

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
AUGUST 11, 2026
DRAFT**

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

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Diane Clemens, Vice-Chair

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Darren Schibler

1. CALL TO ORDER

E. Massey called the meeting to order at 6:31 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

D. Schibler said he plans to complete the conversation, which began at the last meeting, on the energy chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. All were amenable.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

None.

4. MINUTES

a. July 2nd, 2026

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUODISIUS, to approve the minutes of July 2nd, 2026. Motion passed 4-0.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Comprehensive Plan Update - Draft Sections

i. Chapter 2 – Community Vision and Strategies

ii. Chapter 3 – History; Trends

The Planning Commission (PC) discussed updates to the Comprehensive Plan. D. Schibler discussed integrating the Community Vision Strategic Action Plan (CVSAP) as a foundation for the current update and eliminating dated content and studies. He also discussed the transition from Essex Junction as a village to its current status as an independent city. E. Massey said the CVSAP is the most comprehensive community engagement initiative that Essex Junction has undergone, despite some gaps in the process. F. Hamilton discussed difficulties in enabling some citizens to attend meetings, suggesting that community events be utilized to better increase engagement. S. McCormick suggested breaking down the vision statements into key objectives like "inclusive and welcoming ethos" and "community-led economic approach," with plans to incorporate these vision statements into each chapter while maintaining detailed implementation information in separate sections. D. Schibler will reformat the section to make it easier to read and understand.

D. Schibler discussed the chapters on energy and efforts to condense changes and bring forth the key actionable items. The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) will be adding

additional language and details into this chapter. E. Massey also suggested a shorter list of action items which can be completed within the next eight years. S. McCormick suggested prioritizing the top 20-25 actions desired for public visibility. E. Massey and S. McCormick discussed formatting changes to make the plan more readable, potentially using executive summaries and tabular formats for key priorities. S. McCormick said the PC needs to consider if this is a technical document for internal use or should be treated as a more accessible public-facing version. D. Schibler said some surrounding municipalities have both a technical document and a more readable version, however this is not possible for Essex Junction at this time. S. McCormick discussed efforts to make the transportation section more readable. C. Yuen discussed the inclusion of the Connect the Junction project, and the 10-story building height and form-based codes intended to implement this.

The PC discussed consolidating and presenting key content from the implementation chapter into a more accessible format for elected officials and city staff. They agreed to add specific details about building height changes to allow for up to 10 stories and corresponding code amendments in the Connect the Junction section. The PC discussed editing and will send changes to C. Yuen rather than making changes simultaneously to a virtual document. D. Schibler is requesting all comments to be presented to staff two weeks from today. This will allow time to incorporate and prepare documents for the next meeting. Chapter 3 will be discussed at a future meeting due to pending demographic data, along with information on the separation of Essex and Essex Junction.

S. McCormick raised concerns about the need to provide context for housing initiatives, particularly explaining the rationale behind housing needs and addressing public questions about population demographics and economic development impacts. He said there is a knowledge gap between actual needs and existing conditions and the knowledge of residents. The PC decided to create a separate subsection in Chapter 2 to explain the foundational housing assessment processes, including statewide housing needs assessments, before diving into specific land use changes. K. Pascall suggested adding references to housing needs assessments and CCRPC targets in relevant sections. E. Massey suggested potentially revising the iconography used to be more localized and context-specific.

Regarding the energy chapters, D. Schibler discussed chapter organization, proposing to move policies from an appendix into the main plan to maintain cohesion. The PC agreed to keep constraints and siting policies together in one narrative section rather than scattering them throughout the document. Land use will be discussed at the next meeting, with D. Schibler discussing simplifying residential zoning categories into broader categories and potentially using more active, visionary language in naming these districts, though they noted the need to ensure the terminology remains accessible to the public. D. Schibler will investigate how other communities classify multi-family residential properties v. primarily single-family neighborhoods.

The PC discussed plans for a public hearing scheduled for September 3rd. D. Schibler suggested scheduling a separate climate commission meeting, should the public hearing become contentious. C. Yuen will investigate potential dates for this meeting.

b. 2026 Land Development Code (LDC) Amendments

C. Yuen discussed the new renderings showing building concepts with a 1-to-1 street room ratio along Park Street, as well as efforts to inform the public of these changes. He discussed development plans for

the southeastern city center quadrant, focusing on building height concerns and the potential for more proactive city involvement in the development process. He hopes to have another rendering available of the Pearl Street corridor near the Dollar Tree.

S. McCormick noted that the Development Review Board (DRB) currently lacks the ability to take a more active role in development projects. The DRB is only able to react to proposals from developers. He expressed interest in incorporating geothermal technology and creating spaces for community gathering in new developments. While formal involvement is limited, the PC would be open to voluntary engagement with developers during the pre-application process to provide guidance on design and sustainability features. C. Yuen discussed the Community Housing and Infrastructure financing process, a statewide tax increment financing program. F. Hamilton discussed concerns about potential project delays which may result from additional board involvement. S. McCormick discussed education which could be offered towards developers to explain why desired features make sense; however, he also noted that this would make for more work for staff. This could possibly be integrated in the pre-development process.

i. Form-Based Code Public Engagement Review

E. Massey discussed feedback received from public engagement efforts at National Night Out. The public response was generally positive, and around 15-20 individuals engaged in the process. Few people put stickers on the posterboard; however, many more came by to look at the exhibits. E. Massey said some participants misunderstood that the city would directly build the proposed buildings rather than setting rules for developers. S. McCormick said participants were generally supportive of meeting the housing targets. Key concerns raised included over-regulation and perceived social issues associated with higher density, leading to discussions about how to better communicate the purpose and benefits of these changes. E. Massey noted that in-person feedback sessions tend to have more positive feedback than online sessions. The PC identified the need for better branding materials for future events. C. Yuen acknowledged that follow-up questions from previous communications still need to be addressed. As a result, he suggested creating an FAQ document to address public questions. This will be available online and will be available prior to the public hearing on September 3rd. The PC discussed including questions regarding the need for housing, the purpose of mixed-use developments and increased density.

ii. Discussion of unit mix requirements

The PC reviewed residential unit mix requirements, which requires developers to have a greater diversity of unit sizes. The PC chose a 25% requirement after comparing Essex Junction's regulations with other surrounding municipalities. C. Yuen said input from developers will also be sought.

iii. Review draft LDC amendments and consider warning a hearing for September

C. Yuen discussed the process of transmitting the Land Development Code to the City Council. E. Massey requested comment from the PC regarding the LDC draft, of which there was none.

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUOSIDIUS, that the Planning Commission approve the Report Pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4441(c) for the proposed 2026 Land Development Code amendments and direct staff to warn a public hearing on the proposed amendments for September 3, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. Motion passed 4-0.

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C. Yuen thanked Maya Balassa of the CCRPC for her assistance with this project.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

None.

7. STAFF UPDATES

C. Yuen said City staff have been looking into the Essex Junction sidewalk policy to ensure it aligns with walkability standards.

8. ADJOURNMENT

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUOSIDIUS, to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0. Meeting adjourned 8:39 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville