



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

Online & 2 Lincoln St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Thursday, March 5th, 2026
6:30 PM

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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](#)
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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. February 5th, 2026
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Introduction and Discussion of Comprehensive Plan Engagement Plan* [6:35 PM]
 - b. Introduction of Draft Form-Based Code Proposal* [7:50 PM]
6. **MEMBERS UPDATES** [8:05 PM]
7. **STAFF UPDATES** [8:10 PM]
8. **ADJOURN** [8:151 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
FEBRUARY 5, 2026
DRAFT**

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

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Finn Hamilton (non-voting)

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Jeff Arango, Bethany Clark, Leslie & Evan Golding, David Knox, Katherine Magee, Nick Meyer

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

Mr. Meyer expressed concern about the housing policy included in the Connect the Junction Transit Orientated Development (TOD) Master Plan. Walkability, greenspace and care of the urban canopy should not be lost sight of with the focus on housing. He said that developers should be pushed to do more than they currently are required to regarding greenspace and landscaping. It is important to balance livability with the need for additional housing.

4. MINUTES

a. January 15th, 2026

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELIJAH MASSEY, to approve the minutes of January 15th, 2026, with corrections. Motion passed 5-0.

Corrections:

-In Item 2, The 802 Homes project and Vermont Arts Council mural grant will be discussed during staff updates,” will be clarified to state, “The 802 Homes project and Vermont Arts Council mural grant will be discussed during staff updates and member updates.”

-In the last sentence of Item 6, “These three options will then be chosen by the community,” will be clarified to state, “These three design options will then be chosen by the community.”

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion of Form-Based Code to Implement the Connect the Junction TOD Plan

Mr. Yuen said that the Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan is an effort that the City has been undertaking to plan for the future of the Pearl Street Corridor and the City Center. This project focuses on housing and transportation needs, and that future developments are done in a sustainable manner. The plan was adopted by the City Council in December of 2025. Mr. Arango, Managing Principal of Framework, presented to the Planning Commission (PC) regarding how to implement the TOD Master Plan into Land Development Code updates via form-based code. He detailed mapping changes to the

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TOD district and said that the goal is to support more housing near transit. Some additional goals include ensuring pedestrian comfort as density increases, protecting and maintaining historic character, supporting activate and inviting streets and addressing other specific City Council concerns. An additional goal is to remove more subjective criteria from the LDC and simplify the development review process.

Mr. Arango said that his firm reviewed standards in the Village Center and TOD districts, as well as applicable overlay districts. Some of the key recommendations include clarifying the role and applicability of historic preservation v. character compatibility, improving predictability and efficiency in development review, replacing subjective design/character language with objective standards and implementing the TOD master plan. Mr. Arango said that he is proposing to apply the Historic Preservation standards to clearly identified historic resources, regulating design and compatibility with form-based standards, re-establishing administrative approval pathways and requiring DRB review for projects that require discretion. Regarding implementing the form-based code standards, Mr. Arango discussed managing height transitions between buildings of different heights. He said that the PC could consider if a buffer is necessary between areas of the district that are crossed by a street. He discussed options to manage height differences between properties, including upper-level setbacks. He also discussed options for preventing long, monotonous facades, such as limiting the façade length, requiring articulation and activating the street level. There is no requirement for retail on the first floor of buildings, including in the Village Center. He reviewed the street room standards, which provides a sense of enclosure and comfort for pedestrians, and methods for complying with such. Different frontage types, such as plazas, landscaped or stoop/porch can be utilized. It is important to promote good design and neighborhood compatibility throughout the district.

Mr. Arango said that his firm would complete the edits to the code and hopes to have a draft prepared by March. He believes that changes to the regulations will remedy some concerns about building heights in the Village Center. Mr. Arango noted a tradeoff between the amount of housing and step-ups/setbacks. There is no parking requirement in either district however the market will most likely demand it. Mr. Arango discussed second-story parking and how to make it aesthetically pleasing. Mr. Massey asked if it would be too restrictive to require step-backs on all sides, especially the street-facing sides. Mr. Arango said that he does not believe that this will be a concern in most areas but could be applicable to certain lots. He will look at specific property examples and discuss this with the PC further. Mr. McCormick encouraged the PC to consider how many housing units would be lost should this be implemented.

Ms. Clemens encouraged there to be a way to include more trees and vegetation in development. Mr. Arango said that “the Green Factor” could be a system for design good system. This is a points system for which is applied to landscaping improvements and developments. He also suggested looking into the minimum better right of way standards. Ms. Juodisius said that many of the parcels being looked at are fairly small and constrained, and that it would be helpful to test the regulations on are larger variety of parcels. Mr. McCormick encouraged additional greenspace in the area near the railroad tracks. He said that he would like to see the landscaping lead to community connections in the downtown area. Mr. Massey said that he wants to ensure that this district is space that people can enjoy being in. Mr. Arango encouraged the PC to collectively decide what is most important to them and said that the tools are available to implement this. Ms. Clemens said that the overlays were put in because developers were not conforming to the ideals of the community. Mr. Arango said that there are different manners in which an

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application would rise to a Development Review level. Mr. Yuen said that there are some design review standards that apply to what seems like very small projects.

Mr. Massey requested public input. Ms. Golding said that she is encouraging the PC to continue to allow Essex Junction to be a great place with an urban canopy and a livable feel. Mr. Meyer said that the Pearl Street and Village Center areas are very different and encouraged the balance between housing and livability. Answering a question from Mr. McCormick, Mr. Yuen said that this plan would be incorporated into the full plan, but updates will primarily be focused on updates to the districts. Mr. Arango said that staff and the PC will be able to review the draft code, and that additional meetings will be held.

b. Administrative Officer Nomination

Mr. Yuen said that he is the City’s Administrative Officer, and that this appointment lasts three years.

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUODISIUS, to nominate Christopher Yuen to serve as the Administrative Officer for a three-year term beginning from March 22, 2026. Motion passed 5-0.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

Mr. McCormick said that Essex Junction has been selected as a pilot community by the Climate Action Office. They will provide free consulting services related to incorporating climate change into the municipal plan.

7. STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Yuen said that the 802 Homes Design Charette will take place this Saturday at 4 PM. He will attend the City Council meeting on February 11th to discuss the possibility for improving pedestrian crossings on Pearl Street. He will also give an introductory presentation on one of the goals of Connect the Junction project, restriping Park Street for better pedestrian accessibility. Changes to the proposed fee schedule related to planning and development, with the largest being a large change to excavation permit fees, will also be discussed.

8. ADJOURNMENT

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUODISIUS, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0. Meeting adjourned 8:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Public Engagement Plan

Background & Context

In Vermont, municipal plans are the community’s primary policy documents for guiding growth, development, and investment. They shape land use, housing, transportation, energy, natural resources, and other local priorities, and serve as the basis for zoning, capital planning, and project review by local, regional, and state bodies. State law ([24 V.S.A. § 4387](#)) requires towns to readopt or update their plans at least once every eight years, creating a regular opportunity to assess progress, respond to new challenges, and ensure local goals align with statewide planning requirements.

Essex Junction is updating its [2019 Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan](#), set to expire in August 2027, with funding from a Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and with support from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) through the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

CCRPC provided an Initial Town Plan Review in January 2025 with comments on how to improve the plan and meet state requirements and has been contracted to design and carry out community engagement and to update the plan to reflect the needs and interests of Essex Junction residents. This engagement plan outlines CCRPC’s strategy for supporting that process.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles outlined in [Strengthening and Sustaining Public Engagement in Vermont](#) helped inform CCRPC’s engagement approach. CCRPC strives to uphold these principles in its engagement efforts, recognizing that unproductive engagement is damaging and often results in decreased trust in government and decision-makers. Productive engagement, when done respectfully and thoughtfully, results in better and more resilient policies, robust local citizenship networks, and stronger communities.

ENGAGEMENT WORKS BEST WHEN IT IS:

	INTERACTIVE	Everyone has a chance to contribute.
	TIMELY	It happens at a point when people can have an influence on important decisions.
	INCLUSIVE	It brings together a wide range of people, including people who may have been excluded or not engaged before.
	AUTHENTIC	People value one another's input and know the process will have meaningful results.
	TRANSPARENT	It is open, honest, and understandable.
	INFORMED	Everyone has access to the knowledge and data they need, and there is balanced information describing the pros and cons of different opinions.
	ACCESSIBLE	The barriers to participation, including location, time, language and other factors that might deter people, are as low as possible.
	RESPONSIVE	What people say is documented and decision-makers report back to participants on the outcomes of engagement.
	NETWORK-BUILDING	Engagement helps to build relationships and networks over the long term.
	EVALUATED	People are able to track and measure how engagement is working.

To uphold these principles throughout engagement, CCRPC will:

- Offer multiple opportunities to engage, directly and indirectly.
- Provide clarity at the start with communities about what can and cannot change about the plan, so that community input focuses on the elements where it would hold influence.
- Present and discuss the information in understandable, simple, and visual terms whenever possible, and share all relevant information with community members before asking for input.
- Emphasize and prioritize relationship building in and throughout engagement.
- Share all collected information back to participants to offer opportunities for corrections, additional comments, and accountability to build trust.
- Connect community members, municipalities, and organizations to one another when and where it makes sense to support their own work.
- Respect community members' time and lived experience by providing stipends, language services, food, childcare when requested, and other support to reduce participation barriers.

GOALS OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

1. **Enhance awareness** of the Comprehensive Plan: what it is and why it matters.
2. **Center the voices and viewpoints** of Essex Junction communities in the Plan, with a focus on communities' voices historically not included in decision-making and on issues not recently asked of the community.

3. **Build relationships and trust** between community members and City staff and the community through a transparent and collaborative process.

Methodology

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 and subsequent events ignited significant changes in the social and political fabric of Chittenden County. Communities fractured as social isolation became a norm, and inequities deepened, especially for communities already struggling. Since then, the climate crisis has continued to visibly shape our landscapes, as the State has seen record flooding, drought, and poor air quality due to wildfires. Meanwhile, income inequality has continued to rise, political divides worsened, and Vermont has become the site of one of the nation's greatest housing crises.

Essex Junction reflects many of the same statewide and regional dynamics as other Chittenden County communities, while also having a distinct history and urban character. Located in the center of the county, Essex Junction functions as a historic railroad village and a regional employment and transportation hub. With a population of roughly 10,000 residents within just over two square miles, it is one of the most densely populated municipalities in Vermont. The Junction is characterized by a compact downtown, established residential neighborhoods, a strong street grid, and proximity to major employment centers. Its development pattern reflects its origins as a rail center and mill village, resulting in a more urban form than many neighboring communities. Today, Essex Junction is known for its walkable downtown, Five Corners, local parks and trails, civic institutions, and community events that contribute to a strong sense of place.

Essex Junction's population is younger and more diverse than much of Chittenden County. The median age is slightly lower than the county average, with a higher share of residents under 18 and working-age adults, reflecting the community's role as a residential and employment center. The Junction is one of the more racially and ethnically diverse municipalities in the county. A meaningful portion of households speak a language other than English at home. Median household income is lower than the county average, and the community has a much higher proportion of renters, including many households facing housing cost burdens. While Essex Junction hosts substantial employment nearby, many residents still commute out of the municipality for work, while workers from across the region commute in. These dynamics underscore the importance of housing affordability, transportation access, and inclusive economic development strategies tailored to Essex Junction's urban context.

Essex Junction has already conducted several community outreach efforts in recent years to lay out a vision for the City's future, both in its governance and its built environment.

ASSESSMENT OF PREVIOUS ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

To repair past harms, prevent future ones, and center local knowledge in policy, CCRPC recognizes the critical importance of organizational equity and community engagement. CCRPC is also

mindful of the growing fatigue among community members driven by unmet basic needs and the high volume of overlapping engagement initiatives. To avoid placing additional burdens on already overextended individuals and organizations, CCRPC staff reviewed engagement activities conducted in Essex Junction since 2020 and incorporated existing community-informed insights into engagement results, including efforts conducted at a statewide, regional, and local level. This approach emphasizes clarity in outreach by focusing engagement on filling identified gaps and not replicating previous efforts. Insights from these efforts relevant to the Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan Update are summarized in [Appendix B](#).

- Statewide
 - [State of Vermont Climate Action Office Engagement](#)
- Regional
 - [2024 Chittenden County Regional Plan Update Engagement](#)
 - [2025 Chittenden / Grand Isle County Community Health Needs Assessment](#)
 - [2022 Chittenden County Active Transportation Survey Report](#)
 - [2025 Chittenden County Regional Future Land Use Map Update Engagement](#)
- Local
 - 2024 Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan
 - Connect the Junction Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan
 - 2025 Essex Junction Rebranding Project & Community Survey

CCRPC staff also reviewed the FY2026 Prioritization List & Department Work Plans (Budget Day Packet) specifically for current actions being undertaken by City government.

For a full and ongoing database of community engagement efforts conducted within Chittenden County, please see this [Community Engagement Tracker](#).

ENGAGEMENT THEMES & APPROACH

After conversations with local community leaders and planning commission members, it is apparent that Essex Junction has already conducted extensive engagement around key planning issues and established a vision for the future.

The 2024 Strategic Vision and Action Plan sets clear goals for the community around the six thematic pillars:

1. Housing and Urban Design
2. Public Services and Facilities
3. Economic and Business Development
4. Transportation and Connectivity
5. Environmental Stewardship
6. Community Engagement and Decision Making

CCRPC staff will incorporate the Key Actions into the plan alongside new statutory requirements and discussion of current trends (as noted in [CCRPC's initial review of the 2019 plan](#)). However, the specific actions that will advance the Key Actions need significant updates. While some of

these are already identified by the City in the [2026 Prioritization List and Departmental Work Plans](#), others have no associated actions, or actions that are vague. In particular, the Economic and Business Development, Environmental Stewardship, and Transportation and Connectivity pillars would benefit from additional public engagement around crafting specific actions.

Before embarking on plan drafting, CCRPC staff will seek input from community focus groups on key topics related to these Strategic Pillars to craft actions that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. CCRPC has developed discussion guides (see Appendix A) with context narratives, potential focus group membership, and guiding questions for these three pillars.

In addition to these themes and questions, CCRPC staff will ask residents broader visioning questions about their community to highlight what residents love the most about the Junction and hopes they have for the future, including:

- What do you value most about living in Essex Junction? If you moved to the Junction recently, why did you move here?
- What are your favorite places in the Junction? Why?
- What are the biggest challenges you face living in Essex Junction?
- What are the areas of the city you'd like to see improvements to?
- What should be the City's #1 priority?
- List three small actions your local government could take to improve the quality of life in your community.
- It's the year 2050. What do you hope is different about Essex Junction?

INTERESTED & AFFECTED PARTIES (IAP)

To identify impacted communities and community assets, CCRPC staff used the [Chittenden County Community Asset Map](#) and collaborated with local partners to identify communities and voices who should be included in outreach and engagement efforts. This includes consulting with the CCRPC Community Engagement Advisory Committee to identify other potential IAPs and voices that may be missing from the conversation. CCRPC will use this list to recruit members to the three topical focus groups and to ensure that broader community engagement reaches all community stakeholders.

- Working Parents + Families / Youth
 - Tamara Eklof, EWSD EL Program Coordinator / McKinney-Vento Liaison and Erin Maguire, Director of Equity & Inclusion / Co-Director of Student Support Services
 - School events (Hiawatha, Thomas Fleming, Albert D Lawton, Essex High School)
 - Essex Junction Recreation & Parks events
- Low(er)-Income (Renters, Affordable Housing Residents, Houseless Population, etc.)
 - Heavenly Pantry
 - Brownell Library

- Residents of subsidized housing communities (Monarch Apartments, Whitcomb Woods / Whitcomb Terrace)
- BIPOC Communities
- New Americans / English Language Learners
- LGBTQ+ Communities
- (Dis)Ability Community
- Elderly
 - Essex Senior Center
 - HomeCare Assistance of Greater Burlington
 - Essex Rotary
- Communities of Faith
 - Holy Family Church Community Center
 - First Congregational Church
 - Calvary Baptist Church
 - St. Lawrence Catholic Church
 - Essex Alliance Church
 - St. James Episcopal
 - Grace United Methodist Church
 - All Nations for Jesus Christ Church
 - Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
 - Other (non-Christian) religious communities
- Small / Locally Owned or Franchised Businesses (see non-exhaustive list)
- Farming & Agriculture
 - Whitcomb’s Land of Pumpkins and Corn Maze
- Environmental groups – connect with Siler Climate Consulting / residents interested in energy / climate topics
- Tourists/Visitors
 - People attending events at Fairgrounds
 - People eating at restaurants
 - Amtrak & GMT users
- Other

Engagement Plan: Timeline & Activities

STEP 1 | Situation Assessment (January 2026)

- **Research the community context** in Essex Junction leading up to this comprehensive plan update and review previous engagement efforts with Essex Junction communities since 2020 to avoid duplication and inform engagement priorities.

STEP 2 | Collaborative Design with Community & Planning Commission (February – March 2026)

- **Develop an engagement strategy** in collaboration with the Essex Junction Planning Commission, City Staff, CCRPC's Community Engagement Advisory Committee (CEAC), and local partners.
 - This may include meeting with all City department heads to understand engagement context, confirm department priorities and challenges, and coordinate upcoming engagement activities.

STEP 3 | Planning & Coordination (January – March 2026)

- **Coordination** with Planning Commission, Staff, and partners.
- Develop engagement materials. Depending on the strategy identified in Step 2, this may or may not include:
 - Comprehensive plan overview for education (what is a town plan, what is included in the town plan, what does it do/why does it matter?)
 - Discussion guides for focus groups and interviews
 - Presentations for focus groups and events
 - Printed maps of Essex Junction (for dot activities)
 - Flyers for events
 - Tabling materials
 - Bar coasters
 - Community survey text / questions

STEP 4 | Engagement Activities (Spring – Fall 2026)

- **Ongoing Partnerships** with key organizations and community members.
- **Focus Group Conversations** | Organize and facilitate 3 focus groups that will meet 2-3 times each around the identified Strategic Action Plan pillars. Invite priority populations to all, but in particular to the Economic and Business Development sessions which will focus on economic mobility.
 1. CCRPC's Community Engagement Advisory Committee (CEAC)
 2. Police Community Advisory Board
 3. Town Committee Meetings: Bike-Walk Advisory Committee; Tree Advisory Committee; Capital Program Review Committee; Recreation Advisory Committee
 4. Non-English Speaking Focus Group
 5. Essex Westford School District students / classes
 6. Older Community Members & Community Members of Faith
 7. Residents of subsidized housing (Monarch Apartments, Whitcomb Woods / Whitcomb Terrace)
- **One-on-One Interviews** | Offer ## one-on-one interviews with additional interested and affected parties (e.g., small business owners, indigenous community members, City Council members, first responders, etc.) on topics of interest to them.

- **Public Meeting** | Host one open house / public meeting for any member of the public to participate in.
- **Community Events + Gatherings** | Table at / attend up to 10 community events with engagement activities to assess support for SMART actions identified in focus group sessions and by City staff or the Planning Commission. Activities may include:
 1. Dot Activities can be used both for ranking priority actions and for community values mapping (i.e. identify your favorite places in town, areas you'd like to see improvements, areas you feel unsafe walking or biking in town, areas you feel unsafe driving, areas you'd like to see more housing, etc.)
 2. Money in a Jar: every participant gets a set amount of "Monopoly" money to add to jars representing how they'd like to invest public dollars.
 3. Targeted conversations.

Events may include:

- Library Events
- Memorial Day Parade
- 4th of July at the Expo
- National Night Out on Tuesday, August 4, 2026, from 5:00PM to 7:00PM at Essex High School
- Champlain Valley Fair?
- Meet Me on Main
- Train Hop
- School sports events
- Small Business Saturday
- Annual Meeting (4/14/2026)
- **Public Surveys** | Consider using targeted surveys to reach specific groups or ask questions around specific topics, if appropriate.
- **Other Activities** | Offer additional, creative, forms of engagement to target additional populations and feedback.
 1. Support elementary youth through partnering with the public schools to draw their future Essex Junction.

STEP 5 | Results & Recommendations (Fall / Winter 2026)

- **Synthesize feedback** gathered through engagement.
- **Develop recommendations** to integrate feedback into the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Report changes** back to interested and affected parties to ensure accountability.
- The finished Comprehensive Plan will go to the City Council for adoption in August 2026.

Appendix A: Focus Group Discussion Guides

Appendix B: Results from Previous Engagement Efforts

Essex Junction Community Vision & Strategic Action Plan (2024)

In August 2023, the City of Essex Junction embarked on the City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan process to deliver a 5-year Strategic Action Plan. The following is a summary of the results from the final plan, specifically the community engagement results.

- A repeated theme is the desire to retain a “neighborhood village” feel while planning responsibly for growth.
- Many residents support growth that is community-led, inclusive, and aligned with local values, while others are concerned about the impacts and change to community identity that growth will bring.
- Strong interest in improving transparency, civic engagement opportunities, and trust in decision-making.
- Many residents noted confusion about City governance following independence and want clearer civic information.
- Public amenities, community events, and shared spaces are seen as critical to civic pride and social connection.

Essex Junction Community Survey Summary Results

The City worked with Place Creative on a rebranding initiative following the City’s separation from Essex Town and the creation of its new identity. The following is a summary of the Community Survey taken by approximately 200 people (mostly but not all residents).

- Respondents generally report satisfaction with living and working in Essex Junction and see potential for future growth and opportunity.
- Many respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining a family-friendly, walkable, livable community.
- There is support for thoughtful growth (especially among newer / younger residents) paired with concern about the pace of change (especially among older / established residents).

Connect the Junction (Transit-Oriented Development Plan, 2025–2026)

This transit-oriented development (TOD) master plan, developed by the City of Essex Junction, works toward the vision of a more pedestrian-friendly City Center with more diverse housing options, vibrant public spaces, and safe and accessible options for walking, biking, and busing. The following are key engagement results:

- Common concerns include traffic congestion, lack of safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, and limited affordable housing options.

- There is a desire for a denser, more walkable 5 Corners and Pearl Street corridor, with the biggest challenge being seen as funding and the second being resistance to change.
- There is a desire for more green space, including programming and activities in that green space.
- More pedestrian and bike lanes, especially those that feel protected/safe, are desired. However, changes to vehicle circulation should be supported by studies to minimize further impacts to traffic problems.
- There is attention to preserving the character of the City while allowing for increased density and height.
- Businesses are highly valued, and more restaurants are desired.

Chittenden County 2026 Regional Plan Update Engagement – Phase 1

The first phase of regional plan community engagement focused on elevating the voices of those whose needs, priorities, and experiences were not adequately reflected in previous versions of the ECOS Plan. Feedback was summarized by regional plan chapter; the following selection includes those that align with the Essex Junction Strategic Vision and Action Plan pillars.

- **Ecological Systems and Climate Change:** Participants emphasized urgent action on climate change and environmental protection. Specific needs identified were: greater collaboration and transparency among decision-makers, affordable renewable energy for all income levels, and comprehensive climate education. Addressing the immediate needs of vulnerable populations and the inequitable impacts of climate change was highlighted as critical.
- **Land Use:** Participants supported denser downtowns with greater access to services, focusing on infrastructure and public transit while preserving Vermont’s natural landscapes. With denser downtowns, participants emphasized the importance of including urban green spaces and trees to mitigate the heat island effect.
- **Transportation:** There were major concerns about the inadequacy of public transportation, especially its failure to reach rural areas effectively and the lack of connectivity to essential services and town centers. Participants called for expanded routes and more frequent services to accommodate community needs, particularly for lower-income residents pushed out of town centers due to high housing costs.
- **Housing:** Many concerns were centered on the lack of affordable housing and tenants' rights. Maintenance issues were rampant, with reports of slow responses to repair requests, impacting living conditions. The need for housing that accommodates larger families was a recurring theme, highlighting the mismatch between available housing types and community needs, particularly among immigrant communities. Feedback highlighted a critical need for housing development strategies that cater to larger family units and consider cultural sensitivities, such as private cooking spaces. Participants also stressed the importance of safe neighborhood locations for new housing and the utilization of vacant lots for community housing projects.

- **Economy & Household Financial Security:** Input indicated that current wage levels do not meet the cost of living. Participants called for more job training programs and access to part-time work opportunities, reflecting the diverse needs of the community, especially among those who cannot commit to full-time employment due to family obligations.
- **Civic Engagement:** Feedback showed a desire for more accessible civic education programs that reduce bureaucratic jargon and make governance understandable and engaging for all community members. This includes providing education on how local and regional governments function and how residents can participate effectively in decision-making processes.

2025 Chittenden County Regional Future Land Use Map Update Engagement – Phase 2 – Essex Junction

The second phase of regional plan engagement focused on working with municipalities and partners to collaboratively re-create a Regional Future Land Use Map that aligns with Act 181 requirements and reflects the diverse needs and aspirations of all 19 Chittenden County municipalities. The following summarizes common themes heard specifically in Essex Junction.

- There was support for growth in the TOD study area and regionally-mapped Planned Growth Area to support housing availability, along with a desire for consistent walkability, transit access, and neighborhood services throughout the City. At the same time, there were concerns about building height, maintaining neighborhood character, managing growth, and traffic, particularly in existing residential neighborhoods.
- There was strong support for municipal housing targets as a meaningful, long-term planning goal, particularly when paired with infrastructure investment and permitting reform.
- There were concerns about equity, particularly from regional focus groups, about exclusionary zoning, housing affordability, and the need for supporting communities in achieving homeownership.
- Desire for increased certainty and predictability in the development process for both community members and developers.

2022 Chittenden County Active Transportation Survey Report

The purpose of this survey was to capture key insights from a statistically representative sample of Chittenden County residents that will inform decisions regarding walk/bike policies, conditions, and improvements.

- Most people rely on a personal vehicle for transportation, but people of color, those with lower incomes, and young people are generally twice as likely to carpool, bus, bike or walk compared with their counterparts.

- Older residents are less likely to use alternative forms of transportation and may not have access to secondary options if their main option is not available. They are also more likely to support improved bike / walk facilities than any other age group.
- Respondents generally rated transportation infrastructure as average or poor in terms of condition, efficiency, and safety. The top investment priority was maintaining existing infrastructure, followed by efficiency improvements, expanding capacity, and improving safety. Expanded public transit, improvements to bike / walk facilities, and TDM incentives ranked the lowest. Still, respondents are strongly supportive of bike / walk infrastructure.
- The top two design priorities for commercial streets among survey respondents were “safety of all users” and “creating a place where people want to spend time and money.” Still, respondents were mixed in their support for reducing vehicle parking and travel lanes in favor of protected bike lanes.

Chittenden 2025 Chittenden / Grand Isle County Community Health Needs Assessment

Health is a foundational need for individuals that can be influenced, positively or negatively, by public policy decisions. A Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) is a process that non-profit hospitals complete every three years in partnership with community-based organizations to learn more about the significant health needs in the greater community. The following is a summary of some key findings relevant to the City’s Comprehensive Plan Update from the CHNA for UVM Medical Center, whose service territory includes Essex Junction.

- **Mental Health:** Loneliness and social isolation were highlighted by focus groups as root causes of poor mental health and barriers to wellbeing. Health indicator data show an increase in the number of adults experiencing mentally unhealthy days, and 46.1% of adult survey respondents age 65 and older in Chittenden County live alone.
- **Youth and Schools:** Expanding youth mental health programs was the top choice among survey respondents for improving schools. 1 in 4 high school students in the UVM Medical Center Health Service Area reported experiencing bullying in 2023.
- **Built Environment:** In the Community Survey, 20% of respondents selected “more safety options for walkers and bikers” as their top choice for improving their community. More than 60% of Community Survey respondents said increasing affordable housing units is essential to improve health and wellbeing
- **Economic Mobility:** Gaps in median income by race, ethnicity, and gender continue to undermine economic security and equitable health outcomes. Over half of respondents reported that affordable childcare is not available in their community, limiting families’ stability and workforce participation

State of Vermont Climate Action Office Engagement

Vermont Voices on Climate quarterly reports share climate stories of those who call Vermont home. They are generated through conversations between Vermonters and the Climate Action Office, supported by Consensus Building Institute. The focus is to communicate the perspectives of those whose voices haven't historically been represented in government processes. The following is a selected summary of themes that align with the Essex Junction Strategic Vision and Action Plan pillars.

1. Equity and Accessibility

- Strong concerns about the cost burden of climate solutions (EVs, heat pumps, weatherization) on low- and moderate-income Vermonters.
- Rebates/tax credits don't reach the lowest-income residents; upfront costs are a barrier. Calls for direct, accessible funding and support.
- Climate programs should be simple, transparent, and easy to navigate; too much bureaucracy excludes those most in need.
- Need for plain language materials and communications.
- Renters and mobile home residents face specific barriers (split incentives, outdated infrastructure, lack of landlord investment).

2. Housing & Resilience

- Strong connections made between housing insecurity and climate vulnerability (mobile homes in floodplains, lack of weatherization for renters, post-flood displacement).
- Calls for better building codes, zoning, and land use regulation to prevent siting of affordable housing in high-risk areas.
- Requests for more resilient, affordable housing and climate-responsive infrastructure.
- Many Vermonters tied climate resilience to basic needs: safe housing, food security, healthcare, and community support systems.

3. Transportation

- Skepticism about EVs as the sole solution; concerns about affordability, waste, and global supply chains.
- Strong calls for expanded public transit, better bike/pedestrian infrastructure, and multimodal options.
- Rural residents stress the challenge of long commutes and lack of transit alternatives.

4. Energy & Utilities

- Desire for expanded weatherization and energy efficiency programs, with simpler processes and more local support.
- Interest in solar panels on every building, geothermal networks, and alternative clean energy systems.
- Frustration with complicated application processes; calls for "one-stop" resource hubs.
- Skepticism about biomass; interest in renewables that are accessible and equitable.

5. Agriculture, Food, & Land Use

- Recognition that farms and farmworkers are highly vulnerable to flooding and climate change.

- Calls for support for farmers using climate-friendly practices and for stronger regulation of pesticides and runoff.
 - Indigenous voices highlighted the importance of seed sovereignty, native knowledge, and protection of traditional practices (e.g., Abenaki basketmaking trees, resilient corn varieties).
 - Food systems seen as central to resilience: hunger councils, community gardens, and access to local food.
6. Resilience, Disaster Response, and Community Health
- Trauma from flooding and extreme weather is widespread. Calls for better state disaster response that reduces bureaucratic hurdles and provides direct support.
 - Resilience is framed broadly: includes mental health, disability inclusion, youth engagement, and immigrant support.
 - Strong appreciation for community-based organizations (CBOs) and desire to fund them directly as trusted messengers.
7. Trust & Governance
- Many expressed skepticism about government and corporate interests; climate solutions should not be driven by profit.
 - Strong desire for community-led, locally based solutions.
 - Importance of consistent presence—“show up, and keep showing up”—to build trust.
8. Youth, Education, and Future Generations
- Youth want more involvement in climate conversations.
 - Calls for better climate education in schools and youth leadership programs.
 - Youth Climate Leaders Academy created momentum for integrating youth voices in state processes.

MEMORANDUM

To: Essex Junction Planning Commission
 Copy: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director; Michael Giguere, City Planner; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications and Strategic Initiatives Director
 From: Darren Schibler, Senior Planner & Project Manager; Maya Balassa, Planner
 Date: February 27, 2026
 Re: March 5, 2026 Meeting on Public Engagement Plan

Project Scope of Work Review

To level-set where we are in this project, below is a summary of the contract tasks with the status of each:

Task	Description	Start	End	Status
1	Project Management	Jan-26	Apr-27	Ongoing
2	Review Existing Plans	Jan-26	Jan-26	Complete
3	Mapping and Analysis	Feb-26	Jun-26	In progress
4	Public Engagement	Feb-26	Oct-26	In progress
5	Policy Updates / Plan Drafting	Apr-26	Nov-26	Started in background
6	PC Work Sessions	May-26	Dec-26	Not yet started
7	Plan Adoption	Dec-26	Apr-27	Not yet started

Summary of Prior Meetings

At the January 15th Planning Commission meeting and at biweekly staff check-ins, we:

- Introduced ourselves and the project, including our anticipated tasks and timeline
- Reviewed general principles of land use planning in Vermont
- Acknowledged that the 2019 Plan contains outdated or joint Town/City content that no longer reflects the City's governance.
- Reached consensus that there is interest in narrowing objectives, prioritizing actions, and aligning the plan with the six Strategic Vision pillars and other recent work (such as the TOD study)
- Discussed how to approach public engagement for this plan update, knowing that much has been done in Essex Junction recently and that outreach should be targeted at specific outcomes, use focus groups over broad surveys, and include people who are not regularly represented

Introduction to the project's Public Engagement Plan

The Public Engagement Plan (PEP) outlines how the City and CCRPC will gather input to inform the City Plan update. The goals of engagement are to 1) increase awareness of what the Comprehensive Plan is and why it matters; 2) center voices not historically included in decision-making and; 3) build trust through transparent and accountable engagement.

The PEP is organized with a situation assessment and review of prior engagement (with more details in Appendix B), discussion of key themes and how to approach them, identification of interested and affected parties, and proposed timeline of engagement activities.

Engagement Approach

CCRPC staff considered how to respond to the Planning Commission's direction to move beyond high-level goals and favor focused discussions over broad outreach, especially in light of what the City has already accomplished. In coordination with City staff and the PC's project representative, we have settled on the approach to engagement outlined in the "Engagement Themes and Approach" section of the PEP.

- This approach will lean heavily on focus groups that will dive into three of the six pillars of the Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan (the other three pillars have already been thoroughly addressed by the City's other initiatives):
 - Housing & Urban Design
 - Business & Economic Mobility
 - Energy & Climate Resilience
- Discussion guides for each topic will help the group craft actions that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.
- One on one interviews will be used to hear from key populations that have a harder time making it to meetings and focus groups, or who may not wish to share opinions in a more public setting.
- The focus groups will meet once before edits have been drafted to the Town Plan and once after to review, edit and confirm that their input was effectively integrated.

CCRPC staff will then share the ideas generated by the focus group with the wider community to ensure the goals and actions are consistent with the community vision, and to help prioritize actions through light-touch activities.

Questions for the Planning Commission

- What are your thoughts on the Public Engagement Plan? Does it reflect your vision for public input?
- Are there additional activities that would support a wider range of input? Are there activities you see as being duplicative or ineffective that we should remove?
- Do you have any proposed edits to the Discussion Guides to make this work more meaningful/impactful?
- Are we missing anything?
- For the Focus Groups, are there members of the community who should be included in conversations?

Resources

Materials for this meeting include the following documents (attached if not linked):

- Public Engagement Plan
- Focus Group Discussion Guides
 - Housing
 - Energy & Climate Resilience
 - Business & Economic Mobility

Please let us know if you have any questions. We look forward to seeing you next week!

Darren Schibler
Senior Planner & Project Manager, CFM

Maya Balassa
Planner

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Business & Economic Mobility Focus Group Discussion Guide

Context

The City is working with CCRPC to update the Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan. The 2024 Strategic Vision and Action Plan sets clear goals for the community around the six thematic pillars:

1. Housing and Urban Design
2. Public Services and Facilities
3. Economic and Business Development
4. Transportation and Connectivity
5. Environmental Stewardship
6. Community Engagement and Decision Making

CCRPC staff will incorporate the Key Actions into the plan alongside new statutory requirements and discussion of current trends (as noted in [CCRPC's initial review of the 2019 plan](#)). However, the specific actions that will advance the Key Actions need significant updates. While some of these are already identified by the City in the [2026 Prioritization List and Departmental Work Plans](#), others have no associated actions, or actions that are vague. In particular, the Economic and Business Development, Environmental Stewardship, and Housing and Urban Design pillars would benefit from additional public engagement around crafting specific actions.

Before embarking on plan drafting, CCRPC staff will seek input from community focus groups on key topics related to these Strategic Pillars to craft actions that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

Economic Development

The [2019 Comprehensive Plan](#) addresses economic development in Chapter 4.3; the related topics of Education and Child Care are addressed in Chapter 4.7. Since the writing of the 2019 plan, several important trends have shifted the economic landscape. On a statewide scale, the dual factors of an aging population and the COVID-19 pandemic caused many people to leave the workforce, drastically driving up inflation and causing disruptions in many industries. Unemployment rates did return to normal as of 2024, but the overall workforce remains smaller than before the pandemic¹. While Essex and Essex Junction recovered more quickly and completely compared to the state², supply chain disruptions and federal tariffs have further driven up costs for businesses and individuals, which are felt more by those with lower income and

¹ (2026) *Vermont Labor Force and Unemployment Statistics*, Vermont Department of Labor.
<https://www.vtlmi.info/laus.cfm>

² (2026) *Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages*, Vermont Department of Labor.
<https://www.vtlmi.info/indareanaics.cfm>

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update

Business & Economic Mobility Focus Group Discussion Guide

thinner margins. The rising cost of goods and services has strained household finances, as have Vermont's skyrocketing education fund taxes and housing costs (though the housing market has cooled somewhat).

Amidst these challenges, the City has established in its Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan a preferred future where "Essex Junction becomes known for its inclusive and welcoming ethos" with a population that "is both economically and ethnically diverse." To achieve this vision, we need to consider who in the community may be struggling financially and why, especially those who have been struggling for a long time (for example, white households in Chittenden County have more than double the income of black households)³. The vision also states that the City's "economic approach is community led while having a strong focus on adapting and growing as a community." This implies a mandate for the City to take action in support of businesses and households, ensuring opportunities for all in the community to achieve their desired financial future.

Focus Group Participants

CCRPC will recruit members of the focus group from the following stakeholder groups to ensure a broad range of interests and perspectives are represented in the plan actions:

- Planning Commission member
- City Community Development staff
- Brownell Library staff
- Vermont Professionals of Color Network members
- Essex High School Business Club
- 2-3 owners of businesses with a range in size and industry
- Resident(s) with lower incomes / residents of subsidized housing
- Residents who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC)
- New Americans and English Language Learners
- EWSD Student Support Services staff (Tamara Eklof and/or Erin Maguire)

³ U.S. Census Bureau. (2019-2023). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates: Median Household Income by Race, Chittenden County, VT*. Accessed via data.census.gov.

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Business & Economic Mobility Focus Group Discussion Guide

Process

CCRPC anticipates the following process and timeline, which may be adjusted or added to as the work moves forward based on participant availability, needs for additional time and engagement, and in consideration that discussion of housing issues are informed by the other Strategic Pillars and their stakeholders:

Focus Group Meeting 1	April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convene and introduce group members• Review context and focus group charge• Brainstorm actions using targets and discussion questions
CCRPC staff complete draft plan text	May 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a list of draft actions• Seek answers to unresolved questions / issues• Conduct additional outreach as needed
Focus Group Meeting 2	June 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review complete draft of plan text• Focus Group helps refine plan actions
Planning Commission presentation / discussion	July 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review complete draft of plan text

Guiding Questions

CCRPC will use the following questions to help guide discussions among focus group participants and generate ideas for plan actions. These questions are inspired by the [Urban Institute's Upward Mobility Framework](#).

- General Economic Development
 - What do you value most about Essex Junction's local economy? What are the biggest challenges you face when it comes to working and shopping in the City?
 - What allows existing businesses to grow and sustain themselves in Essex Junction?
 - What do existing businesses need to feel supported by the City?
 - What investments in infrastructure can the City make to support businesses?
- Small Business Development
 - If the City re-established an Economic Development Fund, what opportunities could it offer to the community?
 - Startup support
 - Business stabilization assistance
 - Business growth / capital investment guidance

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Business & Economic Mobility Focus Group Discussion Guide

- How does the City currently support microbusinesses, home-based businesses, and informal work opportunities? Are there any barriers or opportunities?
- Measurable and Equitable Outcomes for Business Support
 - How can the City ensure that its business support initiatives reach all business types and people within the community?
 - What partnerships can be leveraged to help track and improve equity outcomes?
- Workforce Development Strategies
 - How does child care availability affect economic development in Essex Junction?
 - Are there enough employees to fill jobs in local businesses? If not, what is the barrier: housing availability? Competitive wages? Lack of skills / credentials?
 - Are job opportunities and pathways for business / career growth available to all members of the community? If not, what are the barriers?
 - What partnerships can the City facilitate to support workforce development?
- Creating an Opportunity-Rich, Inclusive Community
 - What businesses or community members are missing from the economy?
 - Is there growth potential in sectors that would benefit individuals and the community? What can the City do to market to the gaps?
 - Are low-margin, essential businesses able to sustain themselves in Essex Junction?
- City Procurement Processes: How can the City modify its procurement policies to support local upward economic mobility?
 - Expand vendor outreach
 - Lower barriers for small / local firms to bid on municipal projects
 - Simplify bidding thresholds
 - Use pre-qualified vendor lists
 - Mentorship for first-time bidders
 - Increase transparency of procurement process
 - Increase language access in the procurement process
- Downtown Revitalization
 - What design elements in the TOD study area (Five Corners and Pearl Street corridor) are necessary for business viability?
 - Affordable commercial space
 - Adaptable commercial spaces
 - Flexible leases
 - Small-stall incubators
 - “Third places” (parks, cafés, markets)
 - Strategies to encourage pass-by business (slowing traffic, frequent transit stops, easy-to-use parking)

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Business & Economic Mobility Focus Group Discussion Guide

- Economic Resilience
 - How are local businesses prepared for a major disruption (flood, pandemic, recession, etc.)? What lifelines could be put in place now to ensure their continuity in the face of hard times?
 - Business resilience training
 - Emergency grant navigation
 - Recovery coordination
 - Communication channels
 - Community resource hubs / community support organizations
- Business Navigation and Access to Capital
 - Are the City staff and offices welcoming and helpful to businesses? What could be improved?
 - What role can the Brownell Library play in supporting economic development?
- Encouraging Ownership Pathways
 - What intentional strategies can the City implement to support ownership opportunities to residents, especially those historically excluded from wealth-building?

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Energy & Climate Resilience Focus Group Discussion Guide

Context

The City is working with CCRPC to update the Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan. The 2024 Strategic Vision and Action Plan sets clear goals for the community around the six thematic pillars:

1. Housing and Urban Design
2. Public Services and Facilities
3. Economic and Business Development
4. Transportation and Connectivity
5. Environmental Stewardship
6. Community Engagement and Decision Making

CCRPC staff will incorporate the Key Actions into the plan alongside new statutory requirements and discussion of current trends (as noted in [CCRPC's initial review of the 2019 plan](#)). However, the specific actions that will advance the Key Actions need significant updates. While some of these are already identified by the City in the [2026 Prioritization List and Departmental Work Plans](#), others have no associated actions, or actions that are vague. In particular, the Economic and Business Development, Environmental Stewardship, and Housing and Urban Design pillars would benefit from additional public engagement around crafting specific actions.

Before embarking on plan drafting, CCRPC staff will seek input from community focus groups on key topics related to these Strategic Pillars to craft actions that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

Energy

The [2019 Comprehensive Plan](#) addresses energy in Chapter 4.1 and in Appendix D, the Essex Community Enhanced Energy Plan, which was a joint effort with the Town of Essex while the municipalities were still considering merger. Climate resilience topics are addressed throughout the plan, including Chapter 4.2 (Agriculture and Community Forestry), Chapter 4.4 (Open Space / Recreation / Public Health), Chapter 4.5 (Natural Environmental Resources), and Chapter 4.6 (Natural Hazards Resiliency).

Many of the actions in the plan were very generic, or are applicable only to the Town, so new actions will need to be crafted that are relevant to the City. Actions will also need to reflect the targets set for Essex Junction in CCRPC's [municipal energy data guide](#), which align with the Vermont Climate Action Plan and the 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan:

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Energy & Climate Resilience Focus Group Discussion Guide

Key Energy Targets for Essex Junction	2035	2050
Transportation		
Percent reduction in light duty transportation energy use from 2025	37%	63%
Light Duty Electric and Hybrid Electric Vehicles (% of Vehicle Fleet)	52.4%	98%
Heating		
Percent of Commercial Establishments Weatherized	40%	50%
Number of Heat Pump equivalents installed in Commercial Buildings	4,906	6,275
Percent of residences weatherized	40%	50%
Percent of residences using heat pumps	74%	93%
Percent of residences using utility gas	25%	2%
Electricity		
Number of residences with increased electric efficiency	1,772	3,204
Commercial / industrial buildings with increased electric efficiency	400	400
Annual MWh of new renewable electricity generation (typical residential solar installations produce ~6-13 MWh annually)	29,972	40,937

Climate Resilience

Separate from efforts to reduce Essex Junction’s impact on climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the City also needs to take action to become more resilient to the effects of climate change. These climate challenges may come in the form of:

- **Flooding:** Though less vulnerable than many other parts of Vermont, Essex Junction is not immune to the impacts of flooding. Several severe rain events in recent years have strained the City’s stormwater infrastructure, causing significant damage to roads.
- **Extreme Heat:** The [Vermont Department of Health’s Heat Data Dashboard](#) shows upward trends in the statewide average heat index and the number of days of extreme heat days in Chittenden County. This can cause heat-related illnesses and even hospitalizations, especially among the elderly, very young children, and others with underlying health conditions. It also affects those in urbanized areas like Essex Junction more where there is less shade from vegetation and more heat retention from buildings and paved surfaces.
- **Warmer, Less Predictable Winters:** The [Vermont Climate Action Plan](#) notes that Vermont winters are predicted to be warmer on average in the future. This may result in more winter rain or icing, which is more hazardous for road travel and requires use of more road salt. It can also cause more downed trees and power outages. Larger swings in temperature are also predicted, with repeated or extended periods of extreme cold.
- **Air Quality:** Levels of particulate matter and ozone, which can cause poor outdoor air quality, [have generally decreased in Chittenden County over the last two decades](#). However, more recently an increase in the frequency and size of wildfires in western North

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update

Energy & Climate Resilience Focus Group Discussion Guide

America have created periods of high particulate matter and poor air quality in the east during the summer.

- **Shifting Ecological Communities:** Changes in temperature and precipitation combined with continued human and natural disturbances are changing Vermont's natural landscapes. Plants and animals adapted to warmer, wetter conditions and tolerant of periodic drought are becoming more prevalent, while the stress of extreme physical conditions create more opportunities for pests and diseases that affect plants and animals (including humans and our pets).
- **Agriculture and Food Systems:** Because there are few farms in Essex Junction, the City's residents depend on food produced elsewhere. Many of the above climate challenges and others have negatively impacted agriculture in Vermont and beyond, and social and economic disruptions experienced in the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the weak points of our food supply chains.

Focus Group Participants

CCRPC will recruit members of the focus group from the following stakeholder groups to ensure a broad range of interests and perspectives are represented in the plan actions:

- Planning Commission member
- City staff
- Subject matter expert(s) in energy and climate issues
- Youth representative or Essex Westford School District staff / board member
- City staff who oversee buildings & operations (e.g., Public Works Director)
- CVOEO Weatherization Program staff
- Resident(s), especially of older and/or rental housing
- GlobalFoundries staff (given the campus' energy demand and potential for renewables development)
- Local business owner(s), including those working in the energy industry (e.g., fuel suppliers, HVAC, building construction / maintenance)
- Food & agriculture industry representatives (Whitcomb Farm?)
- Essex Junction Tree Advisory Committee members
- HomeCare Assistance, Senior Center staff, and/or primary healthcare providers

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update

Energy & Climate Resilience Focus Group Discussion Guide

Process

CCRPC anticipates the following process and timeline, which may be adjusted or added to as the work moves forward based on participant availability, needs for additional time and engagement, and in consideration that discussion of energy and climate issues are informed by the other Strategic Pillars and their stakeholders (such as housing, economic development and equity, and utilities / facilities):

Focus Group Meeting 1	April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convene and introduce group members• Review context and focus group charge• Brainstorm actions using targets and discussion questions
CCRPC staff complete draft plan text	May 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a list of draft actions• Seek answers to unresolved questions / issues• Conduct additional outreach as needed
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Planning Commission presentation / discussion	July 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review complete draft of plan text

Guiding Questions

CCRPC will use the following questions to help guide discussions among focus group participants and generate ideas for plan actions.

- Energy
 - How would meeting the targets outlined for reducing energy use and fossil fuel emissions change life in Essex Junction?
 - Where can City government show leadership in meeting these targets: through its own operations, land-use policy, infrastructure investments, or partnerships with residents and businesses?
 - How will residents and business owners become motivated to help meet these targets?
 - List 1-2 SMART actions that City government can take for each of the energy targets listed in the table.
- Climate Resilience

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Energy & Climate Resilience Focus Group Discussion Guide

- Where should the City focus its resources to address climate impacts in ways that are most visible, practical, and beneficial to residents and local businesses?
- If Essex Junction treated climate change as the greatest long-term risk to community wellbeing, how should that priority shape decisions about land use, housing, transportation, and public investment?
- How can the City ensure that development envisioned by the Connect the Junction occurs in a way that advances climate goals? What will make this different from the TOD Overlay District?
- List 1-2 SMART actions that City government can take in response to each of the climate challenges outlined in the “Context” section above. Feel free to list other actions related to climate resilience.

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update

Housing Focus Group Discussion Guide

Context

The City is working with CCRPC to update the Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan. The 2024 Strategic Vision and Action Plan sets clear goals for the community around the six thematic pillars:

1. Housing and Urban Design
2. Public Services and Facilities
3. Economic and Business Development
4. Transportation and Connectivity
5. Environmental Stewardship
6. Community Engagement and Decision Making

CCRPC staff will incorporate the Key Actions into the plan alongside new statutory requirements and discussion of current trends (as noted in [CCRPC's initial review of the 2019 plan](#)). However, the specific actions that will advance the Key Actions need significant updates. While some of these are already identified by the City in the [2026 Prioritization List and Departmental Work Plans](#), others have no associated actions, or actions that are vague. In particular, the Economic and Business Development, Environmental Stewardship, and Housing and Urban Design pillars would benefit from additional public engagement around crafting specific actions.

Before embarking on plan drafting, CCRPC staff will seek input from community focus groups on key topics related to these Strategic Pillars to craft actions that are SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

Housing

The [2019 Comprehensive Plan](#) addresses housing in Chapter 4.9. Many of the actions need to be reassessed to adjust for work in the past 8 years. In addition, Vermont's Act 181 (2024), building on the 2023 HOME Act (Act 47), modernizes state land use and housing policy by requiring statewide, regional, and local housing targets with stronger alignment between municipal plans, zoning, and state planning goals to address long-standing housing shortages. Under this framework, Essex Junction has been assigned the housing targets listed in the table below. These targets will be integrated into the 2019 Comprehensive Plan, along with public and private actions identified by this focus group that will be needed to achieve the targets and address other housing needs.

Essex Junction Housing Targets*			
Target Year	Low	Medium	High
2030	707	864	1,021
2050	1,529	3,062	4,594

*Targets represent new units in addition to the 4,889 existing units as of 2023.

Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Housing Focus Group Discussion Guide

Focus Group Participants

CCRPC will recruit members of the focus group from the following stakeholder groups to ensure a broad range of interests and perspectives are represented in the plan actions:

- Planning Commission member
- City Community Development staff
- City Health Officer
- Affordable housing developer / property manager
- For-profit developer and/or large multi-unit property manager
- Small-scale / infill developers (use 802 Homes contacts)
 - Huntington Homes
- Landlord of small rental property or properties
- Resident(s) of rental housing
- Resident(s) of owner-occupied housing

Process

CCRPC anticipates the following process and timeline, which may be adjusted or added to as the work moves forward based on participant availability, needs for additional time and engagement, and in consideration that discussion of housing issues are informed by the other Strategic Pillars and their stakeholders:

Focus Group Meeting 1	April 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convene and introduce group members• Review context and focus group charge• Brainstorm actions using targets and discussion questions
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Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update

Housing Focus Group Discussion Guide

Guiding Questions

CCRPC will use the following questions to help guide discussions among focus group participants and generate ideas for plan actions.

- What do residents want the city to promote when it comes to housing? Options, affordability, quality, neighborhood integration?
- How do residents see the city promoting housing? Options may include:
 - Reducing regulatory barriers
 - Providing financial incentives
 - Partnering with developer(s)
 - Fully taking on development of housing
- Would you support the city utilizing Tax Increment Financing or partnering with a developer on a Community Housing Infrastructure Program (CHIP) project to fund infrastructure that supports housing?
- Which characteristics are important to retaining “character” of our built environment. Is it building materials and decorative elements? Height and massing? Streetscape features? How a building is used?
- If Essex Junction were to meet the housing target by 2050, where should the units go?
- What mix of unit sizes, types, and affordability levels would meet Essex Junction’s needs?

Essex Junction Land Development Code – March 2026
Form-Based Code Updates Memo #2

Purpose

This document builds on the earlier Form-Based Code Options memo presented at the February 2026 Planning Commission meeting, which outlined a restructuring of development standards to streamline review, clarify regulatory intent through new objective standards, and implement the Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan. As described in that memo, the proposed amendments eliminate the Design Review Overlay District (Section 620) and simplify the Historic Preservation Overlay District (Section 621); design standards are integrated directly into the base zoning districts, while historic preservation standards are consolidated within the overlay section, where they function independently of the underlying zoning regulations.

The proposed amendments primarily affect the Village Center (Section 604) and Transit-Oriented Development (Section 608) districts. Rather than layering new standards on top of existing dimensional and design requirements, the code will be reorganized so that existing standards for lot size and coverage, setbacks, building height, parking, and design standards are implemented through coordinated Form-Based Standards.

Key proposed changes to the Village Center and TOD sections include:

- Removal of repetitive preservation language currently located in Section 604.E.4 of the Village Center standards, which will remain solely within the Historic Preservation Overlay (Section 621). The demolition subsection in the Village Center (current Section 604.E.5) may be retained and clarified to establish a defined review process intended to prevent demolition of historic buildings, including those not formally listed on historic registers.
- Integration of preservation- and design-related considerations into new objective standards for building form and frontages, façade composition and articulation, materials, parking, and landscaping.
- Addition of standards for new streets within the TOD district.

This document outlines the proposed revised sections for the Village Center (Section 604) and TOD (Section 608) districts. Because the two districts share similar policy objectives, the proposed standards are aligned in structure and, in many cases, content. In the updated Land Development Code, Sections 604 and 608 will remain separate, but in this memo, they are presented together to facilitate comparison and efficient review.

Code Outline

The proposed Section 604 (Village Center) and Section 608 (TOD) are reorganized under a consistent structure in which conventional dimensional standards and design requirements for buildings and sites are implemented as coordinated Form-Based Standards. The outline below identifies the structure of each section and summarizes where content is new, revised, and/or differentiated by district.

A. Purpose

Purpose statements are largely retained. The TOD purpose is streamlined and coordinated with the “Use of Form-Based Standards” section to avoid repetition and clarify that form-based standards are the primary implementation tool. New content is indicated in green.

Section 604.A Village Center	Section 608.A Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
<p>To provide a compact commercial community center having a mix of commercial, residential, governmental, cultural, and mixed-use institutional buildings and uses that are consistent with the purpose of a designated Village Center District, and a neighborhood development area as both are defined by the State of Vermont. The Village Center shall be the core for an ongoing revitalization that will improve the community’s vitality and livability and the goal of having a Center that accommodates growth. Due to the historic nature of the residential neighborhoods surrounding the Five Corners area, the design and layout of any new developments or infill projects shall acknowledge the importance of the existing streetscape and enhance the area through an architectural design and site layout that enhances pedestrian connectivity to adjacent properties.</p>	<p>The purpose of the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District is to encourage development that supports a variety of transportation options including public transit (bus and rail), walking, biking, and the automobile car travel. The TOD District is currently served by public bus service and is adjacent to an active rail corridor that may accommodate future light rail service as well as planned bike facilities. Given these connections, the TOD District is an ideal location to support compact urban growth and increased mobility options. Development including dense housing within the district should embody the principles of transit-oriented design through high-density residential and mixed-use buildings with first-floor retail, wide sidewalks, on-street parking, public or shared parking facilities, open spaces, and pedestrian amenities that enhance safety and comfort for all users.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.— In order to achieve the desired goal of providing greater transportation options, development within the district shall embody the characteristics of compact urban development and pedestrian oriented design. Mixed use buildings with first floor retail, wide sidewalks, interconnected streets, on-street parking, high density residential development, pedestrian amenities, transit stations and stops, open spaces, and public or shared parking are strongly encouraged and in many cases required as a part of the standards within the TOD District. 2.— The area within the TOD District is currently served by public bus transportation. In addition, the TOD District is adjacent to an active rail corridor, which may be used for light rail service in the future. A bike path is also planned for the rail corridor. Therefore, the TOD District is in an ideal location to provide greater transportation options. 3.— The specific objectives of the TOD District are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a.— Create an environment that is conducive to using public transit, walking and riding a bike; b.— Accommodate a mix of uses in a form that attracts pedestrians; c.— Integrate commercial, institutional and residential development into a compact development pattern arranged around a street grid; d.— Provide pedestrian amenities and open spaces to create a comfortable and attractive environment; e.— Provide public and/or shared parking to accommodate automobiles, but will not detract from the pedestrian

	<p>environment;</p> <p>f. High Density Residential development;</p> <p>g. First Floor Retail; and</p> <p>h. Encourage the use of Tax Increment Financing to support public improvements in the district</p>
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B. Use of Form-Based Standards

New section in both districts establishing how form-based standards replace conventional dimensional and design standards and implement district objectives.

Section 604.B Village Center	Section 608.B Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
<p>Regulations for the Village Center include form-based standards to guide compact, context-sensitive development that recognizes and enhances the unique historic qualities of the area while supporting increased activity and efficient transit-oriented growth. These standards are intended to create a pedestrian-oriented district with strong relationships between buildings, sidewalks, and streets, by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enabling infill and redevelopment that protect existing historic resources while introducing new architectural and urban design approaches that increase density, activity, and economic opportunity. 2. Encouraging high-quality, mixed-use development that integrates residential, commercial, and civic uses with active ground floors, public amenities, and open spaces to support daily life, social interaction, and community identity. 3. Supporting daily activities within walking distance of most dwellings and ensuring safe, accessibility mobility for all users through the implementation of Complete Streets principles and inclusive design of all publicly accessible indoor and outdoor spaces. 4. Providing a range of housing types, sizes, arrangements, and price levels to accommodate a diverse range of households, ages, and incomes. 5. Ensuring that buildings and landscaping contribute to the physical definition of streets as civic places through human-scaled elements and details that promote pedestrian interest, comfort, and safety. 	<p>Regulations for the TOD District include form-based standards to guide compact, mixed-use development that supports a range of transportation options, including public transit, walking, biking, and car travel. These standards are intended to create a pedestrian-oriented, transit-supportive district characterized by active ground floors, high-density residential uses, interconnected streets, and high-quality public spaces, by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating an environment that encourages use of public transit, walking, and biking by concentrating density and activity around transit stops and key pedestrian corridors. 2. Enabling infill and redevelopment that integrates commercial, institutional, and residential uses with plazas and open spaces in a form to support daily needs and universal accessibility. 3. Encouraging development that reflects and enhances existing character while promoting contemporary, creative architecture and urban design solutions, durable materials, and high-quality construction. 4. Providing high-density residential development that increases housing options, supports transit ridership, and contributes to active economic and civic realms. 5. Ensuring that buildings and landscaping contribute to a comfortable and attractive public realm and the physical definition of streets as civic places through accessible, pedestrian-oriented design features such as active ground floors, wide sidewalks, street trees, lighting, and furnishings. 6. Providing interconnected streets, on-street parking, and shared parking facilities that accommodate vehicles without detracting from the pedestrian environment. 7. Encouraging the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and similar tools to support public improvements in the district.

C. Permitted and Conditional Uses

There will be no substantive change here. Uses will continue to be governed by the Use Chart in Section 622.

D. Site and Dimensional Standards

Current standards for lot size, coverage, and building dimensions are folded into this section alongside new objective standards for building form, setbacks, and frontages. **Content is the same across both sections, with minor dimensional differences in 2. Dimensional Requirements, indicated below.** Standards for mitigating impact on adjacent residential uses are the same in both districts, with the intent of reducing the visual and physical impact of increased height and density across the board.

A. Building Placement and Orientation

- (a) A Principal Building shall be placed on each Lot with its front façade along the Principal Frontage. Facades shall be built parallel to a rectilinear Principal Frontage line, or to the tangent of a curved Principal Frontage line. For corner lots and through lots, the Principal Frontage may be designated along either or both streets.
- (b) Each lot shall provide contiguous frontage on each abutting public street, consistent with the frontage standards in the Dimensional Requirements table in Section 604.D.2.
- (c) A Principal Building shall have at least one (1) principal entrance facing the Principal Frontage. For Principal Buildings located on a corner, the principal entrance may be oriented to the corner. Principal Buildings fronting a plaza or square shall also have a minimum of one principal entrance directly onto the plaza or square.
- (d) Where permitted, additional Principal Buildings may be placed at the Frontage or behind a Principal Building placed at the Frontage. Any Principal Buildings located behind the Frontage shall be arranged in cohesive groupings, with their principal entrances oriented to a shared driveway or common courtyard or greenspace.
- (e) One or more attached or detached Accessory Building(s) associated with a Principal Building may be built on each Lot to the rear of a Principal Building.
- (f) Projections into required building setbacks, including balconies, bay windows, open terraces, attached decks, steps, stoops, windowsills, eaves, chimneys and fire escapes, are allowed up to 24 inches.

2. Dimensional Requirements

	Section 604.D Village Center	Section 608.D Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
Lot Area (square feet)	N/A	N/A
Density (dwelling units per acre)	N/A	N/A
Lot Coverage (% of lot area)		
Overall impervious coverage, including structural footprints	90% max	90% max
Building Height		
Building height (stories and feet)	2 stories and 24' min Maximum height changes by subdistrict, reference Figure 604-A. Height throughout district shall not	2 stories and 24' min 9 stories max.

Building height bonus for any affordable housing development*	exceed 10 stories max.	
	Maximum height changes by subdistrict, reference Figure 604-A. Height throughout district shall not exceed 10 stories max.	10 stories max.
Setbacks		
Front yard	0' min. Must comply with Frontage Types (Section 604.E.2)	0' min. Must comply with Frontage Types (Section 604.E.2)
Side yards (feet, each side)	0' min, except where the subject parcel is adjacent to a Residential zoning district, in which case Section 604.D.3 applies.	0' min, except where the subject parcel is adjacent to a Residential zoning district, in which case Section 604.D.3 applies.
Rear yard (feet)	0' min, except where the subject parcel is adjacent to a Residential zoning district, in which case Section 604.D.3 applies.	0' min, except where the subject parcel is adjacent to a Residential zoning district, in which case Section 604.D.3 applies.
Frontages		
Frontage coverage (% of linear frontage occupied by a Principal Building Façade)	75% min	75% min

* in accordance with 24 V.S.A. § 4412, provided that the structure complies with the Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code

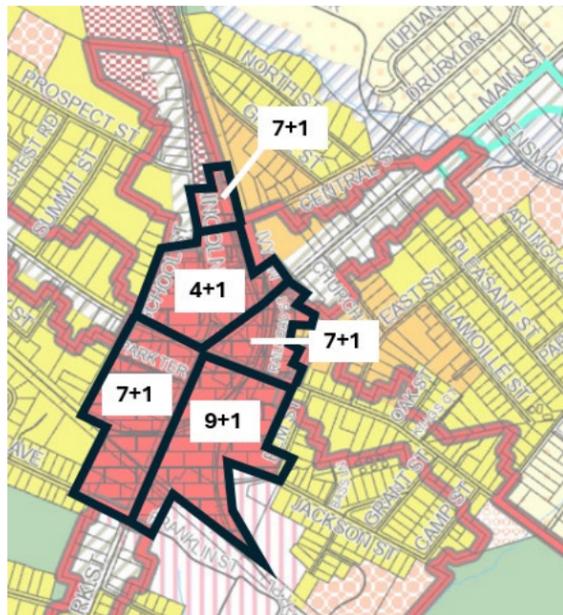


Figure 604-A. Village Center maximum height (in stories, including affordable housing bonus)

3. Residential Adjacency

- B. 10-foot minimum side and rear setbacks shall be required where a parcel directly abuts a residential zoning district with a lower maximum building height.
- a) Where the difference in maximum building height between abutting zoning districts is four (4) or more stories, the required setback shall be increased to 30 feet, 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 property line. See Figure 604-B.

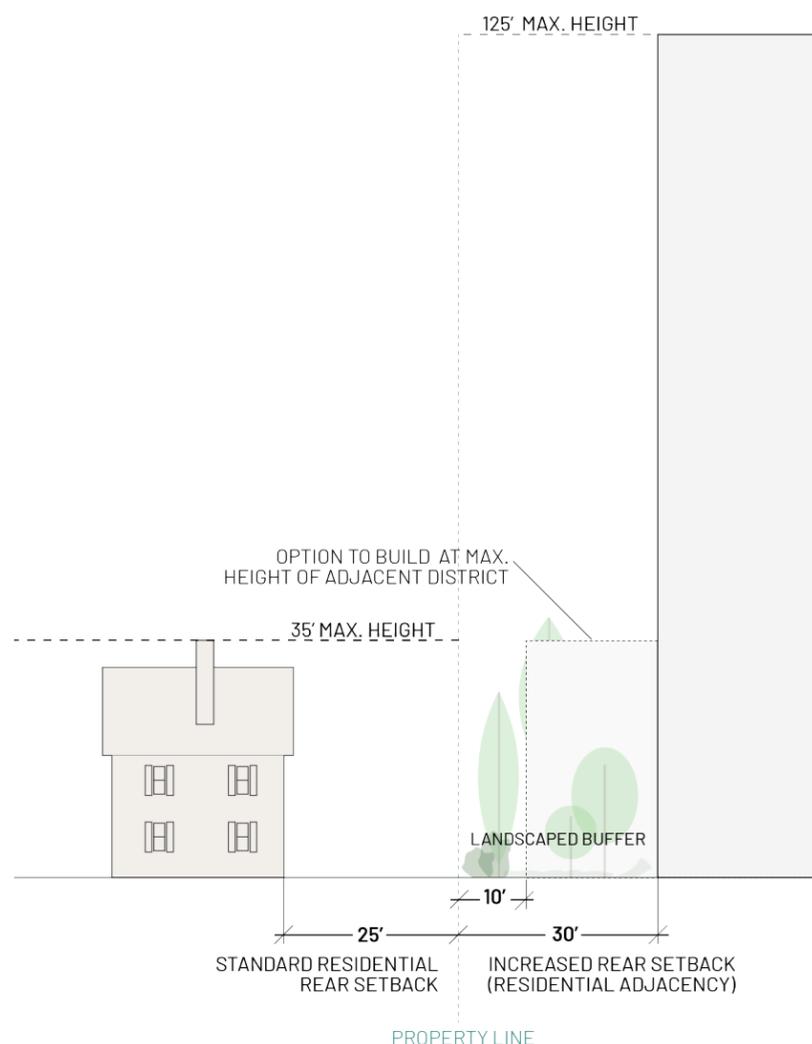


Figure 604-B. Residential Adjacency diagram

E. **Street Room and Frontage Standards**

A consistent street-room framework will be applied in both districts, establishing height-to-width ratios and required frontage types to regulate the relationship between buildings and the public realm. Because ratios that reflect existing scale and frontage types are flexible, **the content of these standards are the same for both districts.**

Purpose: Buildings shall define and respond to the “street room,” the space framed by building frontages, landscaping, and the public right-of-way. Building height, setbacks, frontage types, and façade articulations shall be coordinated to create a comfortable, human-scale public realm. Projects shall comply with building-height-to-street-width ratio standards (Section 604.E.1) and implement an approved frontage type (Section 604.E.2) to establish street-room conditions that support diverse uses and contexts across the Village Center.

1. **Building Height to Street Width Ratio Standards**

- (a) 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. See Figure 604-C. All Buildings must remain within the minimum and maximum setbacks and comply with height requirements (Section 604.D.2).
- (b) To determine if a building meets this requirement, use the following formula: $\text{Building Height} / (\text{ROW width} + \text{Front Yard Setback})$. Building height is measured from sidewalk grade to the top of vertical wall, excluding parapet. If the resulting number is between 0.5 and 1.0, the building meets the standard (falling between a 1:2 and 1:1 ratio) and requires no further adjustment.
- (c) If the calculated ratio falls outside the 0.5-1.0 range, at least one of the following adjustments is required:
 - (i) For ratios greater than 1.0, provide one or more upper-level setbacks above the ground floor. Stepbacks shall extend along at least 75% of the Principal Façade and must be deep enough to reduce the effective ratio to 1.0 or less, calculated as: $\text{Total Building Height} / (\text{ROW Width} + \text{Front Setback} + \text{Stepback Depth})$. Stepbacks may occur at one or multiple levels, provided the cumulative effect meets the required stepback depth. No vertical building wall above a stepback shall exceed three (3) stories without an additional stepback. Stepback areas are encouraged to be designed as usable space, such as terraces or green roofs. See Figure 604-C; or
 - (ii) For ratios less than 0.5, provide a pedestrian-oriented frontage type: Linear, Plaza, and/or Terrace, as detailed in Section 604.E.2; or
 - (iii) Adjust the front setback within allowed limits and in coordination with an approved Frontage Type (Section 604.E.2) in order to achieve a compliant ratio. A ratio greater than 1.0 would require an increased setback while a ratio less than 0.5 would require a reduced setback.

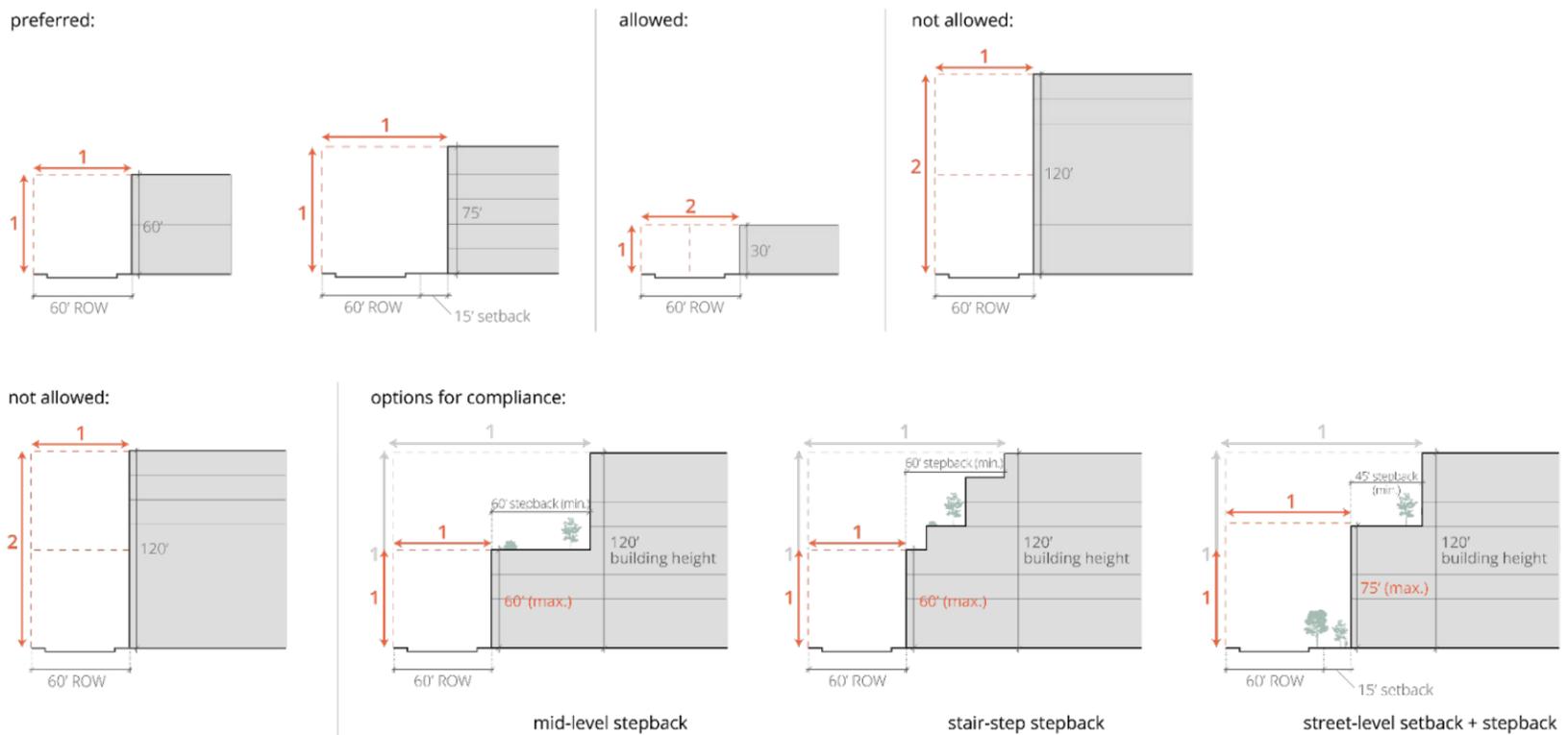


Figure 604-C. Building-Height-to-Street-Width ratio diagrams

2. **Frontage Types**

- (a) Each street-facing façade shall implement an approved Frontage Type consistent with the building’s intended ground-floor use, adjacent street character, and Street Room standards. Frontage Type shall be coordinated with building-height-to-street-width ratio (Section 604.E.1) to ensure façade features, setbacks, and active uses collectively create a well-proportioned, human-scaled, street environment.
- (b) Each development shall designate one of the following Frontage Types per street-facing facade and meet the associated standards. See Figure 604-E:



Figure 604-D. Frontage Types

Frontage Type	Front setback (feet)	Purpose	Intended/Suggested Ground-Floor Use
Linear	0' min, 10' max	Creating a continuous, sidewalk-aligned building edge that prioritizes storefront visibility, pedestrian movement, and lingering.	Active commercial uses.
Plaza	10' min, 30' max	Integrating publicly accessible open space with building frontage to support gathering, seating, and programmed activity.	Commercial or civic uses.
Terrace	8' min, 15' max	Creating a defined transition space between the building and sidewalk that supports either semi-private residential use or publicly accessible commercial/civic activity while maintaining an active and accessible pedestrian edge.	Any uses. Different application of facade elements and amenities depending on intended ground-floor use.
Landscape	5' min, 20' max	Establishing a landscaped buffer between building and street that prioritizes privacy and green space.	Residential or office
Stoop	5' min, 15' max	Providing a residential street edge that balances neighborhood activation with privacy through elevated entries and landscaped transitions.	Residential

(1) Linear

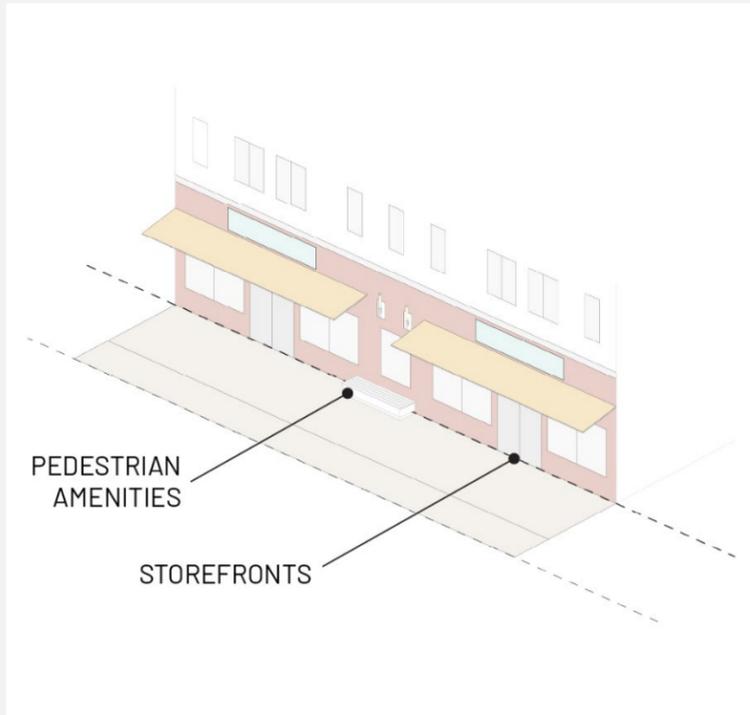


Figure 604-E. Linear Frontage

A. Setback

The Linear Frontage shall have zero setback from the street edge. A setback of up to ten (10) feet is permitted if the setback area is designed and functions as an extension of the public right-of-way, as a pedestrian through-zone or seating zone.

B. Access

Principal entrances shall be oriented to the street. At least one (1) commercial storefront shall be provided with a direct tenant entrance from the sidewalk, at grade. Entrances may be recessed up to four (4) feet in depth.

C. Lighting

Pedestrian-scale lighting shall be provided along the building façade and spaced approximately 40 feet apart. At least one (1) lighting fixture is required at each building entry. All lighting shall comply with Section 704.

D. Façade Treatment

At least 75 percent of the façade area between two (2) and ten (10) feet above the finished sidewalk grade shall be treated with active façade components, which may include transparent windows and/or doors, display areas, and artwork.

E. Weather Protection

Functional weather protection shall be provided over at least 75 percent of the ground-floor façade, projecting a minimum of five (5) feet over the sidewalk with a walk-under clearance of at least eight (8) feet above sidewalk grade. This could include awnings, canopies, or other permitted treatments.

F. Amenities

If a setback is provided, the frontage shall incorporate at least two (2) distinct amenities from the following list. Amenities shall not obstruct pedestrian circulation.

- i. Moveable furniture – Benches or café seating, accommodating at least two (2) people.
- ii. Planter boxes – Minimum area of eight (8) square feet and minimum soil depth of 18 inches; may include trees, shrubs, or seasonal plants.
- iii. Distinctive paving pattern – Of contrasting color, material, or texture covering at least 50 percent of the setback area.
- iv. Public Art – Sculptures, wall or ground murals, or other permanent installations at least three (3) feet in height or covering at least ten (10) square feet of surface area.
- v. Planted buffer – Continuous planting along at least 50 percent of the frontage with a minimum width of two (2) feet; may be in-ground or boxed/elevated.

G. The Linear Frontage may not be implemented with ground-floor residential uses.

(2) Plaza



Figure 604-F. Plaza Frontage

A. Setback

The Plaza Frontage includes a pedestrian-oriented plaza between the building and street edge. The plaza shall be at sidewalk grade and located within a ten (10) to 30-foot front setback. The plaza should extend along a minimum of 30 feet of frontage and provide at least 1,500 square feet of plaza space. Building frontage not part of the plaza may extend up to zero-foot setback at the property line.

B. Access

Principal entrances shall be oriented to the plaza. Entrances may be at grade or elevated as required to accommodate site slope.

C. Lighting

Pedestrian-scale lighting in compliance with Section 704 is required at regular intervals along primary pedestrian paths and plaza edges and should be integrated with landscape, seating, or plaza features where possible. In addition, at least one (1) lighting fixture is required at each building entry.

D. Façade Treatment

At least 40 percent of the facade between two (2) and ten (10) feet above the finished sidewalk grade shall be glazed with transparent windows and/or doors.

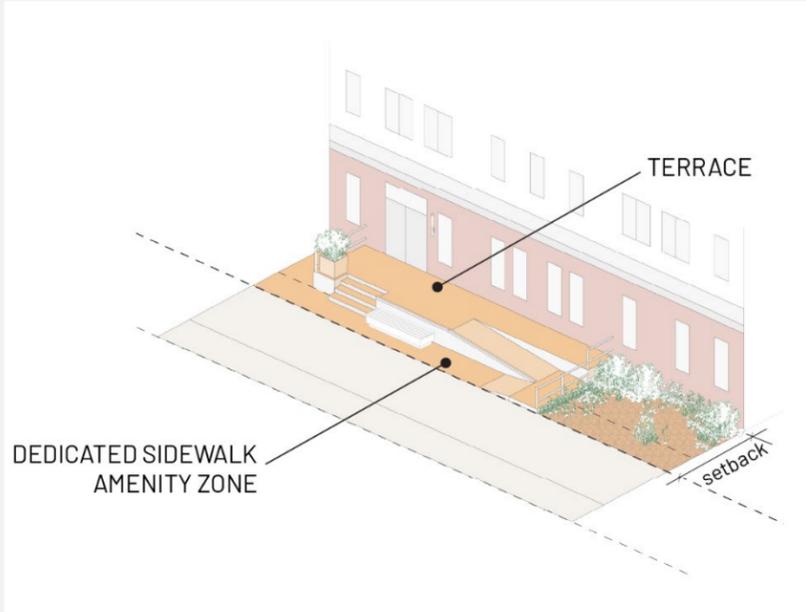
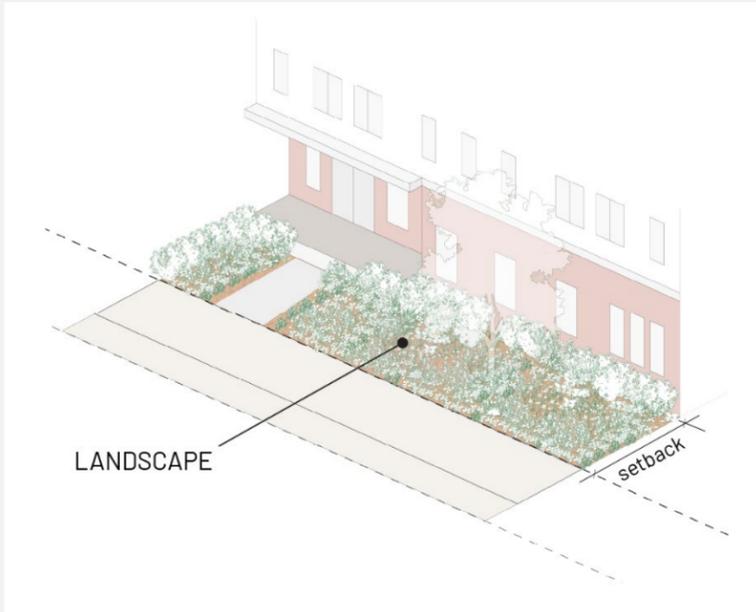
E. Weather Protection

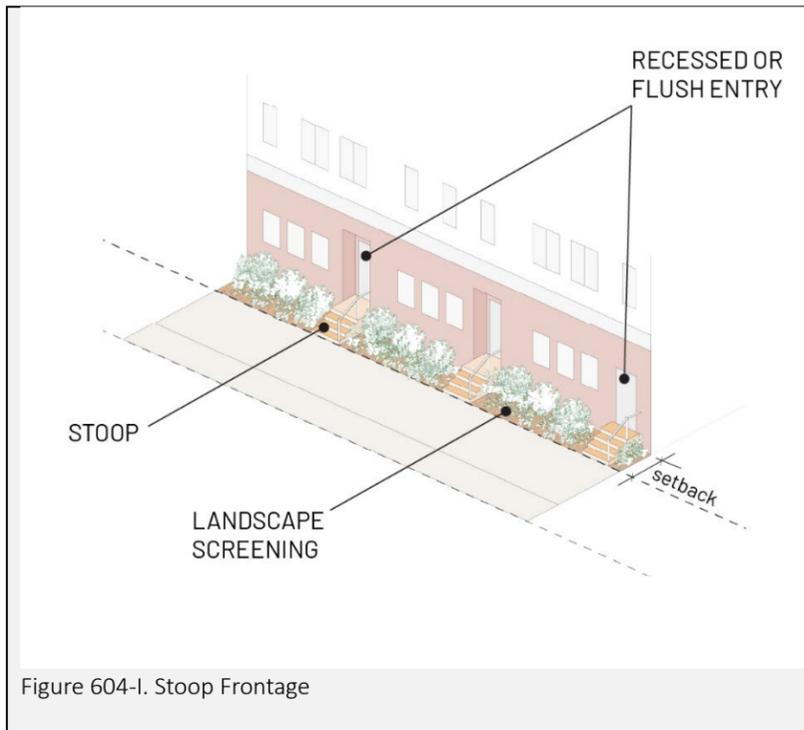
Weather protection with a minimum depth of five (5) feet is required over each principal entry.

F. Amenities

At least three (3) linear feet of seating area (bench, ledge, etc) or one (1) individual seat is required per 60 square feet of plaza area. Seating may include a combination of fixed and moveable furniture and/or may be integrated with other plaza features such as planting beds. In addition, a plaza must incorporate at least one (1) of the following amenities:

- i. A continuous landscaped area of at least 20 square feet.
- ii. One (1) planter box per 100 square feet of plaza area.

	<p>Each planter box should have a minimum area of eight (8) square feet and a minimum soil depth of 18 inches and may include trees, shrubs, or seasonal plants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. A public art feature with a minimum of six (6) feet in height or 20 square feet in area. iv. A water feature with a minimum of 20 square feet in area. <p>G. The Plaza Frontage may not be implemented with ground-floor residential uses except lobbies or entrances for upper-level units.</p>
<p>(3) Terrace</p>  <p>Figure 604-G. Terrace Frontage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Setback The Terrace Frontage shall be located within a front setback of eight (8) to 15 feet. A minimum of four (4) feet of this setback shall remain at sidewalk grade, extending along the street-facing façade and maintaining direct connection to the right-of-way. The remaining setback area shall be occupied by an elevated terrace raised at least one (1) foot or two (2) steps above sidewalk grade, or as required to accommodate site slope. A terrace may be fully open-air, or it may function as a recessed arcade with a partial building overhang above. B. Access The terrace shall serve as primary access to the building, directly accessible from the sidewalk, and not enclosed by fencing or barriers over 42" in height. Access stairs or ramps serving a terrace may encroach into the required four (4) foot at-grade area, provided that pedestrian connectivity is maintained. C. Lighting Pedestrian-scale lighting in compliance with Section 704 is required at regular intervals along primary pedestrian paths and terrace edges. Additional decorative lighting such as canopies or string lights is encouraged for terraces intended for public use. D. Façade Treatment At least 30 percent of the facade between two (2) and ten (10) feet above the terrace or primary entry level shall be glazed with transparent windows and/or doors. E. Amenities The at-grade portion of the setback shall function to support pedestrian activity as an extension of the public right-of-way and shall incorporate at least one (1) of the following amenities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i Fixed or moveable seating accommodating at least two (2) people ii Planter boxes with a soil depth of at least 18 inches iii Street trees iv Public art F. Terraces may function as public or semi-public spaces and may serve commercial, retail, civic, or residential uses. Public terraces are encouraged to incorporate additional amenities such as cafe seating, shade structures, and planter boxes.
<p>(4) Landscape</p>  <p>Figure 604-H. Landscape Frontage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Setback The Landscape Frontage shall be located within a front setback of ten (10) to 30 feet. B. Access Principal entrances shall be oriented to the street. Entrances may be at grade or elevated as required to accommodate site slope. C. Lighting Pedestrian-scale lighting in compliance with Section 704 is required at regular intervals along primary pedestrian paths. Integration of lighting with landscape features is encouraged. D. Façade Treatment At least 30 percent of the facade between two (2) and ten (10) feet above the finished ground-floor elevation shall be glazed with transparent windows and/or doors. E. Landscape At least 50 percent of the frontage area shall be landscaped with at least one (1) tree per 600 square feet of frontage zone.
<p>(5) Stoop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Setback The Stoop Frontage shall be located within a front setback of five (5) to 15 feet. B. Access Principal entrances shall be oriented to the street and accessed from a stoop. Stoops may be projecting or recessed and shall not exceed eight (8) feet in width or depth. Stoops shall be elevated a minimum of two (2) feet or four (4) steps above sidewalk grade. Access stairs or ramps may encroach into the setback and may be street-facing or side-loaded.



- C. Lighting**
Pedestrian-scale lighting in compliance with Section 704 is required at regular intervals along primary pedestrian paths.
- D. Façade Treatment**
At least 30 percent of the façade between two (2) and ten (10) feet above the finished ground-floor elevation shall be glazed with transparent windows and/or doors.
- E. Landscape**
At least 20 percent of the setback area shall be provided as landscaped screening consisting of in-ground planting beds with a minimum width of three (3) feet. In addition, at least one (1) tree shall be provided per 30 linear feet of façade. Required trees may be provided within the public right-of-way as street trees, subject to approval.

F. Façade Composition and Material Standards

This section applies objective to more detailed façade elements beyond form and frontage, regulating materials, articulation, upper-story treatment, and mechanical screening. The goal is to ensure building quality and compatibility with district character, **so standards vary by district apart from 4. Mechanical and Service Elements, which includes the same content for both sections.**

1. Materials

Section 604.F.1 Village Center	Section 608.F.1 Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Primary materials shall be used on at least 75% of each Principal Façade. Primary materials permitted in the Village Center include wood or high-quality fiber cement siding, brick, natural stone, and stucco. (b) Secondary materials may be used for trim, accent areas, upper-story stepbacks, and/or architectural details. (c) Material changes shall occur at logical building transitions such as corners, horizontal expression bands, or other articulation lines implemented under Section 604.F.2. (d) Masonry and other visually heavy materials may be used at the ground floor or on upper stories. When used above the ground floor, such materials shall extend to the ground or terminate at a horizontal expression line or stepback so as not to create the appearance of a floating or unsupported façade. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Primary materials shall be used on at least 75% of each Principal Façade. Primary materials for the TOD District include wood or high-quality fiber cement siding, brick, natural stone, stucco, and certain metals (copper, titanium, and stainless steel, 18-8 or better) (b) Secondary materials may be used for trim, accent areas, upper-story stepbacks, and/or architectural details. (c) Material changes shall occur at logical building transitions such as corners, horizontal expression bands, or other articulation lines implemented under Section 604.F.2. (d) Masonry and other visually heavy materials may be used at the ground floor or on upper stories. When used above the ground floor, such materials shall extend to the ground or terminate at a horizontal expression line or stepback so as not to create the appearance of a floating or unsupported façade.

2. Articulation

Section 604.F.1 Village Center	Section 608.F.1 Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Building façades exceeding 60 feet in length along a Principal Frontage shall incorporate vertical articulation to establish a rhythm that reflects the historic lot configuration and traditional storefront widths. Vertical articulation shall occur at intervals not exceeding 30 feet. See Figure 604-J. Vertical articulation shall include at least one of the following.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A change in façade plane of at least two (2) feet in depth; ii. A change in material extending the full height of the articulated bay; iii. A recessed or projecting entry element; iv. A change in fenestration pattern. (b) The building base shall be visually differentiated from upper stories. The base may include the first one (1) or two (2) stories. Horizontal differentiation shall be made using at least two of the following methods. See Figure 604-K. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A change in material; ii. A change in window size or pattern; iii. A horizontal expression band; iv. Architectural elements such as columns, pilasters, or an arcade. (c) Blank wall segments exceeding 20 feet in length are prohibited along Principal Frontages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Building façades exceeding 80 feet in length along a Principal Frontage shall incorporate vertical articulation to reduce perceived scale. Vertical articulation shall occur at intervals not exceeding 50 feet. See Figure 604-J. Vertical articulation shall include at least one of the following.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A change in façade plane of at least two (2) feet in depth; ii. A change in material extending the full height of the articulated bay; iii. A recessed or projecting entry element; iv. A change in fenestration pattern. (b) The building base shall be visually differentiated from upper stories. The base may include the first one (1) or two (2) stories. Horizontal differentiation shall be made using at least two of the following methods. See Figure 604-K. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A change in material; ii. A change in window size or pattern; iii. A horizontal expression band; iv. Architectural elements such as columns, pilasters, or an arcade. (c) Blank wall segments exceeding 20 feet in length are prohibited along Principal Frontages.

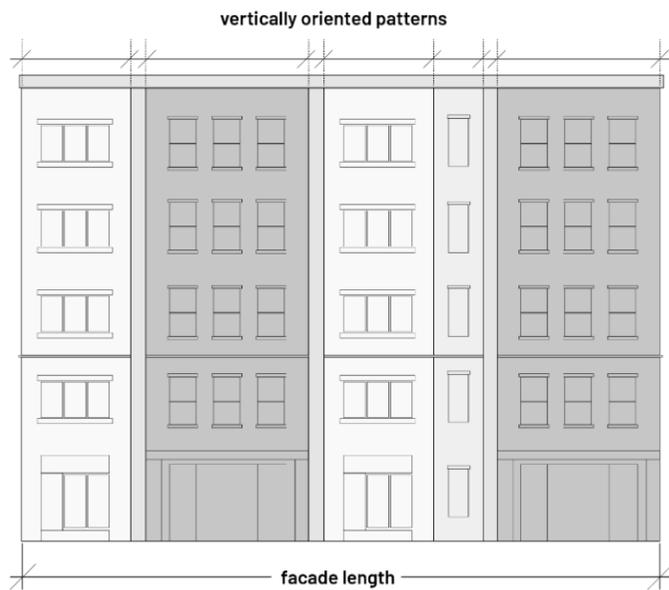


Figure 604-J. Vertical Articulation

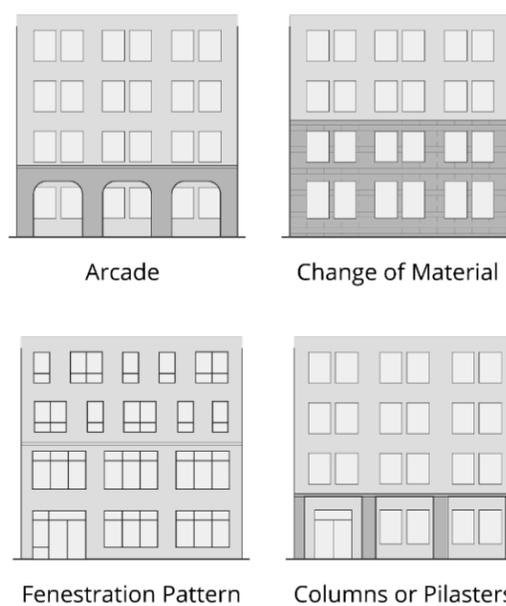


Figure 604-K. Building Base Definition

3. Upper-Story and Roof Treatment

Section 604.F.1 Village Center	Section 608.F.1 Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)
<p>(a) Upper-story windows shall be vertically proportioned. Windows may be grouped horizontally if individual openings are visually separated by a mullion, column, pier or wall section.</p> <p>(b) Upper-story windows shall comprise at least 20 percent of façade area, measured from the top of the second-level finished floor to the top of the roof structure. Windows shall be distributed or grouped to create a consistent rhythm across the façade. See Figure 604-L.</p> <p>(c) 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.</p>	<p>(a) Upper-story windows shall comprise at least 20 percent of façade area, measured from the top of the second-level finished floor to the top of the roof structure. Windows shall be distributed or grouped to create a consistent rhythm across the façade. See Figure 604-L.</p>

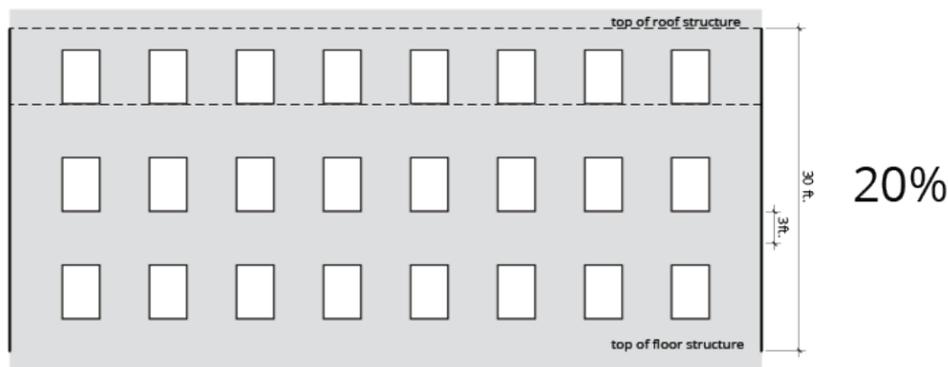


Figure 604-L. Upper Story Transparency Requirement

4. Mechanical and Service Elements

- a) Unfinished foundation walls on a Principal Building shall be exposed no more than 48 inches above the finished grade. Surface-applied waterproofing on any foundation wall shall not be visible.
- b) Security shutters, where provided, shall be designed to be integrated with the façade composition and hidden from view when fully opened.
- c) Where placed on a façade, gutters, downspouts, and projecting drainpipes shall be arranged as an integral part of the façade composition and shall generally be placed at the corners of the building least visible from frontages. Gutters are required where eaves extend over pedestrian walkways.
- d) The following items are not permitted to project from a Principal Façade: air conditioner and HVAC equipment; utility boxes or gas meters; chimneys, vents, piping, ducts, and conduits external to the building; wind generation; and antennas, satellite dishes, and other telecommunications equipment
 - i. Exception: Small exterior vents (less than 10-in x 10-in) associated with small scale heating/cooling equipment or residential appliances shall be permitted on a Principal Façade only if residential occupancy occurs along that façade. Every effort should be made to minimize and consolidate the number of these vents. They shall be located, organized, screened, and detailed to fit within the overall design of the façade.
- e) Roof penetrations, other than chimneys, shall be placed to minimize their visibility from the Principal Frontage. Any rooftop mechanical and telecommunication equipment shall be fully screened on all sides so as not to be directly visible from the street. Such screening shall be incorporated in a manner consistent with the overall architectural design of the building and may consist of parapets, cornices, penthouse screens, or other similar methods.
- f) Storage areas, service areas, trash receptacles, accessory structures, and parking areas shall be screened from view from the street and adjoining properties, per Section 708.

G. Parking

This section eliminates minimum parking requirements in both districts and establishes placement, screening, and design standards to ensure parking does not detract from the pedestrian environment. Content is the same for both districts and references existing parking standards in Section 703.

1. There are no minimum parking requirements.
2. At-grade, below grade, and above grade parking is allowed, subject to the following:
 - (a) At-grade structured parking is permitted only when located within the interior of the building and screened along all ground-floor street frontages by a liner building. Use of ground-floor frontages by pedestrian-oriented businesses is encouraged. See Figure 604-M.

- (b) Surface parking is permitted only at the rear of the lot, behind a Principal Building and a minimum of 30 feet from the edge of the public right-of-way. Landscaping, screening, and lighting requirements apply as specified in Chapter 7.
 - (c) At the discretion of the City Council, parking lots constructed as part of a development project may be accepted by the City as municipal public parking.
 - (d) Shared parking and connections between adjacent parking areas are encouraged to improve access, traffic flow, and overall parking efficiency.
3. Each property is permitted one (1) curb cut in accordance with Section 705. The Development Review Board may approve an additional curb cut upon finding that it is necessary to provide adequate site access. Curb cuts on major arterial streets shall be minimized. Shared curb cuts and joint access are strongly encouraged.

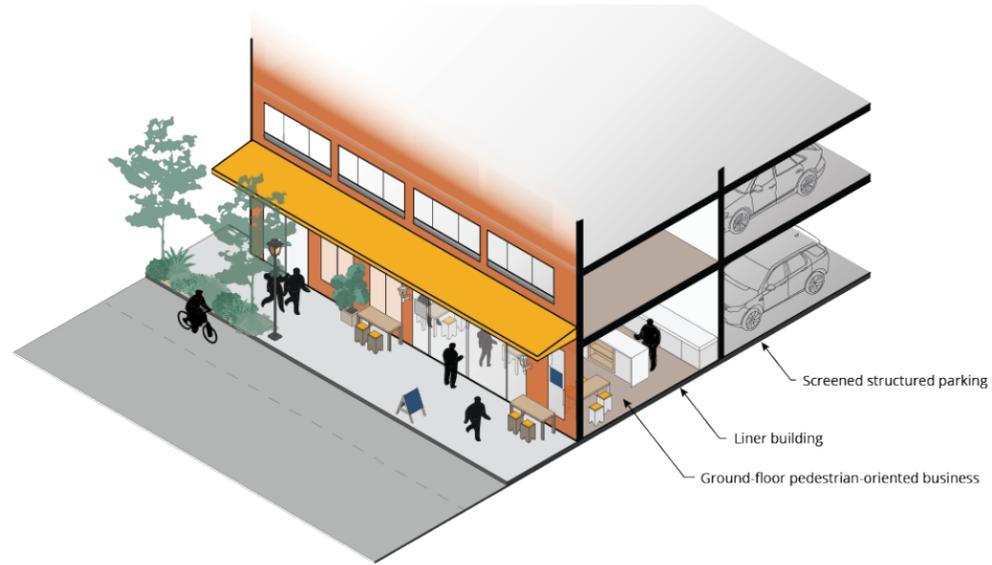


Figure 604-M. Screening Structured Parking

H. Landscaping

This section applies a **consistent landscape framework in both districts**, using the Landscape Performance Score to prioritize tree canopy, green infrastructure, and long-term site quality without over-prescribing. Options to further this framework include: 1) adapting specific scoring or planting requirements by district to support distinct character or respond to site-specific conditions, and/or 2) compiling a preferred plant list from existing Vermont resources to facilitate implementation and review of the Landscape Performance Score.

Landscape Performance Score Requirement

- a) The Landscape Performance Score is a weighted system that assigns point values to specific landscape components based on their environmental benefit, contribution to tree canopy, and enhancement of site quality.
- b) All development subject to this Section shall achieve a minimum Landscape Performance Score of 30, calculated in accordance with the Table in Section 604.H.2(c). Only permanently installed and maintained landscape components may be counted toward the required score.

Landscape Performance Scoring Table				
Site Landscape Components		Component Amount - Area (in square feet) or Number of Plants/Trees	Performance Factor	Component Score (Component Amount x Performance Factor)
Planted Areas	Planted areas with soil depth less than 24".	Area	10	
	Planted areas with soil depth of 24" or greater.	Area	60	
	Bioretention Facilities	Area	100	
Small Plantings, Shrubs, and Perennials	Mulch, ground cover, and other plants less than 2' tall at maturity.	Area	10	
	Medium shrubs or perennials 2-4' tall at maturity	Number of plants	270	
	Large shrubs or perennials 4' tall or greater at maturity	Number of plants	1,080	
Trees	Trees with canopy spread of 8-15'	Number of trees	2,250	
	Trees with canopy spread of 16-20'	Number of trees	7,500	
	Trees with canopy spread of 21-25'	Number of trees	17,500	
	Trees with canopy spread of 26' or more	Number of trees	31,500	
	Preservation of existing trees – must have trunks with 6" diameter or greater at 4' above the ground	Number of trees	24,000	
Green Roofs	Green roofs with less than 4" of growth medium.	Area	20	
	Green roofs with 4-8" of growth medium.	Area	30	
	Green roofs with 8" or more of growth medium.	Area	40	
Permeable paving	Permeable pavers over soil or gravel with a depth of less than 24".	Area	20	
	Permeable pavers over soil or gravel with a depth of 24" or greater.	Area	40	
Bonuses	Landscaping with native plant species.	Area	30	
	Vegetation visible to passersby from adjacent right-of-way	Area	20	
	Structural soil systems	Area	50	
	Landscaped areas where at least 50% of annual irrigation needs are met through use of harvested rainwater or collected graywater.	Area	20	
			SCORE NUMERATOR Add all Component Scores.	
			SCORE DENOMINATOR: Parcel Area (in square feet)	
			LANDSCAPE PERFORMANCE SCORE Numerator / Denominator	

I. Street Standards (applicable to TOD zone only)

This section applies only to the TOD district, revising existing standards for new streets, blocks, and public realm improvements on larger parcels to aid in implementation of the TOD Master Plan. New content is indicated in green.

For the redevelopment of large parcels over five (5) acres, new streets, blocks, and lots shall be established in order to create a pedestrian-friendly environment that supports a variety of transportation options. New streets shall meet the following requirements:

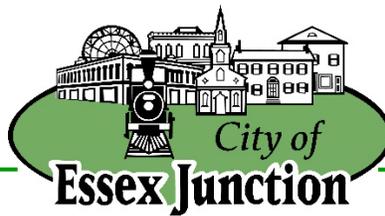
1. All new streets shall be provided as public streets. Alleys shall be privately owned and maintained.
 - a. The overall number of alleys shall be limited to the minimum amount necessary to provide adequate access to the rear of buildings. Alleys shall be designed to minimize the number of access points onto public streets.
 2. Block length shall not exceed 400 feet.
 3. Car Travel and Parking
 - a. New streets shall include on-street parallel or forty-five (45) degree angled parking on at least one side.
 - b. Streets shall have two car travel lanes. Car travel lanes shall be 11 feet in width on streets with parallel parking on both sides, or 12 feet in width on streets with 45 degree angled parking on one or both sides.
 4. Pedestrian Amenities
 - a. Sidewalks of at least five (5) feet in width are required.
 - b. Crosswalks in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) shall be included at all intersections.
 - c. Pedestrian street lamps shall be incorporated into all new streets. The lamps shall be full cut-off fixtures with metal halide bulbs and mounted no higher than 15 feet. Pedestrian street lamps shall be of a decorative architectural style and may require approval by the Development Review Board.
 - d. Pedestrian amenities including benches, trash receptacles, and bike racks shall be incorporated into the design of new streets.
 - e. Street trees shall be planted every 40 feet on center with tree grates and structural soil (See Appendix A for Public Works Specifications). Street trees shall be placed between the pedestrian travel way and the curb.
 5. New streets shall incorporate bus stops, coordinated with Green Mountain Transit (GMT). The applicant shall be required to provide written comments from GMT on the proposed bus stops and facilities.
 6. New streets shall include bike lanes at least five (5) feet in width as needed to provide convenient and safe bicycle access throughout the district. It is not expected that every new street will have a bike lane, but rather that overall connectivity and major bicycle transportation routes throughout the district are established.
- F. Public pedestrian paths 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.

J. Demolition within the Village Center (applicable to VC zone only)

This section keeps and clarifies existing demolition review standards to protect historic resources, including those not formally listed, with a focus on the Village Center where most historic buildings are located. By concentrating broader review in Section 604 (Village Center), this restructure works to protect the character of the historic Village Center while streamlining the Historic Preservation Overlay (Section 621) to apply only to listed resources, ensuring protections without overlap or overly broad application.

The demolition of historic structures in the Village Center, including those not formally listed on state or national registers, is discouraged. This section establishes a procedure for reviewing demolition applications to protect the Village Center's character while allowing redevelopment when appropriate. The Development Review Board may require professional assistance in evaluating an application for demolition at the applicants' expense to determine compliance with the standards of this section.

1. Application for Demolition
 - a. A report from a licensed engineer qualified to assess the structural integrity of historic buildings is required. The report shall address the ability for rehabilitation and reuse of the existing building as it pertains to the building's structural integrity and cost of rehabilitation.
 - b. A report from a qualified professional (planner, economist, business consultant) on the economic feasibility to rehabilitate and/or operate the historic building or site while preserving its historic qualities. The report, at the request of the Development Review Board, may require the report to assess options for sensitive building expansions as it pertains to the economic viability of the building.
 - c. A statement from the applicant regarding compliance with the standards for demolition of a historic structure.
 - d. Any building in non-compliance with the design requirements for historic structures as a result of a fire, flood or similar unforeseen event shall apply within six months of the date of the event for an application to demolish the building or approval of a plan for restoration. All of the standards in this section shall be fully considered including economic hardship, structural integrity and community benefit.
2. Demolition Review Standards:
 - a. Economic Hardship. The continued operation of the historic structure is financially infeasible based on existing and potential land uses and any costs of rehabilitation. All options for adaptive reuse, resale, or relocation shall be considered and addressed in the application.
 - b. Structural Integrity. The structure is beyond repair or the cost of repairing and operating the building is not financially feasible or reasonable; or
 - c. Community Benefit. The redevelopment plan for the site has significant state, regional or community benefits in terms of urban design, ecology, and cultural or economic benefits. The redevelopment proposal shall consider and address impacts on adjacent historic properties and the entire district. The potential of incorporating historic structures into redevelopment plans shall be considered and is encouraged.
3. Approval for Demolition. Historic buildings that are approved for demolition require the applicant to comply with the following:
 - a. Any approval for the demolition of a historic structure shall require the applicant to document the building in accordance with the Historic American Building Survey (HABS).
 - b. Assurance from the applicant that the redevelopment plan as approved will be implemented if the historic structure demolition is approved based on the community benefit of the redevelopment plan. In addition, structures approved for demolition based on the community benefit shall not be demolished until construction of the entire project has received all financial resources and regulatory permits. The Development Review Board may require a bond or letter of credit as a condition of approval for the demolition of a historic structure.
 - c. The time between demolition and the commencement of construction shall not exceed 3 months unless an alternative timeline is specifically approved as part of the demolition approval from the Development Review Board.



MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Commission
From: Christopher Yuen, Community Development Director
Meeting Date: March 5, 2026
Subject: Introduction of Draft Form-Based Code Proposal

Issue: Introduction of draft Form-Based Code (FBC) proposal for initial Planning Commission review and discussion.

Discussion:

At your February 5 meeting, the Planning Commission began a discussion of using a form-based code to implement the adopted Connect the Junction Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan. Since that meeting, Framework Cultural Placemaking has prepared a draft Form-Based Code proposal for the Commission's consideration.

The attached draft outlines a potential structure and set of standards intended to implement the TOD Plan's priorities, including building form, frontage design, height transitions, and public realm standards. This draft is an initial working document and is not being presented for detailed review or endorsement at this time.

The purpose of the March 5 agenda item is to:

- Provide the Planning Commission with an opportunity to review the draft at a high level
- Share first impressions
- Identify any major questions or areas needing clarification
- Flag issues the Commission would like the consulting team to focus on at the next meeting

This is intended to be a short discussion item. A full discussion of the draft Form-Based Code proposal is scheduled for the Planning Commission's April meeting, which has been rescheduled to Tuesday, March 31, 2026. The consulting team from Framework Cultural Placemaking will attend that meeting to walk through the draft in detail and respond to Commission feedback.

Cost:
N/A

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review the attached draft Form-Based Code proposal and provide initial impressions and clarification questions to help guide the more detailed discussion on March 31, 2026.

Attachments:

Draft Form-Based Code Proposal