

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
JULY 2, 2026
APPROVED AUGUST 11, 2026**

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

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Cymone Bedford, Darren Schibler

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Massey called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

None.

4. MINUTES

a. June 4th, 2026

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUODISIUS, to approve the minutes of June 4th, 2026, as amended. Motion passed 5-0.

Amendment:

-Ms. Clemens will be listed as absent.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Committee Reorganization

Mr. Yuen said this is a required to be voted upon each July.

ELENA JUODISIUS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to nominate ELIJAH MASSEY as Chair and DIANE CLEMENS as Vice-Chair. Motion passed 5-0.

b. Introduction to Economic Mobility & Opportunity Initiative

Ms. Bedford, Economic Mobility Manager at the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) presented on the Economic Mobility and Opportunity Initiative. This project is sponsored by the International City Managers Association and is a 30-month national program involving four municipalities in Vermont, including Essex Junction. She discussed economic mobility, which is defined as creating economic success for a person or persons over their lifetime. She read the vision statement, "We aim to be a region where everyone has access to civic participation, entrepreneurship and attainable housing."

Ms. Bedford discussed the three-part definition of upward mobility, discussing dignity & belonging, economic success and power & autonomy. She said entrepreneurship resources are offered through partnerships with Green Mountain Credit Union and Kiva Institute, as well as additional peer learning opportunities through networking. She discussed the housing trust funds as a helpful tool to strategically invest in various housing priorities. She discussed the Community Academy Program, which will help provide relationship-building opportunities with town departments and help to identify future community leaders. A business meet and greet event will be held on August 25th 2026 at the South Burlington Public Library. She said a festival series is planned by the downtown association to promote member cities.

Mr. McCormick raised concerns about ensuring alignment between the work being done by the CCRPC and Ms. Bedford and Essex Junction's work on revolving loans and comprehensive planning initiatives, suggesting the need for better coordination. Ms. Bedford discussed the community academy program, which is currently in the co-design phase and aims to have a draft ready for review in the fall, aligning with the next commission member appointment cycle in June. The PC discussed the potential for involving business owners and commission members in the program, particularly for housing trust fund initiatives. Answering a question from Mr. McCormick, Ms. Bedford confirmed that a housing trust fund could support both new construction and retrofits of existing homes. Ms. Bedford explained housing trust funds, which accumulate money from developers choosing in-lieu fees for affordable housing and can be used for various housing-related initiatives. These include: helping residents become homeowners, renovating dilapidated buildings, and aiding local workers in buying homes with a deed restriction which requires at least one person in the home be a local worker.

c. Comprehensive Plan Update - Draft Sections (Natural Environmental Resources, Energy, Enhanced Energy Plan)

The PC discussed terminology changes from "Village center" to "City center" throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Schibler clarified that, while some references were updated, there may still be inconsistencies that need addressing. He reviewed the project progress calendar. He presented updates to the Energy & Natural Resources sections, noting that the Energy chapter was streamlined with updated data and references while maintaining the City's enhanced Energy Plan status. He clarified that while renewable energy development is encouraged rather than mandated, the plan focuses on allowing appropriate development while protecting other resources. He noted that rooftop solar is preferred over ground-mounted installations in the City center. Mr. Schibler discussed new content which was added addressing electric vehicles and thermal efficiency needs, while removing redundant information and updating policies to reflect current state requirements, including new energy equity considerations. Community input has been integrated into the document. He discussed new requirements for forest block habitat connector analysis and balancing renewable energy development with natural resource protection. Mr. Schibler discussed Vermont's conservation design priorities, recommending that the city stick with the state-regulated highest priority areas rather than adding additional priority levels to avoid regulating existing development. All agreed. Mr. Schibler and Ms. Clemens discussed other actions which could be taken to facilitate wildlife movements in areas of existing development.

Mr. Schibler discussed historic preservation standards for renewable energy development, with the PC deciding to maintain them as advisory guidelines rather than enforceable requirements due to practical implementation challenges and financial viability concerns. Mr. Yuen detailed current historical preservation practices in the City, noting that Development Board review can be required however

financial viability is taken into consideration. Ms. Clemens brought up a concern about historical properties being converted into multiple rental units, and whether historic preservation could be addressed or applicable in these types of situations.

Mr. Schibler discussed the organization and structure of the enhanced energy plan appendix, noting that it is currently disorganized and contains too much technical detail that may not be accessible to the average reader. The PC expressed concerns about the document's readability and suggested reorganizing it to better integrate the four key sectors (transportation, housing, energy, and climate change) while maintaining essential information in an appendix. Mr. McCormick said the Comprehensive Plan does not give a good sense of what is most important to the community and noted that many projects which appear to be perpetually not completed are included. He said it reads more like a technical report than a readable document and noted a lack of education in the processes of City government. He suggested that information regarding state requirements be included in the energy section and better integrating the various sectors so that they are more connected with one another. Mr. Schibler said it is important to balance technical requirements with clear communication of priorities. The appendix will continue to have more technical details. Mr. McCormick expressed a desire to continually engage the PC in this process, as well as City Council members. Mr. Schibler will present to the City Council on the Comprehensive Plan in June and will ask about the level of input and engagement that they would like in this process. A draft of the plan must be prepared by December.

Mr. McCormick discussed challenges with staffing needs, particularly for coordinators in key sectors like economic development, energy, housing, and transportation, noting budget constraints and staff time limitations. He said volunteer committees require additional staff time and stipend costs. He encouraged long-term planning for these issues. Ms. Clemens said additional staff could be included as a suggestion in the plan. Mr. Hamilton spoke of the financial impact of renewable energy on housing. Mr. Schibler discussed restructuring how cross-sector connections are presented in the plan, with suggestions to use color-coded pillars or references to show how different actions connect to multiple plan sections rather than separating them by chapter. Mr. Massey said it is important to have a readable way for City residents to easily see the connections between chapters.

The PC also discussed the format for presenting goals, policies, and actions, deciding to maintain a hierarchical structure similar to the main Comprehensive Plan rather than using a long list of unstructured actions. Mr. Schibler presented a proposed timeline and organization structure, grouping related themes like energy, natural environmental resources, and agriculture together. He said he would like to hear input on both timing and the grouping of the chapters. Mr. Massey discussed the idea of better including the Winooski River as a community asset, describing it is an untapped community asset for community recreation. Mr. Yuen discussed correspondence about this concept and noting potential opportunities through developer negotiations and private property coordination.

d. 2026 Land Development Code (LDC) Amendments – Updated Draft

Mr. Yuen said public outreach on the LDC is currently underway, and that information will be included in water/sewer bills. It will contain easily accessible information about form-based code. The DRB recently reviewed the LDC amendments. Mr. Yuen detailed changes which have been made to the LDC since the PC last reviewed it. The Commission discussed the unit mix requirements, splitting between keeping the current 20% requirement and increasing it to 30%, with a compromise reached at 25%. Ms.

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Clemens spoke of the benefit to families from having a better mix of residential unit types. Mr. Massey said there is nothing preventing future Planning Commissions from adjusting this rate if necessary, or a change being requested by the City Council. Ms. Paschall said recent studies have shown that there is a strong need for one-bedroom units. The PC also reviewed technical changes including driveway apron surfacing standards, fenestration (the design, arrangement, and proportioning of openings in a building's exterior) definitions, and updates to municipal farming regulations due to new state legislation. Mr. Yuen discussed the 802 homes design prototypes, and said the location of the doors may not be in compliance with Essex Junction's regulations. All were amenable to future conversations with 802 Homes to ensure that they can comply. Ms. Clemens brought up technical concerns and other edits, which Mr. Yuen will review.

e. Reschedule August Meeting

The August meeting was rescheduled to August 11th, 2026.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

None.

7. STAFF UPDATES

None.

8. ADJOURNMENT

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUOSIDIUS, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0. Meeting adjourned 9:01 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville