"When government officials, business leaders, and citizens come together to build communities that enrich people's lives, that's planning."

– American Planning Association

Essex Junction Community Development Department

Public Participation Guide

April 2016

This Participation Guide identifies ways that residents can learn about and contribute to planning and zoning decisions in the Village of Essex Junction. Good planning relies on input from residents, so the Planning Commission, Zoning Board of Adjustment, and Community Development Department encourage everyone in Essex Junction to pay attention to and participate in the Village's planning and zoning work. **All Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment meetings are open to the public.**

When and where do the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment meet?

	MEETING DATE	TIME	LOCATION
Planning Commission	1st and 3rd Thursday of each month (as needed)	6 p.m.	Village of Essex Junction Municipal Offices, 2 Lincoln Street
Zoning Board	3rd Tuesday of each month (as needed)	6 p.m.	Village of Essex Junction Municipal Offices, 2 Lincoln Street

How can I find out about development or subdivision applications, or other work the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment are doing?

- The **Village website** contains meeting dates and agendas, plans for development proposals and staff reports about those proposals, and minutes from past Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment meetings. (www.essexjunction.org → Boards & Meetings)
- ***The Essex Reporter*** has legal notices with agendas for upcoming meetings.
- The **Town Offices, Village Offices, Brownell Library and Message Board** have bulletin boards posted with notices and agendas.
- **Zoning notices (white and red signs)** are displayed on properties that will be under review.
- **Mailings** are sent to immediate neighbors (aka **abutters**) of a property that will be under review; the mailings contain an agenda with the date of the hearing for the proposed project.
- **Front Porch Forum** (www.frontporchforum.com) emails contain information about upcoming meetings.
- **Community Development Department** (878-6950) staff can answer questions.
- Talk to your neighbors.

What does the Planning Commission do?

The Planning Commission performs two main functions: **long-range planning** and **development review**.

Long-range planning involves updates to the *Village Plan* (every five years), amendments to the *Zoning Regulations* and *Subdivision Regulations*, and special projects that focus on specific areas of planning. Recent examples of special projects include the *Design 5-Corners and the Crescent Connector*.

Development review involves site plan reviews and subdivision reviews that are guided by the Village Comprehensive Plan and regulated by the Land Development Code. (see "Glossary" for more details).

What does the Zoning Board of Adjustment do?

The Zoning Board of Adjustment handles **conditional use review** and **variances**, and hears **appeals** of decisions made by the Zoning Administrator.

Conditional use review takes place when proposed developments need more careful scrutiny because of their scale, intensity, and potential for off-site impacts.

When should I get involved with a specific project?

As soon as possible! Most **Site Plan Reviews** wrap up in one meeting. Most **Subdivision Reviews** take place over three meetings (**Sketch Review**, **Preliminary Review**, and **Final Review**).

When you show up to a meeting, write your name and address on the sign-in sheet, especially if you plan to comment on a project. By signing in and participating in the review process, you will earn "interested person" status, which gives you appeal rights. You will be mailed a copy of the Planning Commission's final approval or denial.

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When the Planning Commission or Zoning Board reviews an application, they are primarily looking to make sure the project conforms to the Zoning Regulations *and/or* Subdivision Regulations. *The zoning and subdivision regulations are updated periodically and stem from the* Village Plan, *which is updated every five years. Participating in updates to the regulations and the* Village Plan *is the best way to influence future development.*

When should I speak at a meeting?

- If you want to speak about an issue that is **not on the agenda**, please do so during Public Comments, which happens at the beginning of every meeting.
- If you want to speak to an issue on the **Consent Agenda**, please do so during Public Comments.
- If you want to speak about a **Site Plan** or **Subdivision (Sketch, Preliminary, or Final)** proposal, the Planning Commission will open a public hearing when they reach that item on the agenda. Be ready to speak – once the public hearing is closed, the Planning Commission will no longer accept comments.

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When you speak, please say your name.

If you plan to speak about a Site Plan or Subdivision proposal on the agenda, you will be sworn in at the beginning of the meeting.

What if I can't make the meeting?

If you have **comments** that you want the Planning Commission or Zoning Board of Adjustment to consider when they review a project, email the comments to robin@essexjunction.org or terry@essexjunction.org. You can also write to the Village Community Development Department, 2 Lincoln Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452.

If you want to **watch** a meeting, Channel 17/Town Meeting Television (CCTV) tapes at least one Planning Commission meeting a month. For information about CCTV broadcasts, either on cable on online, visit www.cctv.org.

How can I learn more about individual Site Plan or Subdivision applications?

Hard copies of all applications are available for review in the Community Development Department at 2 Lincoln Street. Staff members are available to answer questions in person, by phone (802-878-6950) or by email (see below).

Plans and staff reports for individual applications are posted on the Village website prior to meetings, usually by the Friday before an upcoming meeting (www.essexjunction.org → Boards & Meetings → Planning Commission → Agendas).

What types of projects do NOT need to be reviewed by the Planning Commission or Zoning Board?

Minor projects, such as interior work on a home or an addition, shed, deck, garage, accessory apartments and boundary line adjustments, do not go before the Planning Commission or Zoning Board of Adjustment. Most small projects still require a zoning permit, which is issued by the Zoning Administrator. Zoning permits have a 15-day appeal period during which someone can appeal the proposed project.

Any other questions?

Please ask! Community Development staff will be glad to help. We're located at 2 Lincoln Street.

Community Development Department		**878-6950**
Director	Robin Pierce	robin@essexjunction.org
Asst. Zoning Administrator	Terry Hass	terry@essexjunction.org
Community Relations Asst.	Darby Mayville	darby@essexjunction.org

Glossary

(More details about these terms appear in the *Zoning Regulations* and the *Subdivision Regulations*)

Conceptual Review

A relatively informal meeting with the Planning Commission in which an applicant can discuss ideas for a project and receive feedback from commissioners prior to submitting a Sketch Plan or Site Plan application. Conceptual Review applications are not approved or denied.

Conditional Use Review

A review, conducted by the Zoning Board of Adjustment, of a project that warrants more careful scrutiny because of scale, intensity, and potential for off-site impacts. **Most Conditional Use applications are resolved in one hearing.**

Deliberative Session

A private meeting in which a quasi-judicial board – the Planning Commission or Zoning Board – may meet to rule on an application. Decisions can be made in deliberative session as long as a written decision becomes public record.

The Essex Junction Planning Commission and Zoning Board usually make their decisions in public. The boards have, on occasion, entered deliberative session to make a ruling on an application.

Master Plan

A master plan is to guide long-term development on larger properties and allow for public input early in the process as a means to limit negative impacts resulting from incremental planning and development. The master plan process is an opportunity to address the long-term vision and conceptual design for development of buildings, land uses, infrastructure and conservation/preservation through integrative design. Master plans are an opportunity to discuss early design concepts with the Planning Commission prior to the formal permitting process.

Planned Unit Development (PUD)

A Planned Unit Development (PUD) is a project that receives flexibility from the zoning regulations in order to encourage a higher level of design and amenity than under the usual land development requirements. A PUD encourages compact, pedestrian-oriented development or redevelopment, and to promote a mix of residential uses or nonresidential uses. PUDs that involve subdivision of land are reviewed as major subdivisions, **which require three hearings**.

PUDs that do not involve a subdivision must go through site plan review, **which requires a single hearing.**

Site Plan Review

Site Plan Review involves new commercial developments and significant changes to existing commercial sites. The Planning Commission holds Site Plan Reviews to make sure the layout and design of development projects conform to the *Village Plan*, the *Zoning Regulations*, and any conditions of any previous subdivision and conditional use approvals. During Site Plan review, the Planning Commission considers natural features (topography, water bodies, wetlands, etc.), access to and on the site, parking, landscaping, lighting, water and sewer, stormwater, and fire protection. **Most Site Plan applications are resolved in one hearing.**

Subdivision Review

The creation of any new lot in Essex Junction needs approval from the Planning Commission. Subdivisions are reviewed for conformance to the *Village Plan* and *Zoning Regulations*, traffic and pedestrian access, impacts on natural and historic resources, availability of water and sewer, stormwater control, and more. Subdivisions fall under one of four categories:

- Lot Consolidation or Boundary Adjustment – When boundaries between two lots are shifted, but no new lot is created. **Most Boundary Adjustment applications are reviewed and approved by staff.**

- Minor Subdivision – A subdivision that includes the platting of five (5) or fewer lots or minor adjustments to the lot lines of three (3) or more lots. **Most Minor Subdivision applications are resolved in two hearings: Sketch Review and Final Review.** The earlier residents become involved in the process, the more likely they are to have an impact on the final outcome.

- Major Subdivision – A subdivision is any proposal not classified as a Consolidation or Minor Subdivision. **Most Major Subdivision applications are resolved in three hearings: Sketch Review, Preliminary Review, and Final Review.** The earlier residents become involved in the process, the more likely they are to have an impact on the final outcome.

LEVELS OF SUBDIVISION REVIEW

Sketch Review – The first level of subdivision review, during which the applicant and the Planning Commission explore options for the overall subdivision concept and layout, taking into consideration the characteristics of the site and the surrounding area.

Preliminary Review – The second level of subdivision approval, during which the Planning Commission determines whether the latest plan addresses issues raised at Sketch Review, and ensures that all survey information, existing and proposed easements, and public infrastructure improvements are complete. Most engineering details are completed during Preliminary Plan Review. *Preliminary Review is only required for major subdivisions.*

Final Review – The last step of subdivision approval, during which the Planning Commission reviews the Final Plan and plat to ensure that all engineering, survey, and other data are complete, and that the proposed subdivision complies with all appropriate regulations and standards. Most of the technical and planning issues have been resolved by Final Review.

Village Comprehensive Plan

The *Village Comprehensive Plan* serves as a vision and a guide for the future of Essex Junction in the areas of growth, development, public services, and environmental protection. The *Village Plan* serves as the basis for zoning and subdivision regulations, and can be used to seek grant funding for priority projects. State law requires town/village plans to be updated every five years. The update process involves gathering data, updating statistics, holding visioning processes, and doing community outreach. Updates can enable the creation of new or different planning districts in the Village.

Use Permit

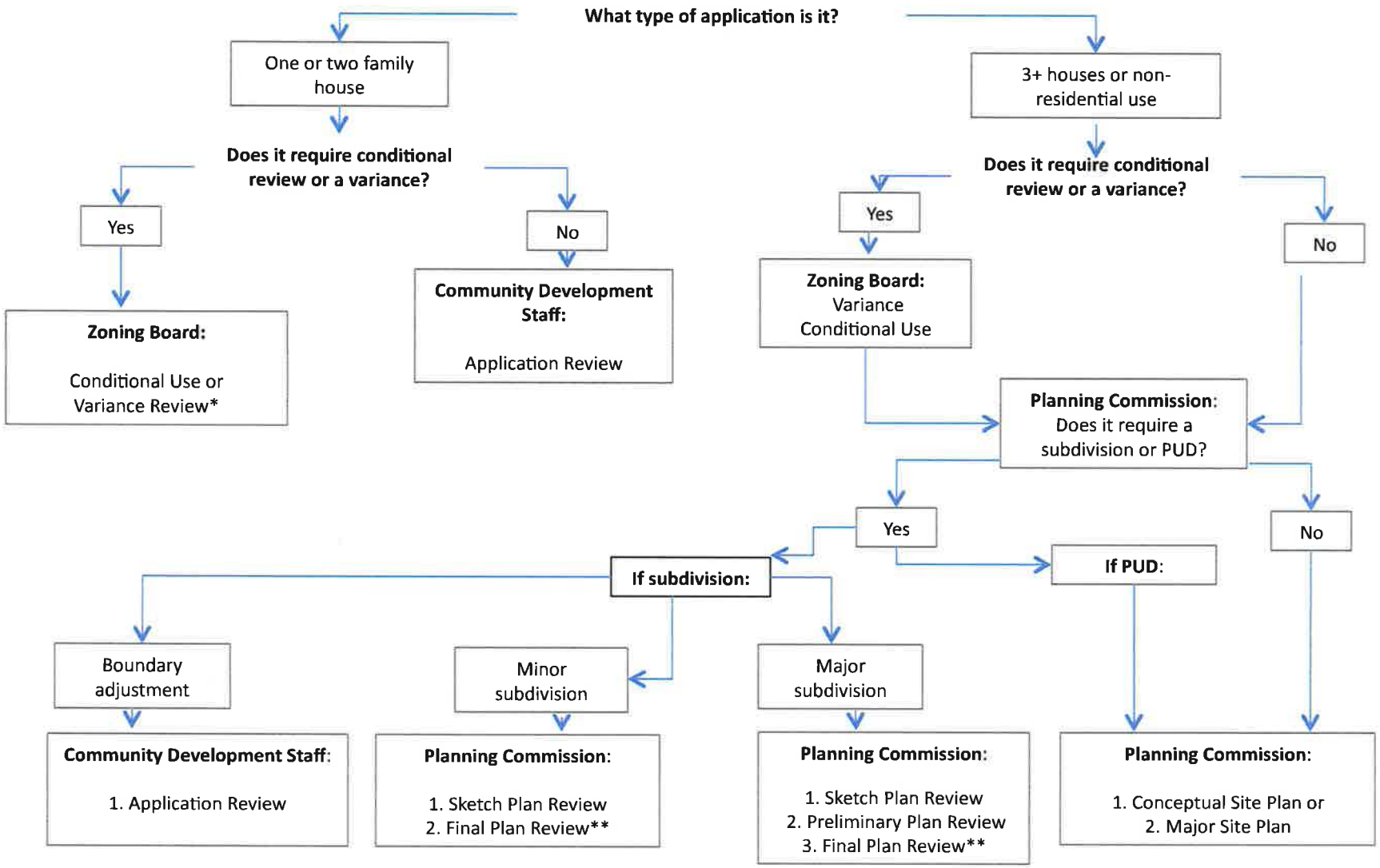
See "Zoning permit"

Zoning Permit

A permit required for most projects that involve any construction, additions or changes to existing buildings, making of any material change in the use of any structure or land or a change in the type of use on a property (i.e. office space converting to a retail shop).

The Development Review Process in the Village

For New Houses or New/Alterations to Non-residential Uses



*The Zoning Board of Adjustment also hears appeals of application decisions made by staff.

** Site Plan review is typically consolidated into one of these preceding subdivision steps. If it is not then the Planning Commission would require an application to go to Site Plan Review.