

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
APRIL 3, 2025
DRAFT**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Sarah Muskin

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Clemens called the Planning Commission meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Mr. McCormick requested to discuss Energy Updates. All were amenable to this change.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

None.

4. MINUTES

a. March 6, 2025

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELIJAH MASSEY, to approve the minutes of March 6, 2025, with modifications. Motion passed 5-0.

Modifications:

-The spelling of Ms. Juodisius's name is corrected throughout.

-In Item D, the sentence "A video should be prepared with the application" shall read, "A video could be prepared with the application."

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion of Regional Future Land Use Map Update and Housing Targets

Ms. Muskin, Senior Planner at the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), presented. The draft Regional Future Land Use Map has been published publicly and is available for comment. Housing targets were released on Friday. Most of the City is eligible for the Tier 1b exemption, except for the flood plain. This would provide an interim exemption in this area from Act 250 review for new housing developments of fifty or fewer units. This would not require the City to take on existing Act 250 review requirements at a local level. Mr. Yuen is exploring what staff resources are necessary to be able to take on this type of review. Essex Junction will review the exemption status and housing targets at the May 1, 2025 meeting with the Selectboard.

The PC discussed extending the proposed Center designation boundaries, with the PC reviewing a map and deciding to add additional areas in the Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan's Primary and Secondary Scope Areas into the proposal. These areas were chosen due to proximity to the City Center as well as ease of accessibility of public transportation. Inclusion in the Center designation could allow for a projects within the area to be eligible for additional state incentives.

Ms. Muskin said that the statewide housing assessment has allocated housing targets to each region, and that it is each regional planning commission's responsibility to disaggregate these targets to each community. The target assigned to each community will need to be included in the new municipal plan, and municipalities will need to provide the regulations to allow for this development. There are no punitive measures for not hitting a target, however if a town is opposing meeting the targets they may not receive municipal plan approval by the Regional Planning Commission. Each community has a high, medium and low target for each municipality. Ms. Clemens said that hitting the high number would double Essex Junction's current housing stock and said that the low number is a more realistic number. The PC discussed issues with hitting the targets, such as a labor shortage and a lack of control of market conditions. Mr. Yuen said that while the City has no control over the pace of private development, the City has control over existing regulations which can make Essex Junction attractive to developers. He will be drafting a letter for the PC's review either in support of or with concerns about Essex Junction's housing targets. Mr. Yuen discussed smart growth when allocating housing targets, and a need to put the growth in areas served by public transportation. The housing needs are front-loaded, and the need for growth will likely taper over time. Ms. Muskin said that the need for specific types of units needed is also necessary and Ms. Clemens spoke of the need for larger sized housing for families.

b. Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan Draft Initial Review

Ms. Clemens expressed concern about the quality of the draft, noting misspellings and incomplete sentences. Mr. Yuen said that this is a draft and that the content will be revised, but that high-level feedback can be collected at this meeting. Additional public engagement on this plan will be held and the consultants will produce a list of recommended code updates. Mr. Yuen provided his feedback and said that he would like to see more integration of the housing targets and Act 181 in this document. He does not believe that the suggestion of reducing the number of lanes on Pearl Street near Five Corners should be included in the document. The addition of covered parking areas on Railroad Avenue was discussed and Mr. Yuen said that he does not see it as being possible to be included in the current Amtrak proposal. He discussed capitalization of the Crescent Connector and efforts to reduce a travel lane on Main and Park Streets, which would create additional pedestrian spaces. Thoughtful housing was discussed in the plan, and it suggested increasing the allowable number of stories. Ms. Clemens expressed concern about the increase in height to seven stories. Mr. Massey said that an increase in building heights could contribute to solving the housing crisis. Mr. McCormick said that a problem statement would be helpful to include in each chapter, especially the chapter on housing, all agreed. Mr. Yuen will put together notes from tonight's discussion to share with the consultants.

c. Municipal Letter of Support for Essex C Parking Lot Solar Project

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion to sign the letter to be submitted in support of the Essex C Parking Lot Solar project. Motion passed 5-0.

d. Animating Infrastructure Grant Update

Mr. Massey said that the initial grant has been submitted. Finalists will be invited to give a full proposal.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

There will be a Regional Housing Convening event on April 30th at the Hula building. Information will be provided at this meeting on how housing targets were created. Ms. Clemens and Mr. McCormick are planning on attending, and Mr. Massey may attend as well. Mr. McCormick asked for the Commission's

opinion on the idea of a subcommittee on energy, and if this would need approval from the City Council. He is willing to coordinate the subcommittee to discuss energy strategy. Mr. Yuen suggested creating a project scope for the development of this plan for the Planning Commission to formally discuss. Mr. McCormick discussed work that the Essex Rotary is planning on doing relating to an energy fair to support member towns.

7. STAFF UPDATES

None.

8. ADJOURN

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELANA JUODISIUS, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 5-0 at 8:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville