

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
MARCH 5, 2026
APPROVED MARCH 31, 2026**

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

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Kirstie Paschall

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Maya Balassa, Marshall Distel, Darren Schibler

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

None.

4. MINUTES

a. February 5th, 2026

DIANE CLEMENS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to approve the minutes of January 5th, 20206, as presented. Motion passed 4-0.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Introduction and Discussion of Comprehensive Plan Engagement Plan

Mr. Schibler, Senior Planner & Project Manager and Ms. Balassa, Planner, both of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), presented. Mr. Schibler said that the CCRPC will be reviewing the engagement plan so that they can move forward with engaging the community. He provided a review of the project process, noting that the CCRPC is currently conducting a mapping analysis and developing a public engagement plan. Mr. Schibler said that the draft engagement plan will provide a review of prior engagement, discuss key themes/questions, include focus groups, determine the interested and affected parties and show a timeline for engagement. He believes that the focus groups will help to determine specific actions that the City can take to meet its goals. Other options for “quick touch” engagement will be provided, which will help to ensure that residents agree with the path that the City is on. Mr. McCormick said that Essex Junction has been approved as a pilot community with the Climate Change Office to integrate climate change into the municipal plan.. He suggested that 50% of engagement should be with those with lived experience, such as BIPOC, youth, seniors, low-income, etc. Mr. Schibler suggested that the work of Simone Bedford be integrated. She is working with Essex Junction to enhance economic mobility and advancement. Ms. Bedford may be able to assist with facilitating a business and economic vitality focus group as well.

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Mr. Schibler discussed the focus group planning, noting that he would like these to be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based) actions. Mr. Massey asked how the plan will utilize SMART goals while also providing a reasonable-length plan. Mr. Schibler said that he hopes to take broader and open-ended goals and replace them with more specific and action-oriented ones. Public prioritization of goals can assist with developing this. Ms. Juodisius suggested keeping the broader goals with actionable steps. This plan is a roadmap, and it will be the City's responsibility to implement the actions, while working with several other organizations and non-profits. Focus groups will begin in May. Mr. McCormick suggested additional focus groups above the 2-3 meetings, as time may be needed to inform all of recent planning efforts. A PC member will attend each meeting as facilitators. All are welcome to attend; however, efforts will be made to engage those from marginalized backgrounds.

Focus groups will be held on housing. The PC suggested reaching out to Maura Collins, a resident who leads Vermont Housing Finance Agency, as well as local developers. Stipends for participants are available. Mr. Massey encouraged the City to involve smaller-scale developers and landlords in the process. He said that he would like to see a broader focus than just on building heights. Ms. Clemens encouraged the New American community and Essex High School business club to be engaged in this process. Mr. McCormick said that landlords of older buildings should be engaged, especially with the energy focus group. Ms. Juodisius suggested mortgage lenders or realtors, as well as a diverse spectrum of both renter and home owners. Mr. Schibler said that he met with Ms. Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director with the City of Essex Junction. Ms. Snellenberger said that this will help to grow internal work plans and move the strategic plan forward. Mr. McCormick said that he would like to facilitate the energy and climate resilience focus group.

The focus group on energy & climate resilience will discuss the ambitious energy and greenhouse gas targets, unpredictable weather, infrastructure, and the role of the City. Subject matters experts, youth representatives, business owners in the energy industry, Tree Advisory Committee members, health care providers, gardeners/farmers, state Forest, Parks & Recreation staff, the Health Officer/Police Department, Efficiency Vermont/CVOEO were all suggested as people/groups to engage. Mr. Yuen expressed concern about the size of the list, and the amount of work involved in contacting all of these parties. Mr. Schibler said that an event flyer can be prepared and shared. Mr. McCormick suggested meeting with some partners, such as the Tree Advisory Committee, in a different environment. The focus group on business and economic mobility will focus both on traditional business development and on economics in the community as a whole. Mr. McCormick said that it can be difficult to engage the small business population, especially New Americans. He also suggested better engaging with current events in Essex Junction and possibly hosting a gathering at a local restaurant. Mr. Yuen will see if any City Councilors would be interested in participating in the focus groups. The engagement plan will also be provided to the City Council in the reading file. Mr. Schibler said that CCRPC staff will prepare an invitation. All PC members will send Mr. Schibler suggestions for focus group participants. Mr. McCormick recommended that all Commissioners read Williston's Comprehensive Plan.

b. Introduction of Draft Form-Based Code Proposal

Mr. Yuen said that the form-based code proposal will be discussed further at the next meeting, and that the consultant will be in attendance. Mr. Yuen said that some of these changes may require changes to the future land use map in the Comprehensive Plan. He said that changes that are not in opposition to any existing documents can be presented to the City Council for adoption earlier. Mr. Yuen said that the West

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Street pump station needs upgrades, and that there may be changes required to accommodate growth. There may be a need to drive growth into the City Center where there is additional sewer capacity. Provisional allocations for sewer use on properties that are not constructed were discussed. Ms. Clemens and Mr. Hamilton provided a variety of edits and clarifications to the draft document. Mr. McCormick encouraged the addition of more diagrams and said that it needed to become more readable. Mr. Massey said that Essex Junction has asked for a higher level of detail, however this detail makes it inaccessible to many people. Mr. Yuen said that it is important for those doing all levels of development to be able to read the document. He said that he is most interested in hearing feedback on what should be done prior to the next meeting. Mr. McCormick discussed the applicability of these documents to developers of different sizes. Mr. Yuen said that four units or less are staff approved, and no professional engineering plans are required. Five and above units are treated the same as larger developments, which could prove to be challenging to smaller scale developers. He suggested the creation of a mid-scale development category, with around 5-15 units.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

Ms. Clemens shared the book 2050, with the Commission, which shares short vignettes on what life may be like during this time. Mr. Hamilton said that there will be an opening for the new terminal at the airport on March 28, 2026.

7. STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Yuen said that the Pearl Street Multi-Modal improvements project is progressing into final design. The City Council will need to decide the number of lanes for the project, and another live traffic test is planned for the next few weeks. The Pearl Street Pedestrian Crossing study will hold a public meeting next Thursday, for the public to review the four alternatives. Public engagement for the Park Street complete streets project has begun.

8. ADJOURNMENT

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by DIANE CLEMENS, to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0. Meeting adjourned 8:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville