

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
JANUARY 4, 2024  
APPROVED February 1, 2024**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Philip Batalion, Chair; Patrick Scheld, Vice Chair; Diane Clemens; Scott McCormick

**ADMINISTRATION:** Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Carlton Houghton, Geo M. (virtual)

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Batalion 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**

None.

**4. MINUTES**

**a. December 6, 2023**

**MOTION by DIANE CLEMENS, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to approve the minutes of December 6, 2023, with changes. Motion passed 4-0.**

**Changes:**

**-Ms. Clemens requested that Item 6, paragraph 2 be edited to reflect that the 18% tax increase refers to statewide school taxes, not municipal or other taxes.**

**5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Land Development Code amendments to Chapter 714: Sign regulation**

The PC reviewed the changes made in each section. Mr. Yuen said that the Land Development Code (LDC) signage updates need to be updated to be content neutral. He said that staff have gone through the existing LDC and have edited and have used the current Burlington regulations as a template. Comparisons between the current Essex Junction and Burlington regulations are detailed below.

**714.J. Sign Lighting**

Mr. Yuen discussed sign lighting, noting that language regarding Christmas lighting was taken out to be more neutral. Ms. Clemens asked if this would bar string lighting year-round, noting that it is something that many businesses and residences do so. The PC discussed whether string lighting should be allowed year-round, with Mr. Yuen stating that he was comfortable with allowing some flexibility with this. The PC discussed the visibility of these lights, and the importance of ensuring that they are dark sky compliant. Mr. Scheld said that this regulation will provide a good way for neighbors to be able to address abrasive lighting, however it is not something that he believes staff will be driving around looking for. A time-of-day limit for string lighting was discussed, and Mr. Yuen said that staff will investigate this suggestion.

714.L1: Awnings & Canopy Sign

Mr. Yuen said that Essex Junction currently regulates all awnings, regardless of the presence of text/logos.

714.L.5: Freestanding Sign

Mr. Yuen said that, unlike Burlington, Essex Junction only has one category for freestanding signs. Mr. Yuen said that, under the new updates, different types of businesses will no longer be allowed different numbers of signs. Mr. Battalion requested more information on Burlington's current freestanding sign regulations, and how the LDC would change should these changes be implemented.

714.L.10: Projecting Sign

Mr. Yuen said that Essex Junction does not currently allow projecting signs, however Burlington does. He suggested allowing blade signs but not projecting signs if the PC would like to stay closest to the current regulations. Mr. Scheld suggested allowing projecting signs with Development Review Board approval, all agreed.

714.L.12: Wall Sign

Mr. Yuen noted that lit neon "open" signs are only allowed in the Village Center district currently, however this could be expanded to other districts. He suggested that murals be allowed as well. The possibility of painting a sign on a wall was discussed, with the PC in favor of such being allowable.

714.L.12: Window Sign

Mr. Yuen said that, should Essex Junction adopt Burlington's regulations, it would be a slight increase from 25% to 30% in total allowable window space to be covered by signage. Ms. Clemens said that some businesses have pieces of paper in the window that have essentially become a part of the signage, such as a menu or store hours. Mr. Scheld asked about the "quantity max," and how this should be interpreted. Mr. Yuen said that the current interpretation is that all signage can be concentrated in one window. Ms. Clemens said that businesses should not be able to fill up a window with signage so that the inside of the establishment cannot be seen by the public or safety personnel. All agreed that total coverage of any window should not be permitted. Ms. Clemens brought up the potential of using shelving behind the window to possibly obfuscate this regulation. Mr. McCormick said that cannabis retailers are required to have their windows covered, and Mr. Yuen said that an exemption would be included for these and other businesses that are required by law to have their windows covered. Mr. Battalion suggested that neon signage not be regulated in this section, noting that 20% coverage by a neon sign seems excessive. Mr. Yuen said that the current regulations state that neon signs cannot exceed three square feet, and all PC members were in favor of continuing this. Signage is not allowed above the second floor, or on roofs.

Table 714.M.2

Mr. Yuen said that this table shows where each type of sign is allowed, based on zoning district. Mr. Battalion asked why some signage is excluded in the planned exposition and transit orientated development (TOD) districts. After some discussion, the PC decided to change this to allow more types of signage in these districts, with the possibility of a waiver to be granted for marquee signs. The PC discussed monument signs in the TOD district and decided to allow these in the TOD and other districts due to their existing prevalence.

Mr. Yuen said that staff will edit the draft based on today's discussion and review for technical issues or other conflicts.

**b. Updated boundary for the Neighborhood Development Area application**

Mr. Yuen said that the City is ready to apply for an expansion of the Neighborhood Development Area and requested that the PC make a formal motion endorsing it. He detailed recent staff changes to this document and showed the requested expansions to the area.

**Motion by PATRICK SCHELD, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK to approve the boundary as presented. Motion passed 4-0.**

**c. Selection of consultants for Transit Oriented Development study**

Mr. Yuen provided a background for this study, discussing the four phases, and noting the PC will be most involved in the Master Planning and Municipal Zoning Updates sections. The goal of this project is to update the municipal zoning to encourage dense development in the most transit-friendly places, which may or may not result in form-based code. Mr. Yuen spoke of the importance of increased frequency for public transit users as the key to encouraging more people to use it. He discussed focusing increased public transportation on areas where there is more walkability. Mr. Yuen said that it is important to not have any preconceived notions about whether to use form-based code and allow the community to decide. He suggested that the PC review the list of potential consultants and set up interviews if desired.

Mr. McCormick asked what Essex Junction will get out of this process, as it is a regional effort. He asked if the consultants would work for all municipalities, Mr. Yuen said that they would work for Essex Junction but would accept other work for other participating municipalities and will work with the regional planning commission on the RAISE grant. He said that this grant was issued to the regional planning commission and is the overarching project to this study.

Mr. Yuen presented his scoring on each of the consultants, noting that it is a review of qualifications rather than a project plan. Each member of the PC discussed the reasons that they liked and did not like each one of the potential consultants. Mr. Battalion suggested sending a ranking to the CCRPC, and all were amenable to this. The PC chose Toole as their first choice, and Framework as their second choice.

**6. MEMBERS UPDATES**

Mr. McCormick said that he had attended a Community Vision and Strategic Action plan meeting, and an open house and community dinner will be scheduled in the future. Focus groups are planned for the end of January.

**7. STAFF UPDATES**

Mr. Yuen said that the City Council will hold a public hearing on the Rental Registry Ordinance on January 24. The Amtrak redesign project is proceeding to an RFQ for the 30% design stage. The Main Street Park project has been put on hold for the time being. A grant request for an update to the scoping study for Pearl Street (between West Street Extension and Susie Wilson Road) has been submitted to the Regional Planning Commission.

**8. ADJOURN**

**MOTION by SCOTT MCCORMICK, SECOND by DIANE CLEMENS, to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 PM. Motion passed 4-0.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Darby Mayville