes regarding housing in the study areas of the Connect the Junction plan and zoning code updates, which were just adopted, should be incorporated into this section.

## Economic Development

- **Optional:** References for projects, data, and links can be updated:
  - What is the status of the Crescent Connector project?
  - Is there a more current list of how many small businesses are in EJ than the 2019 List of Businesses?
  - The inventory of existing businesses referenced in the plan on the City’s website is broken.
  - References to the ECOS Future Land Use map should be updated.
  - References to Essex Town can be updated.

- **Recommended:** Consider using the [Urban Institute's Upward Mobility Framework](#) to review this section for principles and actions the City can take to advance economic development and equity goals.

## Flood Resilience

- **Recommended:** The descriptions of floodplain and river corridor regulation in Chapter 4.6 should be updated in light of the Flood Safety Act of 2024. Also, consider explaining more clearly why Essex Junction regulates floodplains through the National Flood Insurance Program (e.g., protect life and property, make flood insurance available to residents, clearer connection to ERAF).
- **Recommended:** The Chittenden County All-Hazards Mitigation Plan was updated in 2022 and will be updated again in 2027. These latest versions should be referenced in Chapter 4.6, and new goals as well as progress on actions from the prior plans should be discussed.
- **Optional:** Consider adding the following text or similar: Essex Junction is also a member of the Chittenden County Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC). The REMC provides a forum for Chittenden County municipalities to coordinate emergency planning and preparedness activities to improve the region's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from all disasters.

## Maps

All maps should be updated with the most current parcel data, road data and other information available from the Vermont Center for Geographic Information, Agency of Natural Resources, and other state agencies. Consider the following improvements for specific maps.

### Map 1: Natural Resources

- **Optional:** Consider adding Wetlands

### Map 4: Transportation

- **Required:** Review the [Pearl St Multimodal Improvement Study](#) to identify if any transportation alternatives should be included on Map 4.

### Map 5: Community Facilities

- **Required:** Update the childcare locations. The source for current childcare locations is [Vermont's Childcare Information System](#).
  - Remove the Summit Street School (remove from Map 9 as well)
  - Consider adding parks

### Map 6: Non-Motorized Transportation

- **Required:** Review the [Transit Oriented Development Master Plan](#) to identify whether future bike/ped and crosswalk infrastructure should be added to the map



- **Required:** Remove future infrastructure features if they have been built and show them as existing.

**Map 9: Existing Land Use**

- **Optional:** Consider adding conserved areas.

**Map 10: Future Land Use**

- **Required:** See Act181 discussion above
- **Required:** Add Future Land Use Tier 1A and B areas

## Implementation

As part of confirming the municipality's planning process, CCRPC reviews local progress on implementing a municipal plan, and whether the actions taken are consistent with the state's planning goals (24 V.S.A. § 4302).

On 1/29/2026, CCRPC staff met with Essex Junction staff and a representative of the Planning Commission to discuss implementation of the 2019 Comprehensive Plan. The City noted that the plan contains many goals and actions that were broad, vague, or did not provide a measurable outcome. A priority of the upcoming plan update will be to review the actions to ensure they follow the "S.M.A.R.T." mnemonic: Strategic, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and achievable within the Timeframe of the plan.

Regardless, CCRPC staff have determined that the City has actively implemented its municipal plan through the following notable achievements that were envisioned in the 2019 plan (and some that were not).

- Resolved the question of merger with the Town of Essex, which ultimately resulted in separation of the municipalities and a clearer vision for the future of each.
- Finalized design and constructed the Crescent Connector, an extension of Railroad Street on the southeast side of Five Corners. This has improved traffic flow in peak times and for some pass-through traffic to this busy intersection while opening up new opportunities for mixed-use development in the core of the community.
- Continued improving the urban tree canopy through annual plantings in coordination with private property owners. Also, continue preparing for emerald ash borer in neighborhoods with high prevalence of ash trees.
- Conducted the Connect the Junction Transit-Oriented Development Plan and adopted regulations to increase development intensity along transit corridors to support ridership. This plan also identifies opportunities for bike- and pedestrian-oriented improvements.
- Maintained maps of walking and biking routes, and established bike locker rentals for the municipal parking lot on Railroad Avenue in support of multi-modal transportation goals.
- Advanced the Design Five Corners project by acquiring land for a pocket park to support pedestrian activity in support of local businesses. Also, experimented with closure of Main Street between Five Corners and Railroad Street through the "Meet Me on Main" event.
- Expanded outdoor access to the Brownell Library during the pandemic by constructing a heated, shaded pavilion.
- Continued to conduct TV scoping of sewer lines and conducted an assessment of the water supply system for lead piping.
- Renovated the municipal offices at 2 Lincoln Street to address building maintenance issues and update interiors while expanding space for Essex CHIPS and the Senior Center.
- Explored the adoption of a rental registry to maintain quality of rental housing and better document permanently affordable units.

## Compatibility of Local and Regional Future Land Use Maps

To grant regional approval of a plan, [24 V.S.A. § 4350\(b\)\(1\)](#) states that an RPC must find the plan:

- (A) is consistent with the goals established in section 4302 of this title;*
- (B) is compatible with its regional plan;*
- (C) is compatible with approved plans of other municipalities in the region; and*
- (D) contains all the elements included in subdivisions 4382(a)(1)-(12) of this title.*

The standard of review to determine “compatibility” is defined in [24 V.S.A. § 4302\(f\)\(2\)](#). According to statute, a plan is “compatible” with another plan if:

*“...the plan in question, as implemented, will not significantly reduce the desired effect of the implementation of the other plan...”*

With the creation of new Regional Future Land Use maps using the Act 181 mapping criteria, CCRPC has received many questions from municipalities about whether their local future land use maps will be compatible. Cities and towns have also wondered how the regional plan will incorporate local changes if the regional plan is only required to be updated every eight years. Here are a few things to keep in mind about plan compatibility:

- The Regional Future Land Use map was built largely on municipal future land use maps and plans, within the bounds of the statutory definitions.
- CCRPC intends to review municipal plans for conformance much as it has in the past: by looking at how the definitions and purposes of land use categories in local plans align with the definitions and purposes of categories in the Regional Future Land Use map. Local plans do not need to use the same categories as the regional plan, but may if they wish. CCRPC will be looking particularly at two general categories of land use – areas planned for growth and rural areas – to ensure alignment.
- In reviewing for compatibility, the RPC will look particularly at whether there are local changes to areas planned for growth (villages, neighborhoods). This is important because it indicates areas where a municipality may wish to apply for Tier 1A or opt-in to Tier 1B exemption.
- CCRPC recognizes that many communities were undertaking plan updates during or immediately after the Act 181 outreach process, and that many places will be updating their future land use maps, considering Tier 1B designation, and making other changes to local plans. CCRPC will monitor how this process works, or does not work, over the next several years. CCRPC may need to develop a process to update the Regional Future Land Use map to incorporate changes to local future land use maps as plans are updated.

# Implementing the TOD Master Plan: Land Development Code Updates

*Planning Commission*  
February 5th, 2026



CONNECT THE **JUNCTION**

# Agenda



framework

1. Brief background
2. Code walkthrough and approach
3. Focus areas
  - a. Code Structure
  - b. Form-Based Standards
4. Next Steps



framework

OVERVIEW

# Project Background

# Project Background



framework

## What is transit-oriented development (TOD)?

TOD focuses on creating dense, walkable, mixed-use development near transit, creating vibrant, connected communities that enjoy easy access to jobs and services.

- Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan adopted December 2025
- Plan calls for increased height, density, and connectivity
- Code updates are a primary tool for implementation

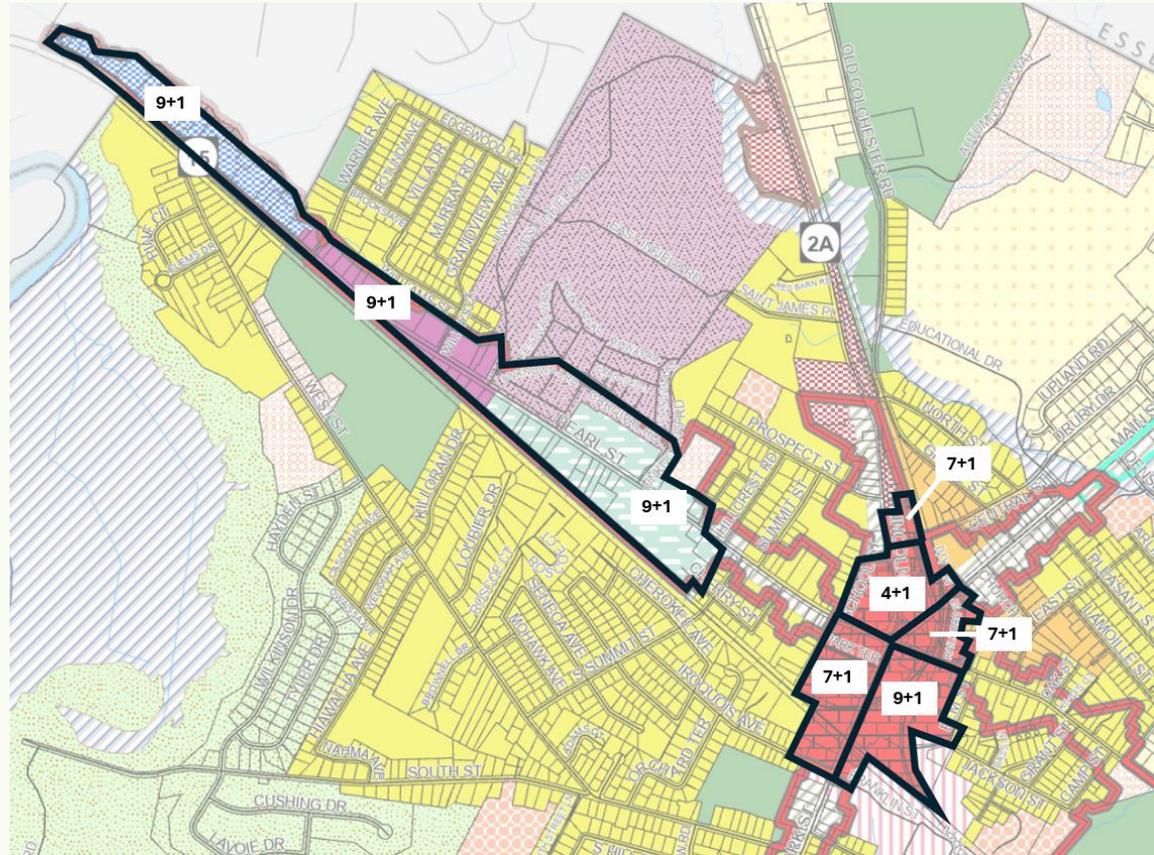


# TOD Plan Adoption



framework

- Increased building heights in Village Center and TOD zones
- More housing near transit
- Stronger pedestrian and multimodal connections
- Active public realm and local economy



**Adopted Height Framework**

+1 indicates Statewide Affordability Housing Height Bonus

# Code Updates: **Goals**



framework

- Ensure pedestrian comfort as density increases
- Protect and maintain historic character
- Support active, inviting streets
- Address specific Council concerns:
  - Transitioning between new high-density areas and adjacent low-density residential zones
  - Preventing long, monotonous facades
  - Establishing pedestrian and multimodal transit connections
- Ensure enforceable outcomes
  - Improving predictability and efficiency in the development review process
  - Building in these requirements as clear, objective standards



framework

APPROACH

# Land Development Code Updates

# What We Reviewed



- Existing standards for applicable zones: Village Center (Section 604) and TOD (Section 608)
- Overlays that apply to the study area: Design Review Overlay District (DRO, Section 620) and Historic Preservation Overlay District (HRO, Section 621)

Overlaps

Subjective standards

Alignment and/or gaps with TOD Plan actions

# Key Recommendations



1. Clarify the role and applicability of historic preservation versus character and compatibility
2. Improve predictability and efficiency in development review
3. Replace subjective design/character language with objective standards
4. Implement the TOD Master Plan

# Key Recommendations



- 1. Clarify the role and applicability of historic preservation versus character and compatibility**
  2. Improve predictability and efficiency in development review
  3. Replace subjective design/character language with objective standards
  4. Implement the TOD Master Plan
- Replace broad application of DRO and HRO with clearer, more targeted standards
  - Limit Historic Preservation (HRO) standards to designated historic resources
  - Address neighborhood character and compatibility through zone-specific form-based standards, not preservation review

# Key Recommendations



framework

1. Clarify the role and applicability of historic preservation versus character and compatibility
2. **Improve predictability and efficiency in development review**
  - Eliminate overlapping review frameworks (dissolve DRO)
  - Consolidate and translate DRO goals into objective form-based standards for each applicable zone
  - Re-establish administrative approval pathways for projects that meet clear, objective standards
3. **Replace subjective design/character language with objective standards**
4. Implement the TOD Master Plan

# Key Recommendations



framework

1. Clarify the role and applicability of historic preservation versus character and compatibility
2. Improve predictability and efficiency in development review
3. Replace subjective design review with objective standards
4. **Implement the TOD Master Plan** - Add form-based standards that encourage active, pedestrian-oriented streetscapes and multi-modal connections

# Key Recommendations



1. Clarify the role and applicability of historic preservation versus character and compatibility
2. Improve predictability and efficiency in development review
3. Replace subjective design review with objective standards
4. Implement the TOD Master Plan

Simplify code structure

Implement form-based standards



framework

TASK 1

# Simplify Code Structure

# Current



framework

- *All proposals* in VC and TOD zones routed to DRB (due to HRO and DRO frameworks)
- Dependent on applicant interpretation and DRB discretion
  - Unclear where historic status applies
  - Subjective design criteria

## Development Activities construction & reconstruction

<5 housing units on a single lot  
or food trucks

anything else  
5+ housing units

**ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW**  
LDC 502.B

**SITE PLAN REVIEW**  
LDC 502.F

**DESIGN REVIEW**  
LDC 620.C

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW**  
LDC 621.C

*proposals in VC and TOD zones*

**PERMIT APPROVAL**

## Exterior alterations or demolition LDC 604.E



# Proposed



framework

- Apply HRO only to clearly identified historic resources
- Regulate design and compatibility with form-based standards applied by zone
  - Option for additional or more strict standards (including exterior alterations/demolitions if appropriate) in Village Center and/or in designated historic subareas
- Re-establish administrative approval pathways
  - Form-based standards ensure consistent, objective application
- Reserve DRB review for projects that require discretion
  - Consider redefining threshold beyond "5+ housing units" - by historic subarea, height, scale, demolition activity

## Development Activities construction & reconstruction

<5 housing units on a single lot  
or food trucks

anything else  
5+ housing units

**ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW**  
LDC 502.B

**SITE PLAN REVIEW**  
LDC 502.F

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW**  
LDC 621.C

*proposals for historic properties*

**PERMIT APPROVAL**

## Exterior alterations or demolition LDC 604.E





framework

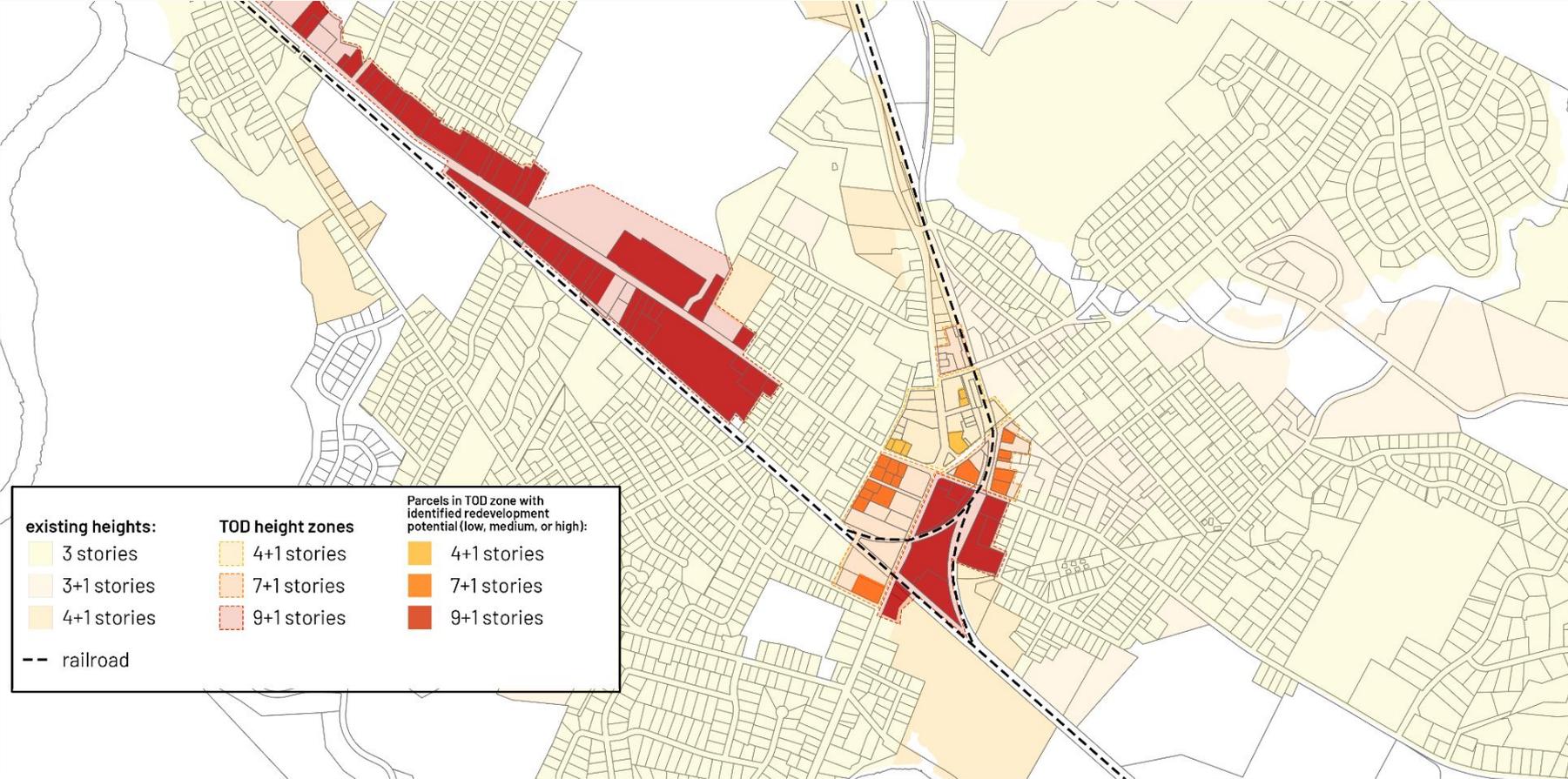
## TASK 2

# Implement Form-Based Standards

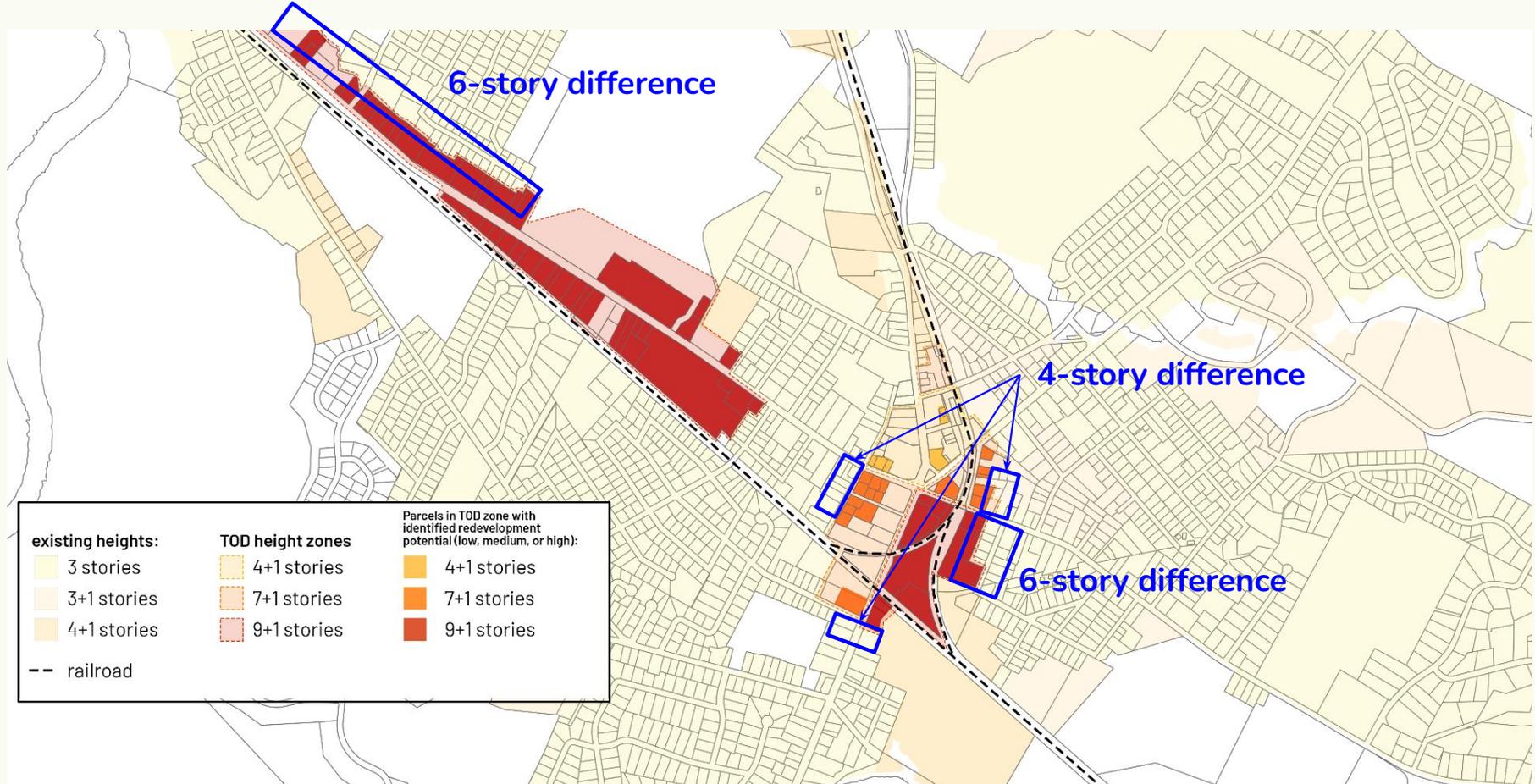
# Managing height transitions



framework



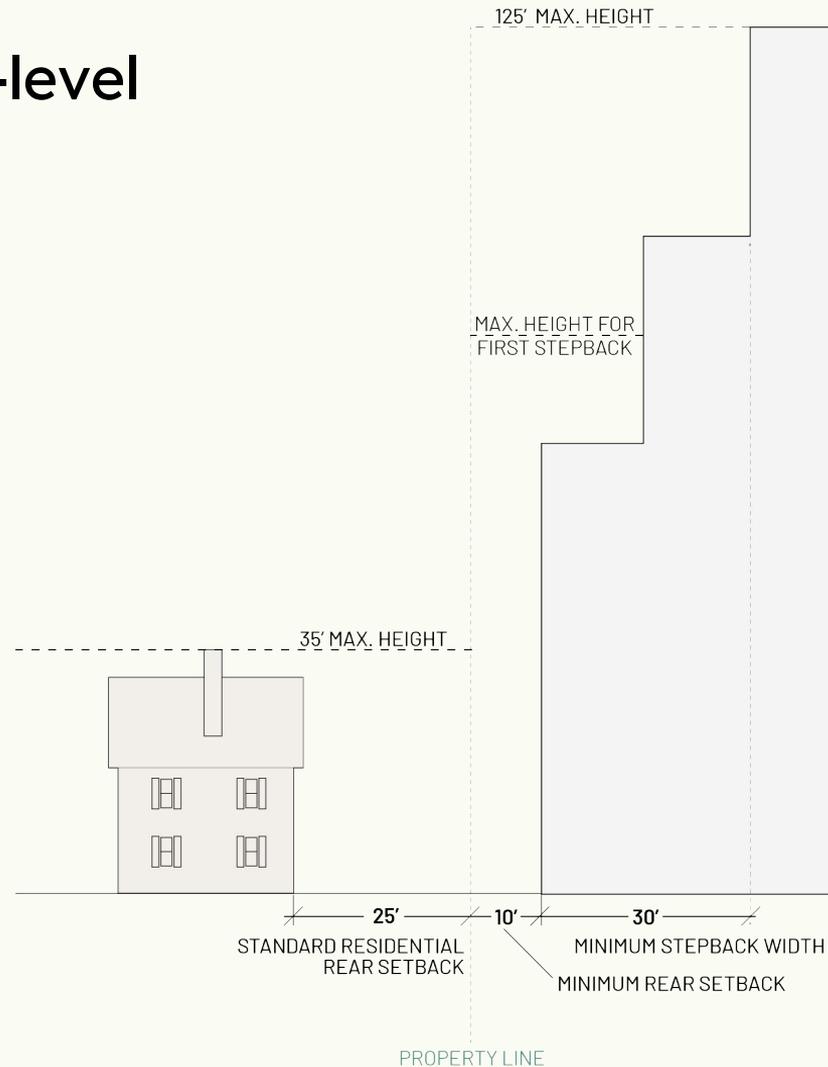
# Managing height transitions



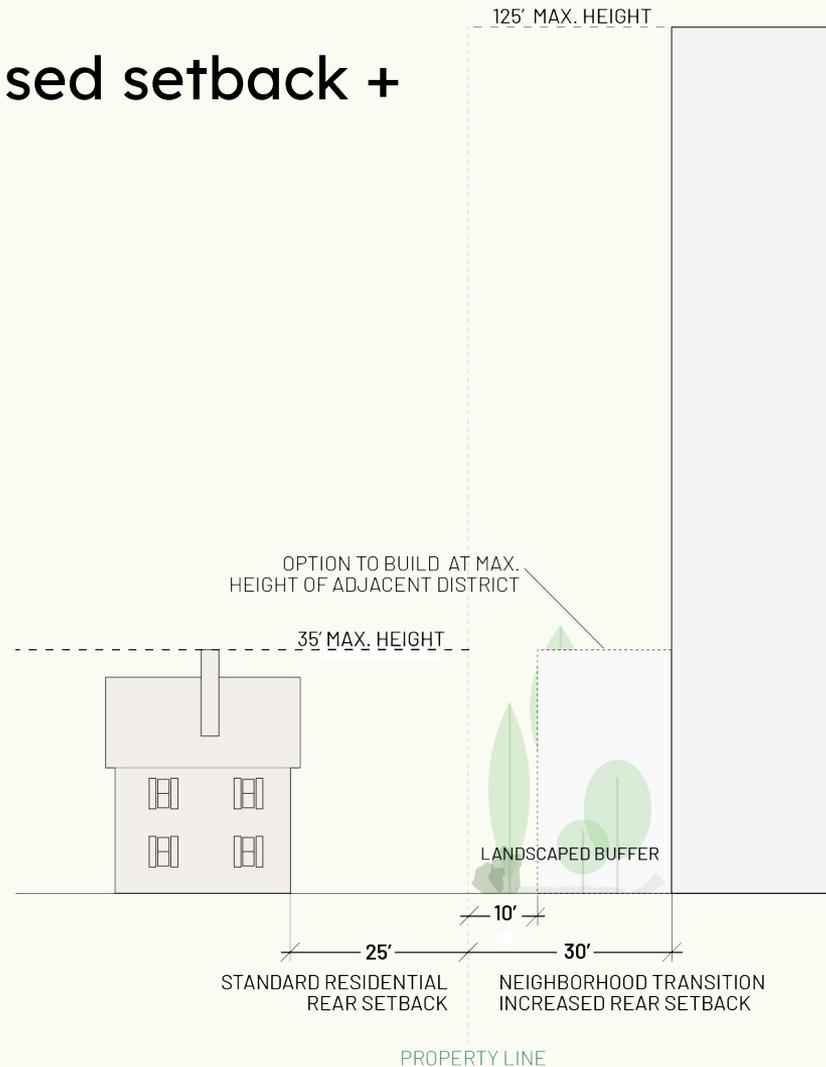
# Option 1: Upper-level stepbacks



framework



# Option 2: Increased setback + landscaping



# Preventing long, monotonous facades



framework

- Limit facade length (maximum of 120-180' long)
- Require articulation
- Activate street level

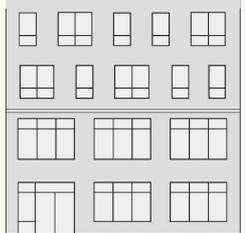
# Facade articulation



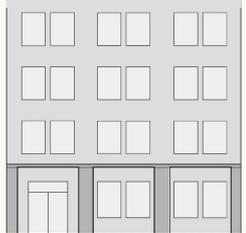
vertically oriented patterns



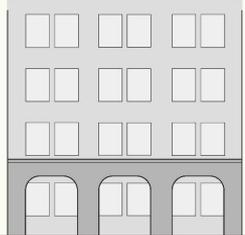
horizontal articulation



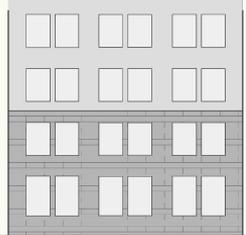
fenestration pattern



columns or pilasters

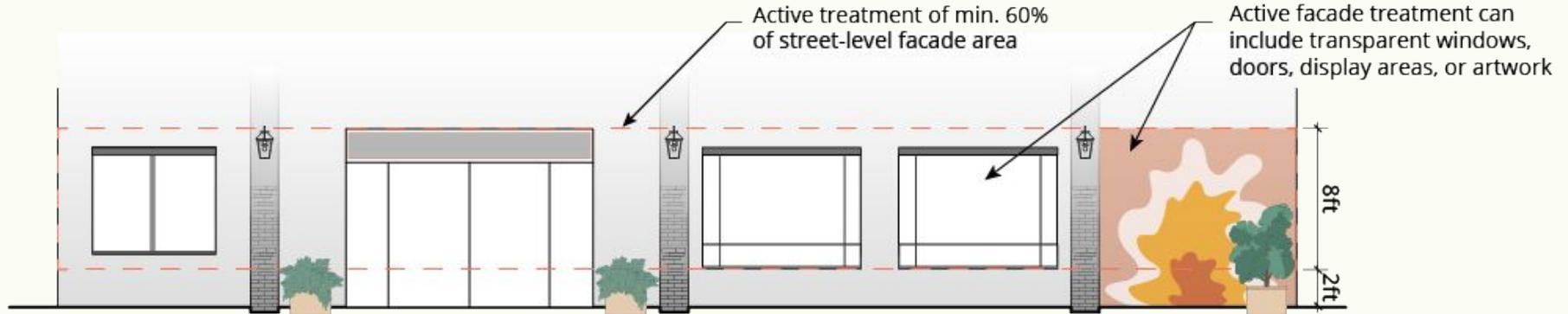


arcade



change in materials

# Transparency + active street level



Different upper- and street-level transparency requirements  
Pedestrian amenities integrated into facade

# Strengthening pedestrian and multimodal connections



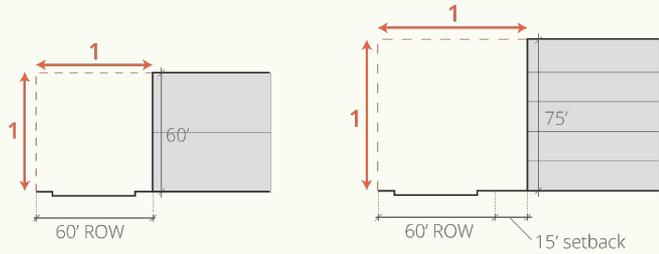
framework

- Support human-scaled building massing along streets without over-prescribing architecture → **street room standards**
- Activate ground floors to create a connected, engaging, and walkable public realm → **frontage types**

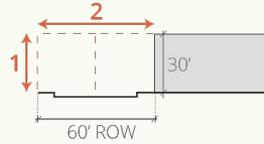
# Street Room standards



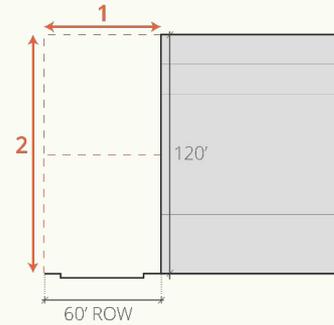
preferred:



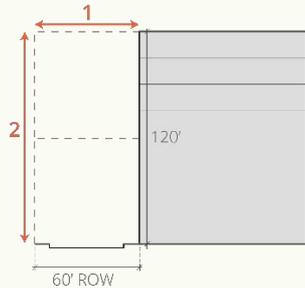
allowed:



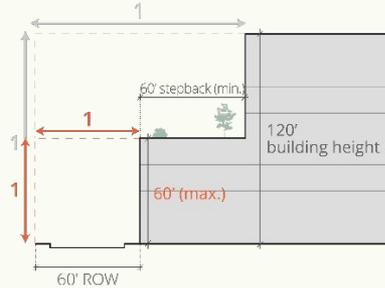
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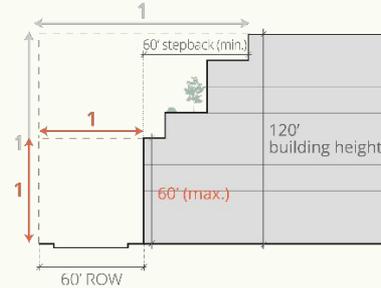
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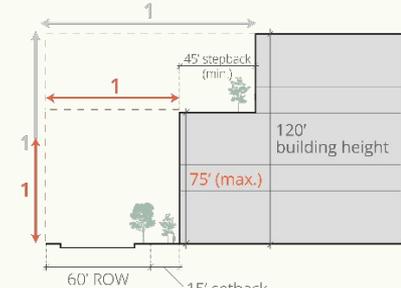
options for compliance:



mid-level stepback

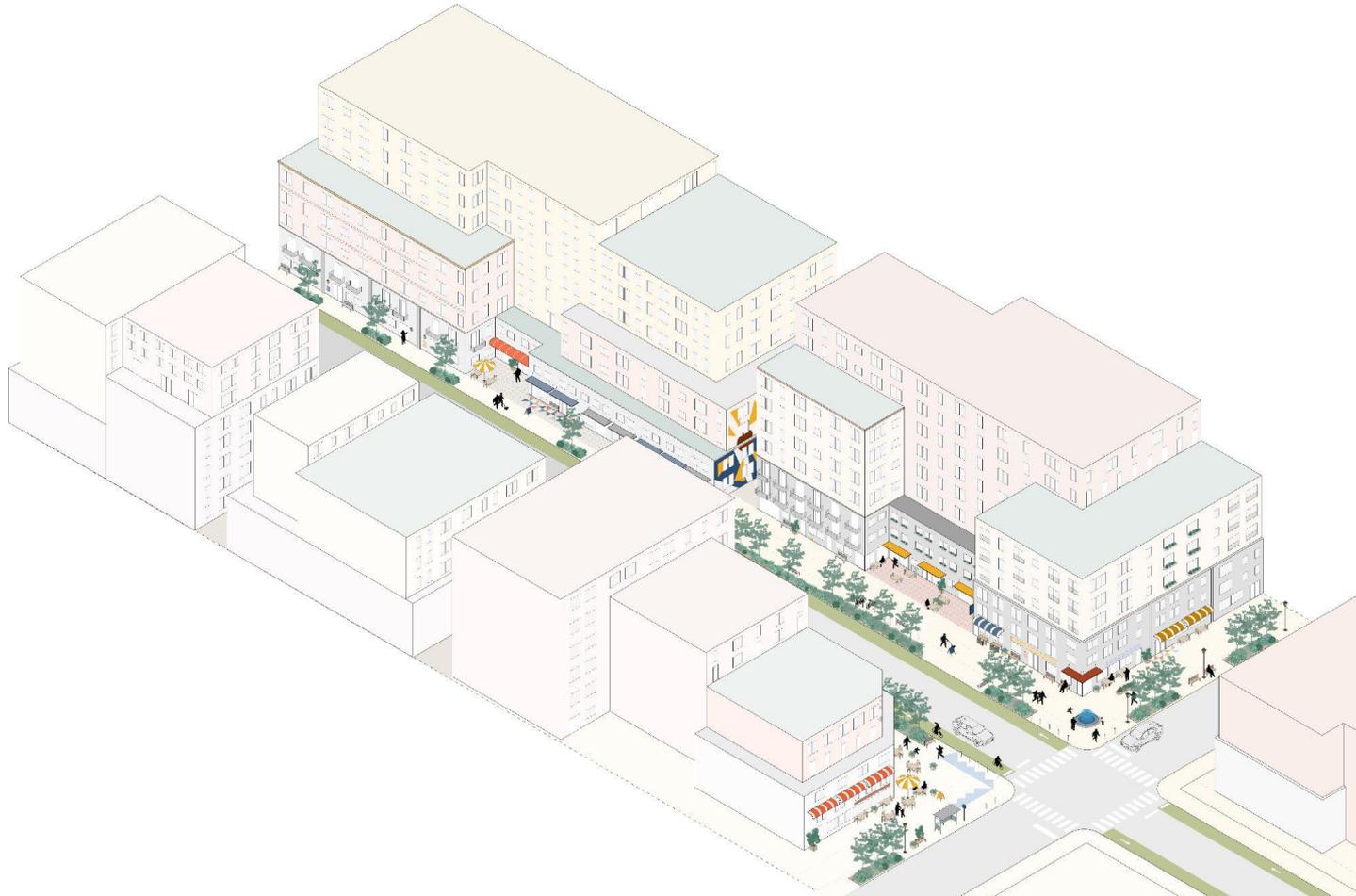


stair-step stepback



street-level setback + stepback

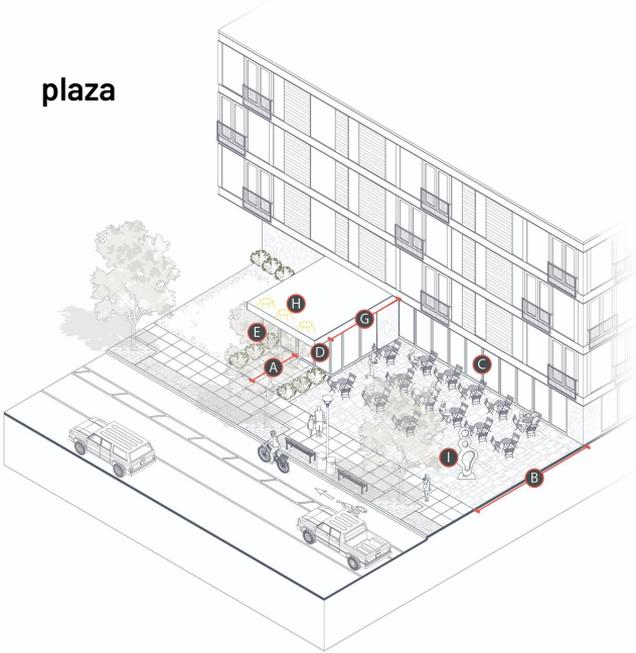
# Street Room standards



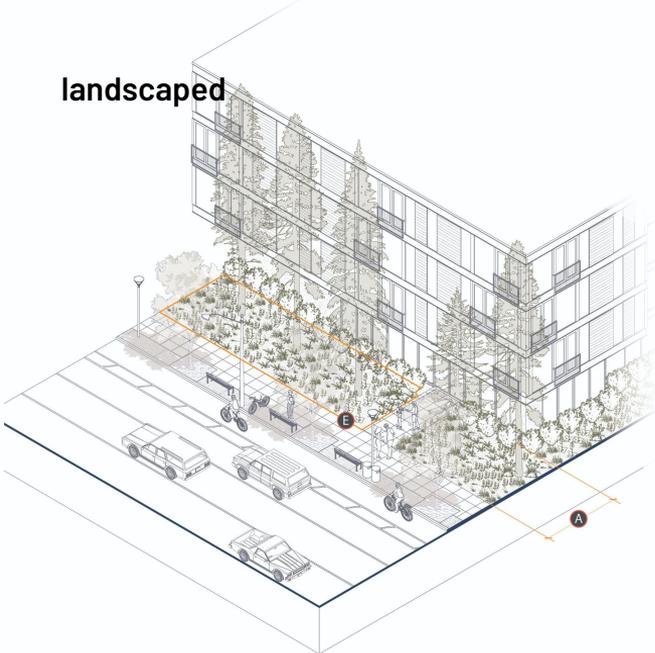
# Frontage Types



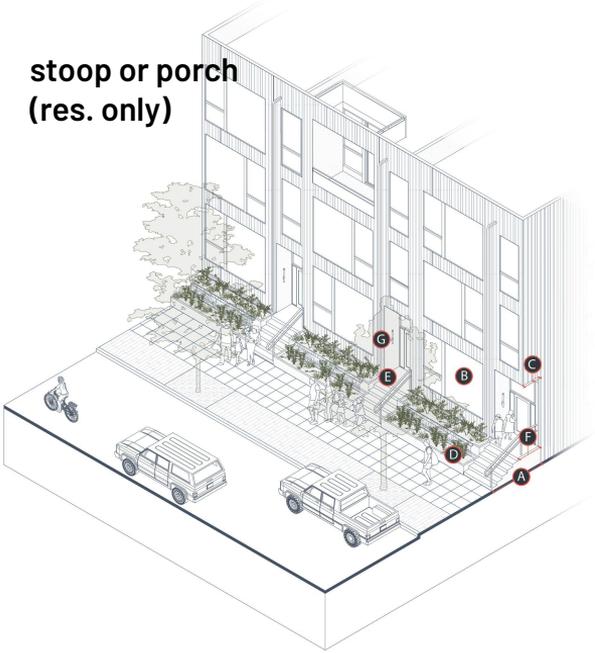
plaza



landscaped



stoop or porch  
(res. only)



with different dimensions, transparencies, and pedestrian amenities applied

# Frontage Types

Variety of plantings

## pedestrian-oriented frontage



Tables and chairs

Artwork

Planted buffer

Seating

Clear and ADA access

Pedestrian-scale lighting

Approved unit pavers, distinctive pattern

# Promoting ‘good’ design and neighborhood compatibility



framework

- Encourage historic compatibility without being too restrictive or subjective
- Focus on material palettes and transitions
- Provide optional design guidelines to illustrate desired character without prescribing specific details or subjective standards



# Next Steps

# For Consideration



framework

- Process and Review - **DR0 elimination and HRO simplification, re-opened administrative pathways**
- Scale and Transitions - **stepbacks vs. setbacks and buffers**
- Facades - **maximum lengths, articulation, transparency**
- Public realm - **street room standards for modulation, frontage types**
- Zone-specific form-based standards:
  - Are additional historic compatibility standards needed for the Village Center and/or historic 'subareas' ?
  - How do we want to differentiate future design character between Village Center and TOD?
  - Where should design standards be fully codified vs. supported by optional design guidelines? (to balance design quality, variety, development flexibility, and predictable review)
- ***Anything Missing?***

# Appendix: HRO Applicability



## B. Applicability

These standards are in addition to the underlying standards of the base zoning district. The historic preservation design standards in Section [621.D.2.] of this Code are applicable to **demolition, alterations, additions or redevelopment** of **buildings within the Design Review and Historic Preservation Overlay District and structures on Map 2 in the Comprehensive Plan**

(([https://www.essexjunction.org/fileadmin/files/Planning\\_Zoning/Map2\\_Historic\\_Sites\\_20190130.pdf](https://www.essexjunction.org/fileadmin/files/Planning_Zoning/Map2_Historic_Sites_20190130.pdf)), **or listed on the State or National Registers of Historic Places.** The following buildings are exempt:

1. Buildings that have been de-listed or determined by the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation for state and federal regulatory program purposes to not meet the State Register Criteria for Evaluation and are not eligible for listing in the State Register of Historic Places.
2. Buildings where the historical significance has been compromised and is no longer relevant. A letter must be provided by a qualified Historic Preservation consultant stating this case.

