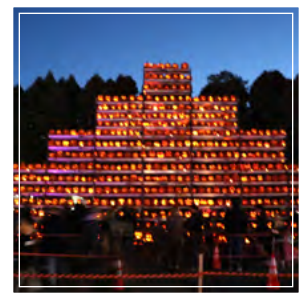
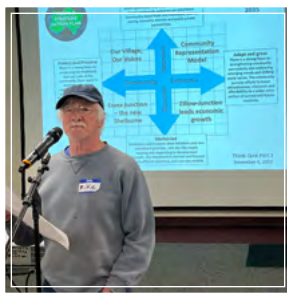


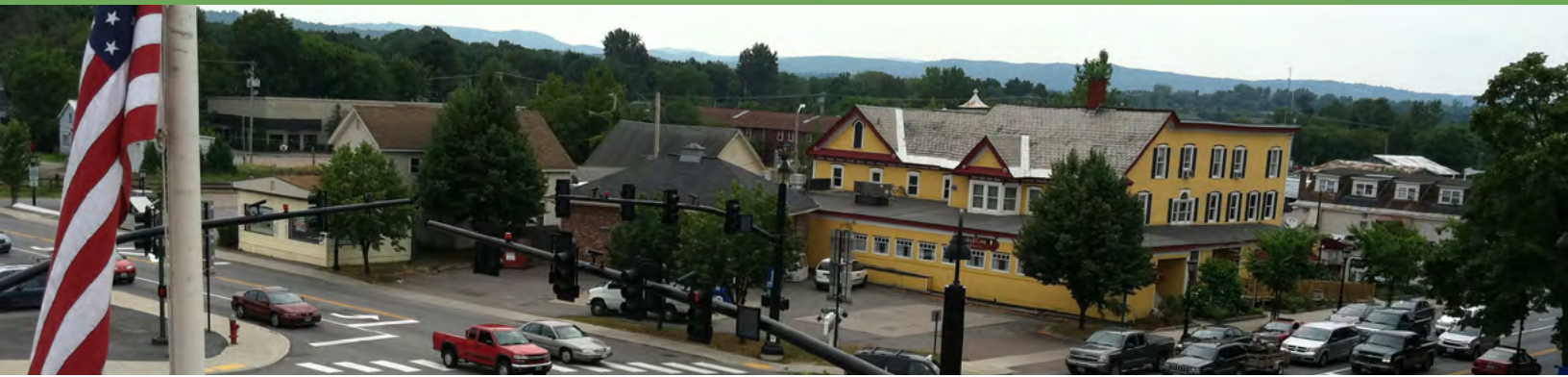


CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION COMMUNITY VISION & STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

VERMONT, USA

JULY 2024





CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION COMMUNITY VISION & STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

VERMONT, USA

JULY 2024

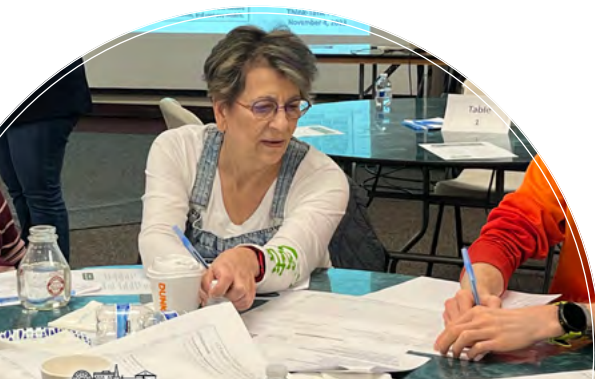
This report presents the Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan that has been developed following extensive community engagement undertaken during the City of Essex Junction Community Visioning and Strategic Action Planning process. Beginning in August 2023 through May 2024, the engagement process included two Community Surveys, the City of Essex Junction Think-Tank workshop, and 6 Focus Group workshops. This engagement process was designed to provide an open, inclusive, and transparent platform for community members to help create a shared vision looking out to 2030.

The reports and associated data analysis are available on the project portal:
lab2.future-iq.com/essex-junction-visionstrategic-action-plan

REPORT PREPARED BY

future→iQ
Create Future Intelligence®

This report represents Future iQ's analysis of the engagement outcomes, and how this data has informed the identification of a preferred future and strategic pillars. The recommended Key Strategic Pillars have been developed from the community input gathered during the visioning process.

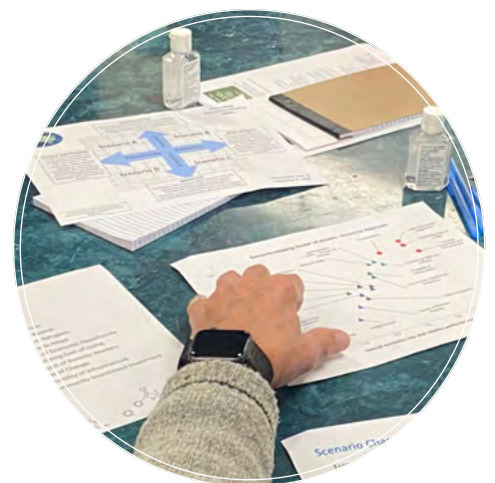


July 30, 2024



»»»»» TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	1	4.4.1 Importance of Transportation and Connectivity.....	19
Snapshot – Report Highlights	1	4.4.2 Key Action Areas.....	20
1.0 Introduction	2	4.4.3 Ideas from the Community.....	21
1.1 Project Timeline	2	4.5 Pillar 5: Environmental Stewardship	22
2.0 The Process Of Identifying the ‘Preferred Future’..	3	4.5.1 Importance of Environmental Stewardship	22
2.1 Community Engagement Highlights.....	3	4.5.2 Key Action Areas.....	23
2.2 Community Engagement Metrics.....	4	4.5.3 Ideas from the Community.....	24
2.3 Stakeholder Engagement Steps.....	5	4.6 Pillar 6: Community Engagement and	
2.4 Identifying the Preferred Future.....	6	Decision Making	25
2.5 Validating the Preferred Future.....	7	4.6.1 Importance of Community Engagement and	
3.0 Community Vision.....	8	Decision Making	25
4.0 Strategic Action Pillars Framework	9	4.6.2 Key Action Areas.....	26
4.1 Pillar 1: Housing and Urban Design.....	10	4.6.3 Ideas from the Community.....	27
4.1.1 Importance of Housing and Urban Design.....	10	5.0 Combined Strategic Action Framework	28
4.1.2 Key Action Areas	11	6.0 Dynamic Systems-Thinking Approach	29
4.1.3 Ideas from the Community.....	12	7.0 Initial Prioritization.....	30
4.2 Pillar 2: Public Services and Facilities.....	13	8.0 Next Steps – Roadmap to the Future.....	31
4.2.1 Importance of Public Services and Facilities	13	9.0 For More Information.....	32
4.2.2 Key Action Areas.....	14		
4.2.3 Ideas from the Community.....	15		
4.3 Pillar 3: Economic and Business Development.....	16		
4.3.1 Importance of Economic and Business Development	16		
4.3.2 Key Action Areas.....	17		
4.3.3 Ideas from the Community.....	18		
4.4 Pillar 4: Transportation and Connectivity	19		





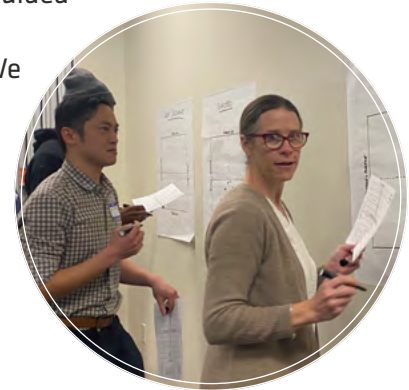
»»»» ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan process has been guided by the Steering Committee, established at the start of the project in August 2023. These committed individuals met in person on a monthly basis for the duration of the project. We would like to acknowledge their input and guidance throughout the process.



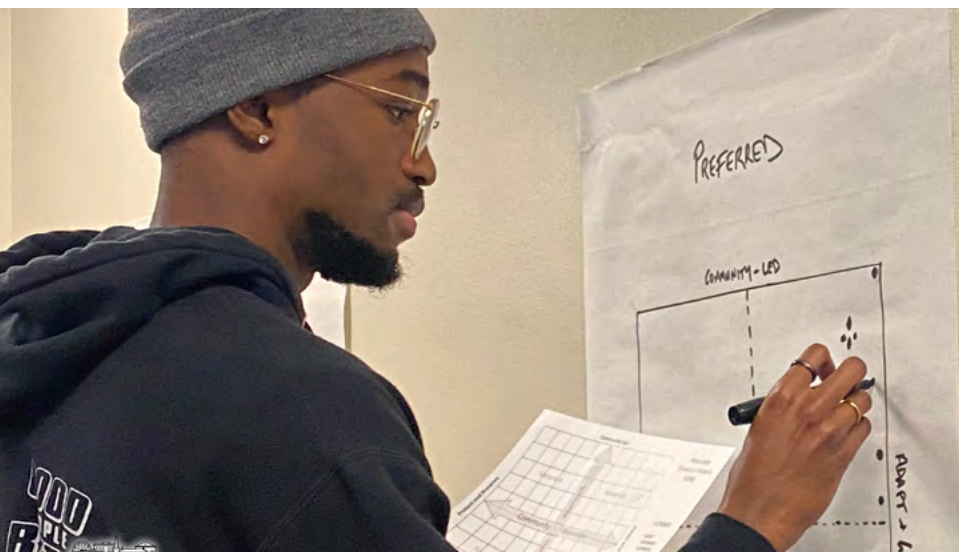
STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Andrew Brown	Emily Hagan-Howe
Marcus Certa	Brad Luck
Cristin Gildea	Chris Yuen
Tacy Lincoln	Regina Mahony
Scott McCormick	



Community members from across the City of Essex Junction engaged in the community vision and strategic action planning process with great enthusiasm and commitment. Their passion and interest ensured discussions were open, thoughtful, and reflective of the myriad of perspectives that exist within the City of Essex Junction.

Additionally, appreciation is especially extended to Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director at the City of Essex Junction, who managed this project and worked with Future iQ on a weekly basis on the organization, content, and direction of the project.



»»»» SNAPSHOT – REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

This report lays out the findings from each step in the visioning process. The process identified key priorities for the future of the City of Essex Junction, looking out to 2030. Community members imagined and considered possible directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions. The process then drilled down deeper into what people saw as the preferred future for the City of Essex Junction. This understanding helps lay the groundwork for establishing the route to this preferred future and will inform the City of Essex Junction regarding future planning efforts.



APPETITE FOR CHANGE

As a newly independent city, this is now a time for intentional and progressive planning for the future of the City of Essex Junction. There is an appetite for change amongst residents who feel that this is a point in time that the City of Essex Junction can develop and change in a sensitive manner.



DESIRE TO SHAPE THE FUTURE VIA EXTENSIVE AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community members within the City of Essex Junction are committed to plan for the future in a manner which puts community engagement at the forefront. However, it was noted early on in the process that many residents are unaware that the City is newly independent and some are confused about what is happening within the City. The clear desire to shape the future of the City of Essex Junction has been apparent throughout the process, whilst retaining the qualities that currently exist and taking on the grand challenges looking out to the future in 2030. This includes an intentional focus on engaging with members of the community who may not have been willing to engage in the past.



RETAINING THE 'NEIGHBORHOOD VILLAGE FEEL'

A repeated theme throughout the entire planning process was the desire of the community to retain the 'neighborhood village' feel that the City of Essex Junction is proud of. As a newly independent city, with the challenges to create its new and unique identity, it has been seen as critical to retain the charm and small town village feel that will attract new residents and retain current residents.



ADDRESSING THE KEY ISSUE OF HOUSING AND DENSITY

Residents of the City of Essex Junction have been disparate regarding the needs to address the issue of housing and density. The options of building up or building out has been a key theme throughout the process. While this is ultimately a decision made by the City, residents are concerned about either buildings being too high or alternatively, the idea of 'sprawl' with the development of commercial/residential buildings.



DESIRE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

As the world faces climate change issues, the planning process has highlighted the need for the City of Essex Junction to take a lead on sustainability issues. This has been noted via sensitive and thoughtful design of the city with green spaces as well as increased measures to mitigate climate change.

1.0 | INTRODUCTION

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.

As a newly independent city, the City of Essex Junction’s intention was to provide an opportunity for the community to discuss the priorities and vision for the City of Essex Junction’s future looking out over the next 5 years via the Strategic Action Plan.

This City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan represents the final element of an extensive seven-month engagement process that started in August 2023. This report represents Future iQ’s analysis of the visioning and strategic planning process, the engagement outcomes and how this data has informed the identification of a preferred future, six Strategic Pillars and eighteen key focus action areas for the City of Essex Junction.

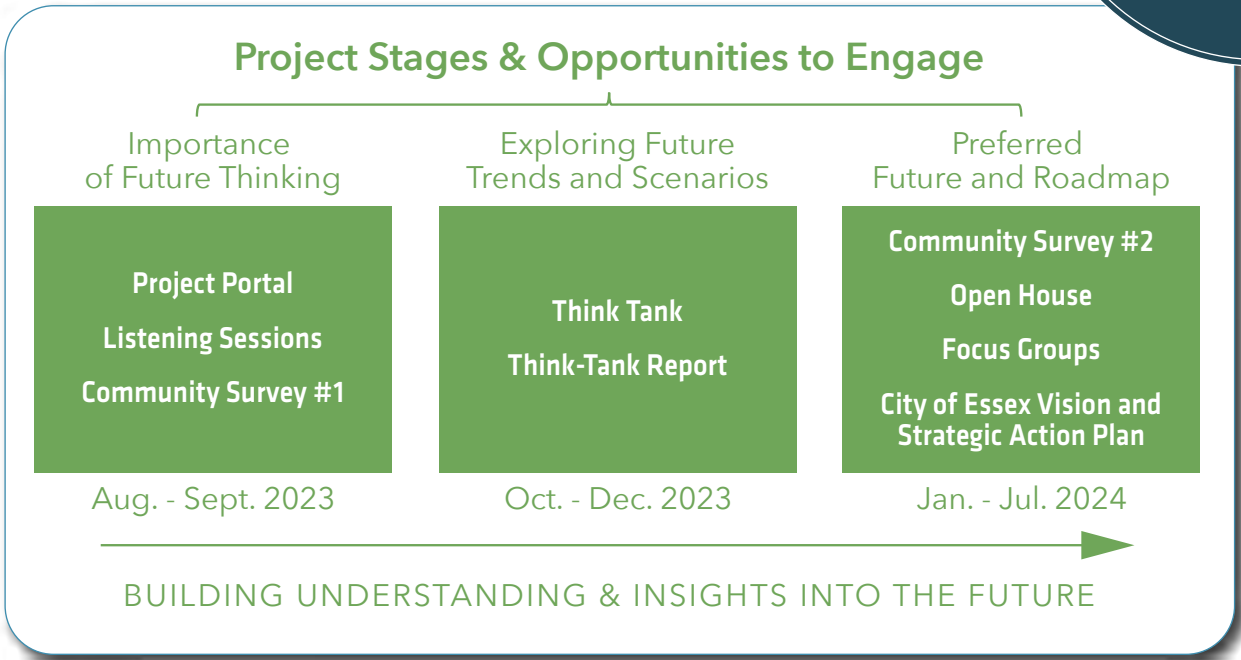
This Plan examines the identification of the preferred future for the City of Essex Junction while discussing the engagement stages of the overall visioning process. The key themes and aspirations that emerged from the engagement process are included within the “strategic pillars” and further explored in the “key action areas” of the report.



1.1 | PROJECT TIMELINE

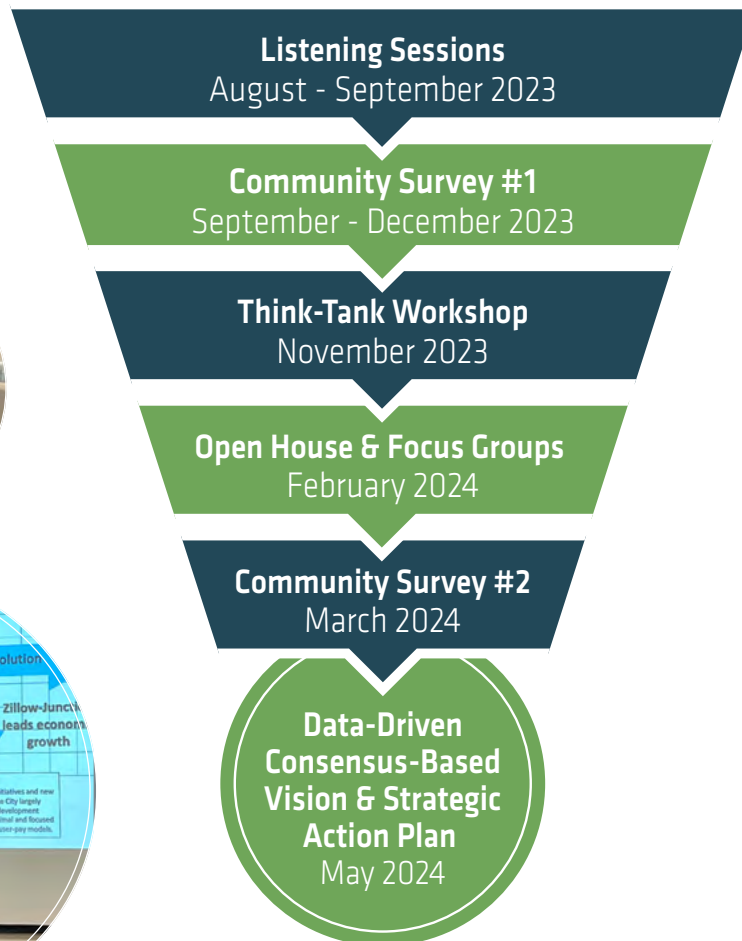
Community input and transparent, inclusive engagement was center to the community visioning and strategic action planning process. The comprehensive engagement and data-driven process progressively narrowed and focused the discussion on emerging key themes and community aspirations for the future. The purpose of the process was to arrive, as close as possible, at a “point of consensus” that represented the most widely shared vision for the future, and strategic pillars and action areas that will guide the community towards that future.

The City of Essex Junction process offers a model for similar recently independent cities that are looking ahead to the future and wrestling with the associated challenges of forming a new identity and macro trends relating to changing weather patterns, workforce, and associated housing issues.



2.1 | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

The community of the City of Essex Junction embarked on a participatory engagement process involving **Community Surveys**, a **Think-Tank**, an **Open House** and **Focus Group** sessions. This engagement process was intended to create a unified community vision which will serve as the foundational support for future planning efforts within the City of Essex Junction.



Results from the two Community Surveys can be viewed and filtered via cohorts on the data visualization platform within the project portal at lab2.future-iq.com/essex-junction-visionstrategic-action-plan/stakeholder-survey.



DataInsight

- A repeated theme throughout the process was the desire of the community to retain the 'neighborhood village' feel that the City of Essex Junction is proud of.
- Community members are committed to plan for the future in a manner which puts community engagement at the forefront. However, it was noted in Community Survey #1 that most residents are unaware that the City is newly independent and confused about what is happening within the City.
- Community members are proud of where they live, however some respondents from Community Survey #1 felt that the reputation of the City was that it was lacking in amenities and was out dated, with too much traffic congestion.

2.2 | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METRICS

Community engagement was the key feature of the City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan project. The engagement and data-driven methodology progressively focused the discussion on emerging key themes and community members aspirations for the future. The purpose of the process was to arrive at a 'point of consensus' that represented the shared vision for the future, and a comprehensive Strategic Plan with actions that will propel the City of Essex Junction towards that shared future. Efforts were made to ensure it was as easy as possible for residents to participate and provide meaningful input in a variety of formats. The engagement was offered via two online community surveys, a two-day Think-Tank, Open House session and 6 Focus Group workshops. Online, the project portal provided regular updated information and will continue to serve as a central location where community members can go to view reports and information on the process.

The participation rates were impressive, with over 800 people participating throughout the process. This reflects the deep commitment of the community to the future of the City of Essex Junction.

Monthly Steering Committee Meetings

425 Survey #1 Responses

150 Survey #2 Responses

3 WORDS THAT DESCRIBE THE FUTURE I WANT FOR THE CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION

84 Participants in 6 Focus Groups

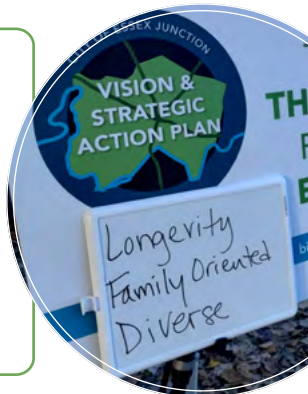
40 Think-Tank Participants

Community-Wide Open House

Walkable
Thriving
Affordable



Sustainable
Improvable
Hopeful



DataInsight

- Engagement numbers were impressive, however one of the concerns by community members is lack of engagement and participation by some residents.
- One of the key community engagement features for the City of Essex Junction process was the **project portal**. The portal served as a central location where community members could go to find updated project information, take surveys, view survey results via data visualization, reports, and register to participate in project events. To explore the project portal, please visit future-iq.com/essex-junction-visionstrategic-action-plan.

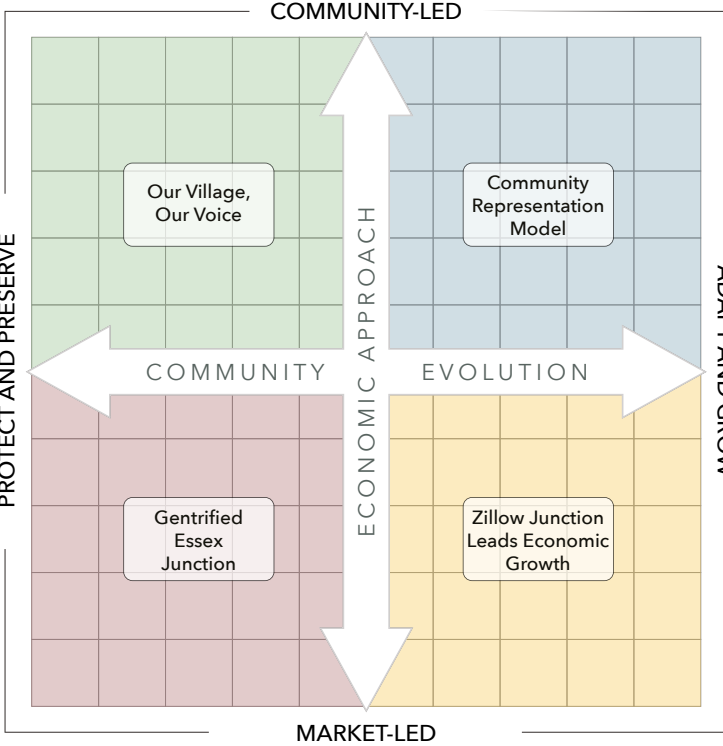
2.3 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STEPS

The City of Essex Junction visioning and strategic action planning was built on a **scenario-planning methodology**. The Think-Tank held over two sessions in November 2023, began with examining external and internal trends shaping the future of the City of Essex Junction. Key drivers were identified and four plausible scenarios were created by the Think-Tank participants. More details on the Think-Tank process is available in the City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan **Think-Tank report**. For more information, visit lab2.future-iq.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/EssexJunction-thinktank-report07.pdf.

The community and City led economic initiatives, which specifically help shape outcomes to ensure broad community outcomes are prioritized. Community-based tools are maximized, such as zoning, economic districts and public private partnerships .

The scenario-based planning methodology is based on two key "Future-Splitting Themes" represented by the axes in the scenario matrix. Each axis represents a continuum with different future directions and outcomes at each end.

There is a strong focus on preserving the traditional feel and scale of the community. Open space is maximized, and new residential and commercial development are resisted. There is a deliberate focus on slowing growth and limiting density.



There is a strong focus on strengthening community connectivity and embracing emerging trends and shifting social values. The community pursues efforts to boost attractiveness, relevance and affordability to a wider cross section of current and future residents.

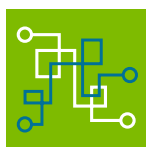
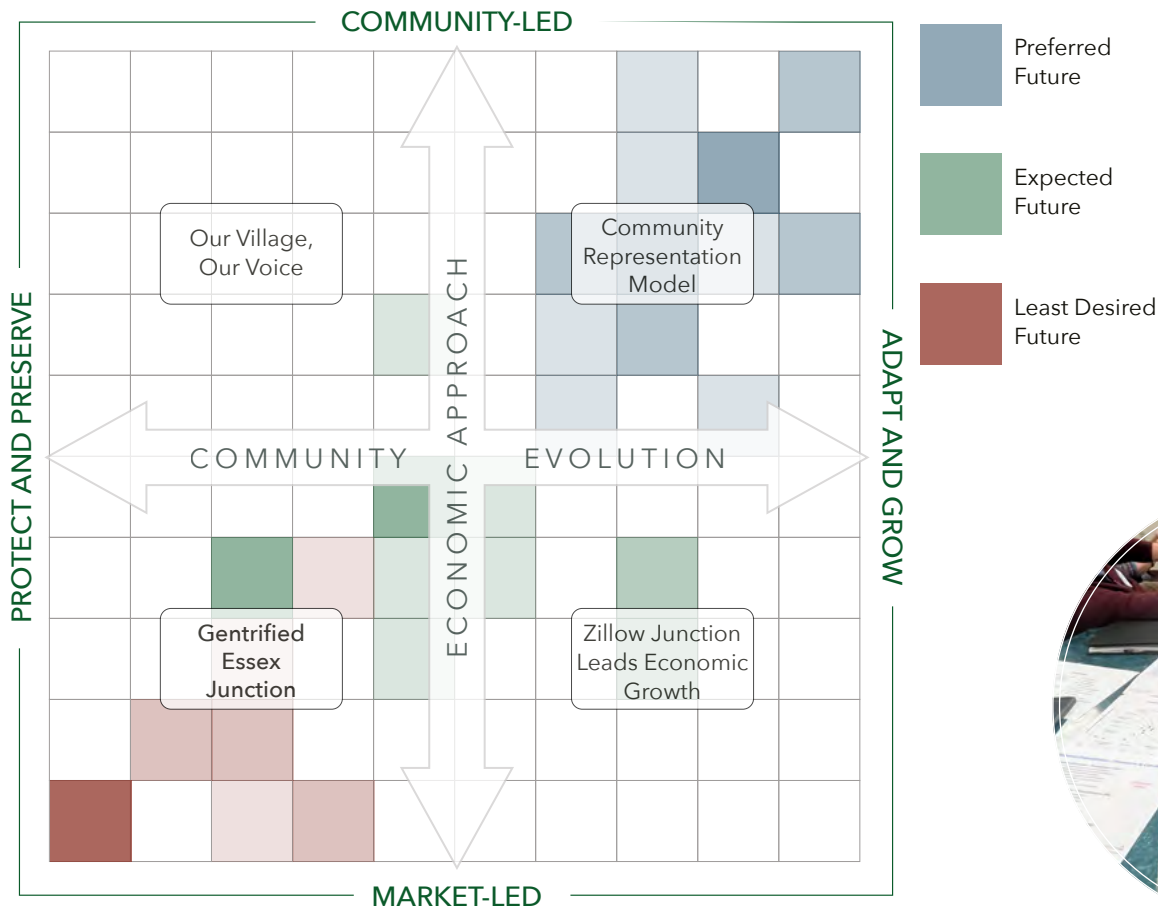
Developers and investors drive initiatives and new investment priorities, with the City largely reacting and responding to development proposals. City investment is minimal and focused on cost-efficient outcomes, and user-pay models.





2.4 | IDENTIFYING THE PREFERRED FUTURE

During the Think-Tank, participants were asked to consider what they thought was the preferred future for the City of Essex Junction looking out to 2030. This was derived by laying a 10x10 grid over the scenario matrix, creating the option for 100 slightly different versions of the future. The scenario matrix is defined by the main continuums (axes), the end point descriptions and the scenario narratives. The responses from the participants were grouped to create heatmaps, and the following diagram shows the main concentrations of responses.



FutureInsight

- The heatmaps showed significant groupings of responses to the different futures, and these are shown in the above diagram. These responses were also validated during the Focus Group discussions.
- The responses highlight a desire to create the 'Community Representation Model' scenario, which requires significant movement on the 'Community Evolution' axis, and the 'Economic Approach' axis. This data laid the foundation for the creation of the community vision and Strategic Pillars.

2.5 | VALIDATING THE PREFERRED FUTURE

The City of Essex Junction Vision and Strategic Action Plan Stakeholder Survey #2 asked ranking questions based on a 1 – 10 continuum to seek respondent input regarding their desire for change looking out to 2035 in the following areas:

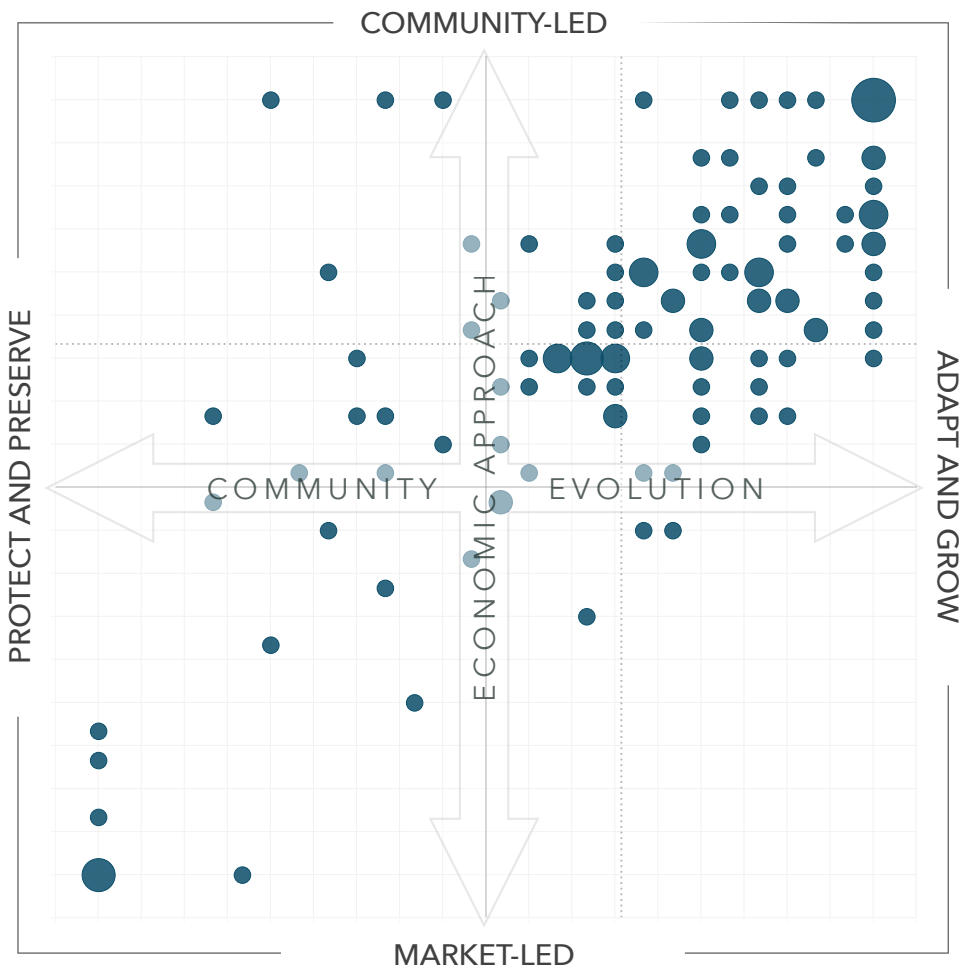
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

- Housing and Urban Design/Development
- Economic and Business Development
- Public Services and Facilities

COMMUNITY EVOLUTION

- Transportation and Connectivity
- Environmental Stewardship
- Community Engagement and Decision-Making

Individual responses for each of these questions were recombined and plotted over the scenario matrix. This provided a way to validate the type of future people are interested in based on a series of specific topics.



DataInsight

- The six questions in the survey were subsets of the themes that were laid out in the scenario matrix. Each question provided a scale, that allowed respondents to select where they thought the focus should be in the future.
- The recombined responses, based on a series of the six specific topics, help validate the heatmaps for the preferred future in the scenario matrix. This provides a strong validation that the 'Community Representation Model' is the desired future, from both an aspirational preferred future perspective, as well as from responses to a series of specific topics.



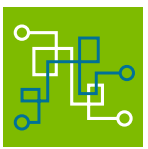
3.0 | COMMUNITY VISION

The community visioning and strategic action planning process allowed community members to explore the future evolution of the City of Essex Junction around the two main themes of 'Community Evolution' and 'Economic Approach' via the Think-Tank, surveys, and Focus Group workshops.

Through an in-depth scenario planning process via the Think-Tank, the preferred future identified for the City of Essex Junction in 2030 is called 'Community Representation Model'. The preferred future was described as:

The future scenario 'Community Representation Model' reflects the community's desire to plan for a future that is equitable and inclusive of all community members. This Strategic Action Plan lays out a series of actions and ideas that can be incorporated into the future planning efforts by the City of Essex Junction.

This scenario forecasts a future where the City of Essex Junction becomes known for its inclusive and welcoming ethos. As a result, the population is both economically and ethnically diverse. The economic approach is community led while having a strong focus on adapting and growing as a community. Community connectivity is significant in relation to amenities, activities, and engagement as well as practicality via cycle lanes, trails, and public transportation. Walkability and cycling are encouraged and there are passive and active greenspaces within the city. Inclusivity and equity are demonstrated via affordable housing, vertical development and incentives and new businesses. There is investment in the public good and shared amenities and resources that create desirable living conditions. There is a focus on community vitality across the city with vibrant amenities and activities. The enviable location is attractive to people wishing to move to the city due to its amenities, character, sense of community and proximity to the airport, Burlington, and the landscape of Vermont.



FutureInsight

- The newly independent City of Essex Junction is located south of Essex, Vermont and is bordered on the south by the Winooski River. The city is 6 miles east of downtown Burlington.
- Benefiting from an enviable Vermont location, the community of the newly independent City of Essex Junction wish to retain all that is unique about the place as well as being welcoming and inclusive to new residents and visitors.

4.0 | STRATEGIC ACTION PILLARS FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Pillars of the City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan process were developed from the community input and data which was gathered over the course of the entire engagement process.

Previous research has also been examined to help produce 'pillars' that represent the major themes or topic areas that underpin the preferred future for the City of Essex Junction. The key action areas listed under each pillar are the building blocks to achieve the preferred community future and were generated by each Focus Group session which was held for each pillar. The following community ideas are suggested steps by community members that could be taken to put the community on the path to this preferred future.

Pillars are considered interdependent.

The strategic pillars help to organize future thinking into six important elements for the City of Essex Junction. These are intended to be the foundational building blocks that support and guide the community towards its preferred future 'Community Representation Model'.



4.1.1 | IMPORTANCE OF HOUSING AND URBAN DESIGN

The City of Essex Junction is regarded as a destination community, where people are wanting to move to the community as a residential location. However, the community is geographically very constrained, with limited available space for future development. This constraint is driving development and planning to consider greater density and height of buildings. Overall, throughout the planning process, there has been a willingness to consider and incorporate greater density, but that it needs to be done in the 'right way'. This particularly focused on the desire to retain a strong neighborhood character, and to retain a scale that makes sense in the City of Essex Junction.

The City of Essex Junction offers a very desirable location with great transit links to Burlington and a strong small community feel.



ResidentValue

- In the second stakeholder survey, participants were asked about the approach the city should take regarding housing and urban design, and whether to leave it to market forces or guide and direct. Overwhelmingly, respondents thought the City should intentionally guide development and take a more active approach in tackling housing issues. The weighted average on the responses was 7.53 out of 10 (see Survey #2 results on portal).
- There seems to be considerable interest in exploring design standards and principles that help amplify and retain the aesthetics and visual appeal of the community.
- This pillar was ranked as the most important for action over the next 5 years.

4.1.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The three main action areas below were identified during the focus groups and refined by the Steering Committee. They represent the big ‘building blocks’ that help define action for this strategic pillar. Additional information on ideas has been added from the second community survey.

Action 1: Enhance the ‘Neighborhood Village Feel’

The notion of creating and sustaining a ‘village feel’ has been very important to people in the community. Ideas on how to achieve this have included adding a balance of smaller one-story single housing together with more multi-story mixed income and multi-generational housing as the population increases. There was also an emphasis on using the housing approach to help build ‘ownership’ pathways, by offering smaller home options. The overarching concern was that the rate of expansion does not overwhelm schools and roads.

Action 2: Include contemporary design principles into the City of Essex Junction

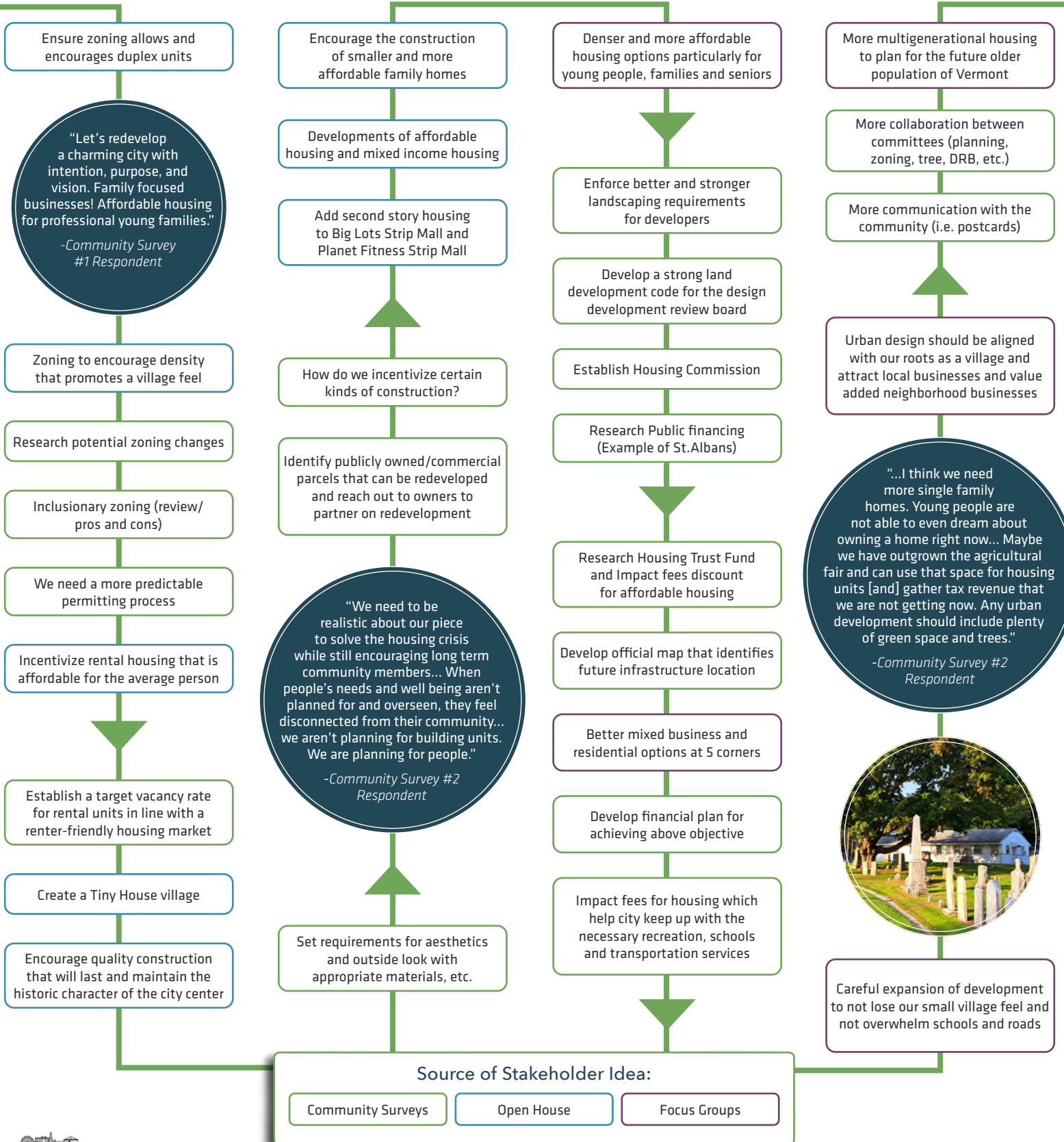
There was a desire for the City to guide the design of properties more intentionally in the community. Examples of where this could be applied included continuing the 5 Corners Project and Transit Design Process, which was seen as a promising process. Ideas included encouraging development from the city center outwards, sound barriers along busy streets, and multi-use bike/walking lanes and trails. Overall, the desire was for the urban design to be aligned with the community roots as a village.

Action 3: Improve the City’s Landscaping and Design Standards

The participants in the process have identified landscaping and design standards in shared spaces as a key way to ‘soften’ the urban environment and create a more intimate village feel. This includes approaches to preserve and enhance green space, including tree planting and green infrastructure to offset harsh landscape. There is a desire to create improved walkability and bikability and help build interconnected neighborhoods via these pathways and lanes. There also needs to be a focus on the upkeep and maintenance of older buildings and structures, as these provide the authentic roots of the City of Essex Junction streetscapes.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future 'Community Representation Model'. Below are their original ideas color coded in relation to the source of the idea.



4.2 | PILLAR 2: PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES

4.2.1 | IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The City of Essex Junction has a key municipal responsibility to provide some essential services, such as water and sewer. It also has the flexibility to provide other important services to the community. The recreation and lifestyle amenities in the City of Essex Junction were consistently highlighted as key priority areas. This includes amenities such as the parks, library and senior center. In addition, there is a strong focus on the core services that help maintain safety in the community.

Like all communities, the City of Essex Junction has limitations in funding and resources. Focusing on high priority projects is an essential approach.



Resident Value

- In the second stakeholder survey, participants were asked about the approach the city should take about the provision of services and cost, and whether City investment should be the minimum necessary to maintain facilities and services at the current level; or if the city should creatively and carefully invest more in community priorities and outcomes. People leaned toward a creative investment approach, with the weighted average on the responses being 7.05 out of 10 (see Survey #2 results on portal).
- There are a wide range of public facilities and services that people identified as priorities, but they were grouped as issues of safety, community amenities, and basic infrastructure services such as water.
- This pillar was ranked as the third most important for action over the next 5 years.

4.2.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The three main action areas below were identified during the focus groups and refined by the Steering Committee. They represent the big ‘building blocks’ that help define action for this strategic pillar. Additional information on ideas has been added from the second community survey.

Action 4: Promote and Enhance Safety

Safety was a key issue in the community discussions. Residents appreciate that the City of Essex Junction is currently a safe and peaceful community and want to ensure that continues. There is broad support for continuing to fund Police, Fire, and Rescue and for investing in new fire and rescue facilities. There is also a strong sentiment that public works should be supported at a level to maintain safe and walkable neighborhoods and improve the overall walkability and bike-ability of the city.

Action 5: Address and Focus on Community Wellness

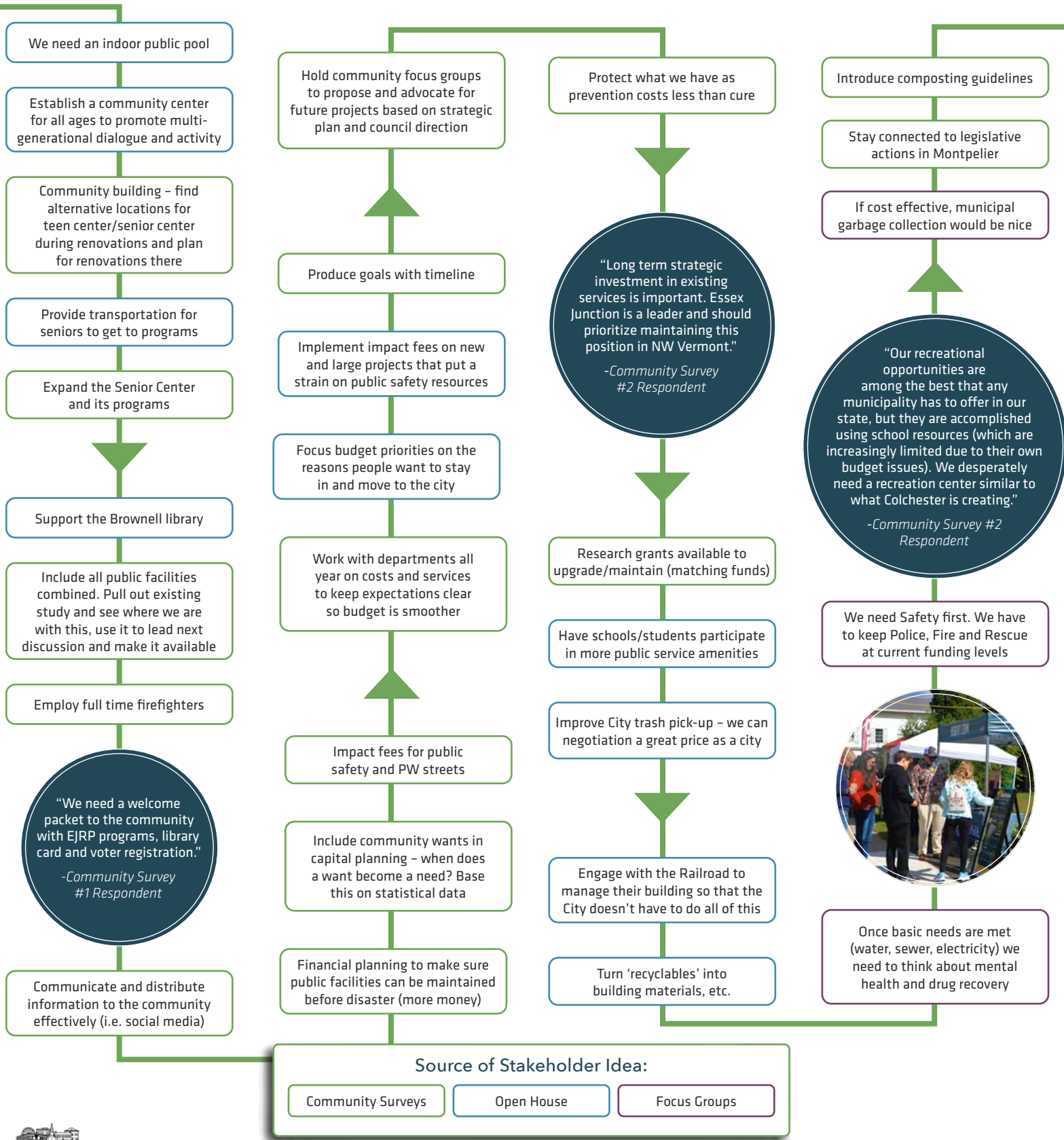
The topic of community wellness ran through the engagement work. Residents see that the City of Essex Junction has an important role to play in creating community wellness. This is through the provision of amenities that support healthy lifestyles, build community connections and allow people to engage in their community life together. There is a desire for expanded recreation options, especially the idea of trails and indoor recreation facilities.

Action 6: Provide Responsible, Open and Transparent Government

There is a desire for local government to be transparent, open and responsive to community needs. This includes issues such as better explaining the basic services the City must provide, outlining its role in water and sewerage, and sharing the budget implications. There is interest in better communication about the broader costs of services such as transportation, library, senior center and recreation areas. As society changes, there will be a need to incorporate new metrics such as diversity, equity and inclusion from both policy and practice perspectives.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future 'Community Representation Model'. Below are their original ideas color coded in relation to the source of the idea.



4.3.1 | IMPORTANCE OF ECONOMIC AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Local economic and business development has been a strong theme in the planning work. There is appetite for more community and City-led economic initiatives, which specifically help ensure broad community outcomes are prioritized. These outcomes include more businesses that serve the needs of locals, and create local destination experiences, such as dining and retail areas. A key focus is to enhance the downtown experience and find creative approaches to stimulate the local business sector.

There is a strong desire to see more businesses that serve local needs, and which will help build the local community identity.



ResidentValue

- In the second stakeholder survey, participants were asked about the approach the city should take regarding business and economic development, and whether to take a hands-off approach (let businesses work it out), or should the City actively use community-based tools to shape outcomes. Overwhelmingly, respondents thought the city should actively use community-based tools to shape outcomes. The weighted average on the responses was 6.73 out of 10 (see Survey #2 results on portal), and it was the second highest rated pillar in terms of importance over the next five years.
- The interest in local economic and business development seems to be primarily driven by a desire to see more local businesses that provide interesting food, retail and experiences, targeted to residents and visitors. There is a desire to see a more vibrant local business community.
- This pillar was ranked as the second most important for action over the next 5 years.

4.3.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The main action areas below were identified during the focus groups and refined by the Steering Committee. They represent the big ‘building blocks’ that help define action for this strategic pillar. Additional information on ideas has been added from the second community survey.

Action 7: Enhance Downtown and Corridors

The continued revitalization of the downtown area and the main retail corridors was the key focus of many comments. Overall residents see there is an upside potential to create more vibrant and interesting business areas, that will attract locals and visitors, and help enhance the experience of the City of Essex Junction. There is interest in these small walkable urban ‘nodes’ that could be full of life and energy. Residents especially liked the idea of promoting local and regional businesses, that sell Vermont produce and products.

Action 8: Provide and Promote Partnership Driven Institutional Support and Advocacy

The planning work has identified the need for more community-based organizations and businesses that work to improve the city and help its population. It was viewed by some that the City should be actively funding these organizations and assisting them in finding space very close to Five Corners as this will increase the community’s ability to thrive.

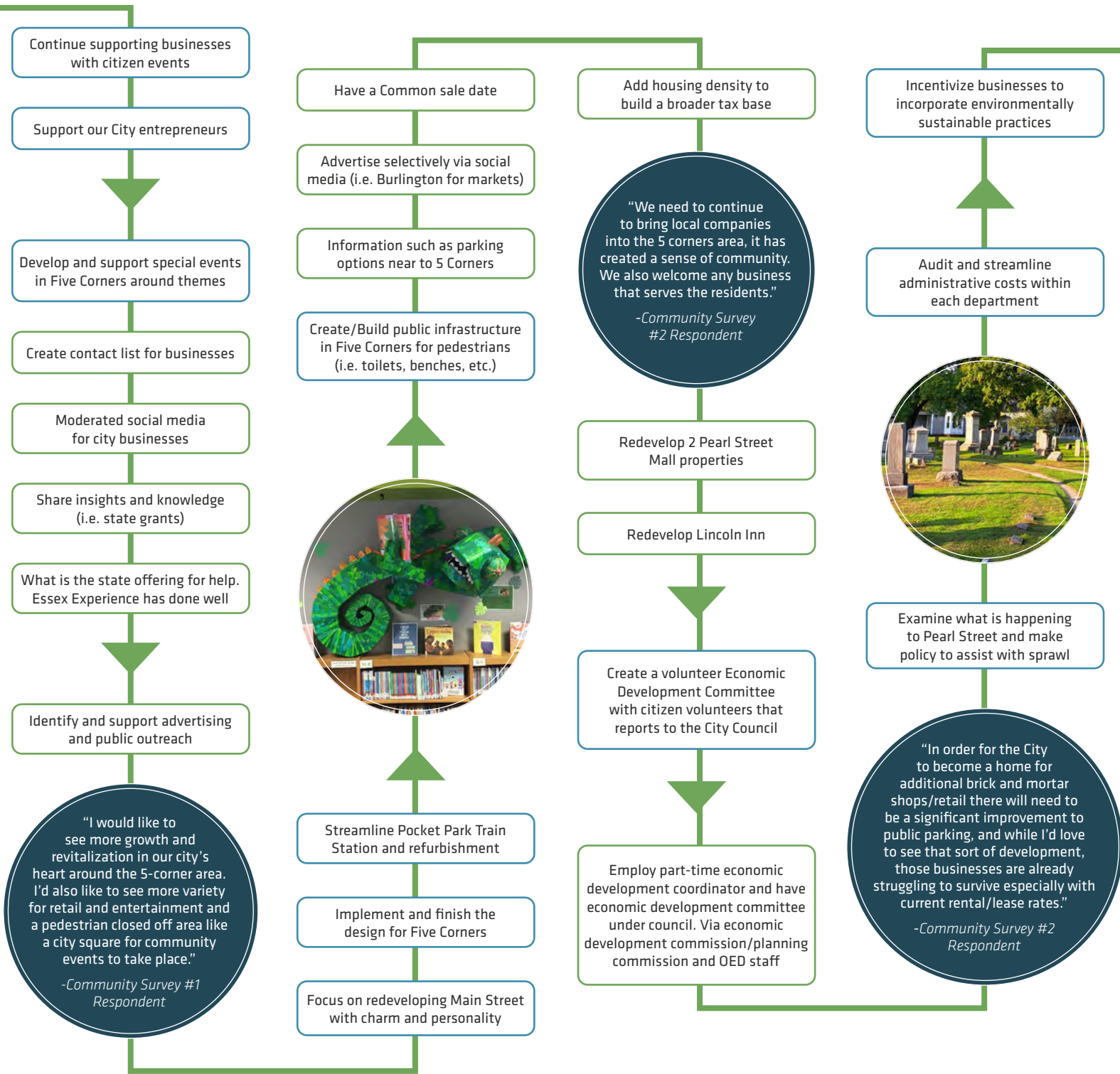


Action 9: Bring Businesses Together to Work Collaboratively

There was a recognized need to build the business ecosystem. A dedicated economic development committee is needed which could creatively build partnerships (i.e.: with Global Foundries and CVExpo). Creativity is needed to grow the vibrant economic sector that the city needs. An important part of the economic and development approach will be promoting the City of Essex Junction. This could have important impacts on attracting new residents and businesses to the community, who are attracted by the values and the local approach.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future 'Community Representation Model'. Below are their original ideas color coded in relation to the source of the idea.



Source of Stakeholder Idea:

- Community Surveys
- Open House
- Focus Groups

4.4.1 | IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY

The City of Essex Junction is well serviced with macro transportation options, including commuter options to Burlington, and good road connections. The focus of residents interest is primarily on internal transportation and connectivity. This topic surfaced in all the community engagement sessions, where people have expressed a desire for more safe walkways, bikeways and connections between neighborhoods and to the downtown. There is a strong desire to create a more walkable community.

Residents in the City of Essex Junction have expressed a great interest in being able to connect the community in off-road networks of trails and walkways.



ResidentValue

- Thinking about future transportation and connectivity, and what they thought should be the approach in the City of Essex Junction respondents were asked ‘Should the approach be to stick to existing road networks, or aggressively pursue ways to fund and implement safe routes on and off road’. Overwhelmingly, respondents thought the city should aggressively pursue ways to fund and implement safe routes on and off road. The weighted average on the responses was 6.93 out of 10 (see Survey #2 results on portal).
- There seems to be considerable interest in multimodal connectivity and creating a network of trails. However, this pillar was one of the lowest ranked in terms of importance in the next five years.
- This pillar was ranked as the fifth most important for action over the next 5 years.

4.4.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The three main action areas below were identified during the focus groups and refined by the Steering Committee. They represent the big ‘building blocks’ that help define action for this strategic pillar. Additional information on ideas has been added from the second community survey.

Action 10: Improve Communication Methods

Resident input has highlighted the need for more signage and directional information. There are currently connection options that people might not be aware of or using. Part of the future communication and educational work will be to promote the existing safe walking and biking options throughout the city, but also to advocate for the expansion of this network.



Action 11: Enhance Transportation Safety

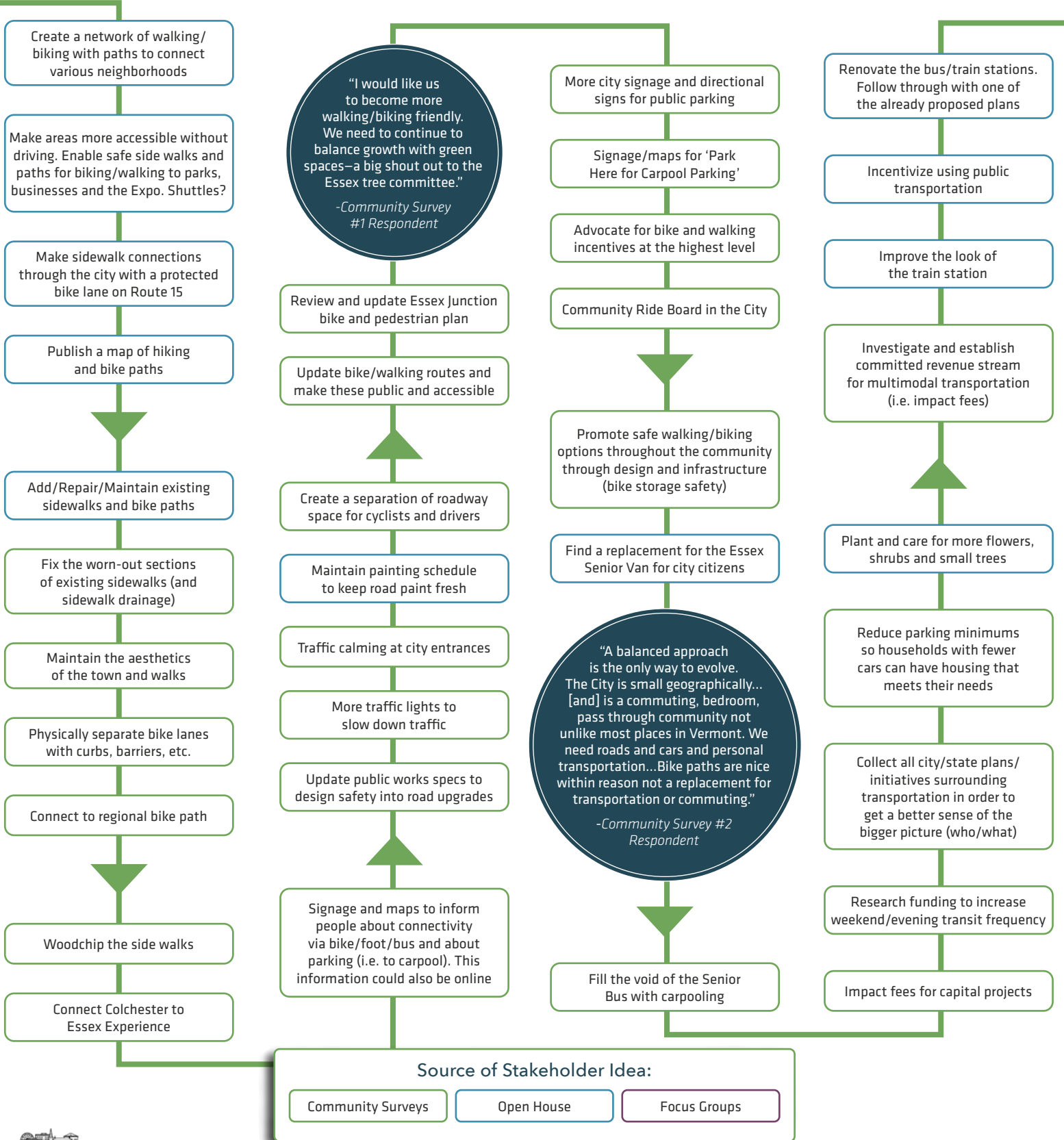
To create a more walkable and bikeable community will require a focus on safety. There are ideas and options such as traffic calming at city entrances, more traffic lights to slow down traffic, and more well located highly visible crosswalks. Many residents also expressed the desire for the physical separation of bike and walking lanes, from the road system.

Action 12: Develop a Citywide Multimodal Transportation Plan

During the planning process, many people talked about the need to have an aggressive plan to build a full multimodal network across the city. This plan would look at the future connections, connection to regional trails, and internal transportation options and modes. This was seen as a potentially transformational approach, that could enhance the livability of the City of Essex Junction and create a very different level of community connection.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future 'Community Representation Model'. Below are their original ideas color coded in relation to the source of the idea.



4.5 | PILLAR 5: ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

4.5.1 | IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

The residents of the City of Essex Junction share a deep commitment to environmental sustainability and stewardship. This sentiment was repeated throughout the planning process, as people explored the many ways the City could embrace a long-term approach to environmental stewardship. There was significant interest in practical solutions like tree planting and reducing pesticide use, through to more systemic topics such as moving to renewable energy sources and managing for future climate related risks.

Residents in the City of Essex Junction have expressed a clear interest and desire in demonstrating and investing in environmental stewardship.



ResidentValue

- In the second stakeholder survey, participants were asked about the approach the City should take regarding environmental stewardship in the City of Essex Junction, and whether no action is needed, or if the City should develop a city-wide, comprehensive, and long-term approach to environmental stewardship. Overwhelmingly, respondents thought the City should develop a city-wide, comprehensive, and long-term approach to environmental stewardship. The weighted average on the responses was 7.10 out of 10 (see Survey #2 results on portal).
- There seems to be considerable community support for environmental stewardship, that builds green spaces and helps adjust to the impacts of climate change. However, this makes pillar the lowest ranked, by a small margin.
- This pillar was ranked as the sixth most important for action over the next 5 years.

4.5.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The three main action areas below were identified during the focus groups and refined by the Steering Committee. They represent the big ‘building blocks’ that help define action for this strategic pillar. Additional information on ideas has been added from the second community survey.

Action 13: Support Green Spaces and Tree Planting

The green spaces in the City of Essex Junction are highly regarded, and the tree planting work is strongly supported by residents. The participants in the planning process have identified strong support for managing the green spaces as important ecological zones. There is a desire for the use of more native species, and to increase the tree planting across the community. Tree planting is seen as helping climate resiliency, improving habitat and enhancing the aesthetics of the community.

Action 14: Encourage Clean Energy and Efficiency Options

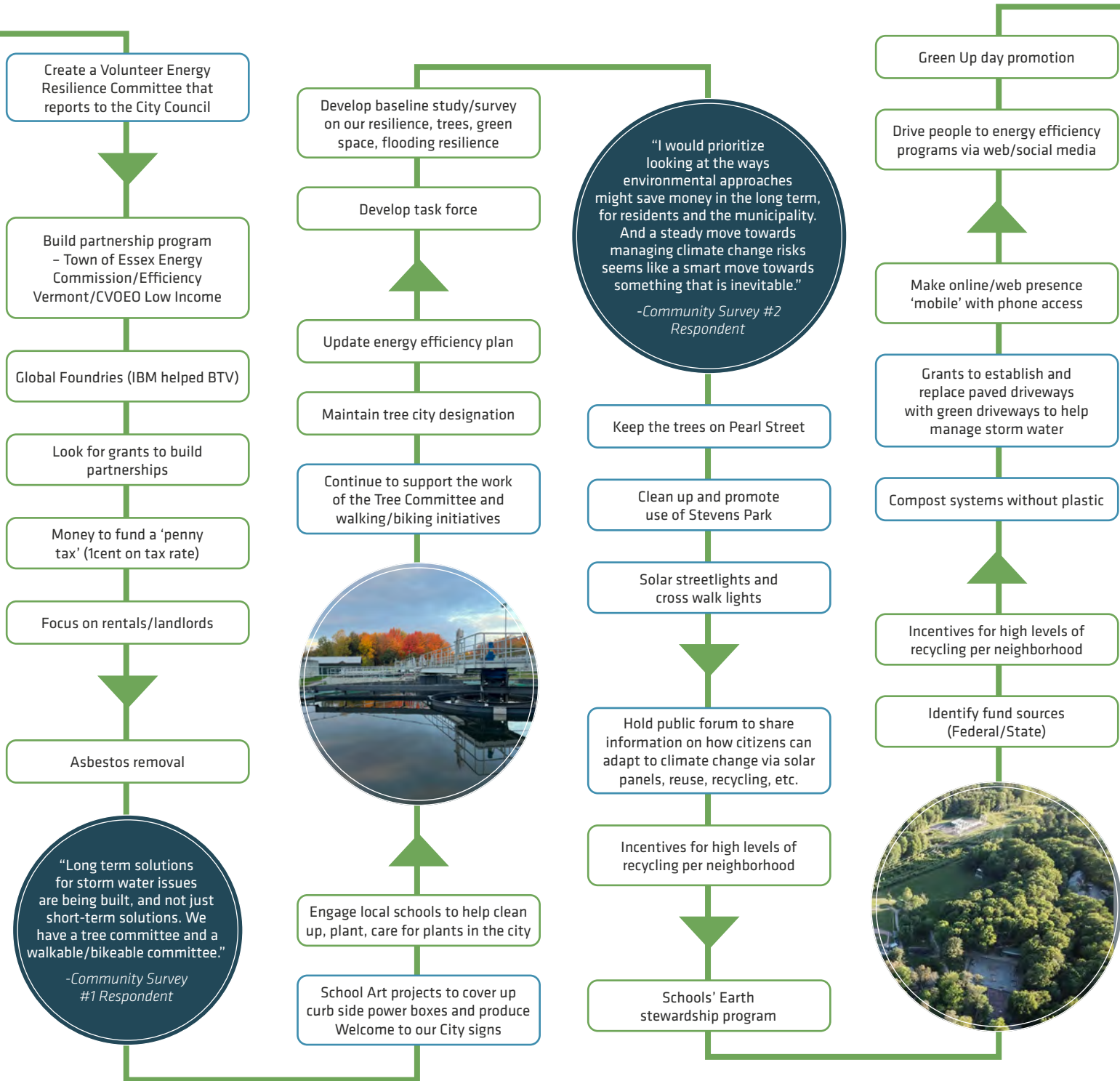
There is strong support for embracing clean energy / renewable energy options. This can also include energy efficient approaches, such as home weatherization. This can be undertaken at an individual home owner level, and at citywide level. This topic needs more information and support for homeowners to make the transition, and there is an important educational role the City can play in assisting with information and demonstration examples.

Action 15: Create a City-wide Comprehensive Sustainability Plan

The City of Essex Junction needs a comprehensive long-term sustainability plan. There are many topics raised through the planning work that need to be picked up in such a plan, such as investment in renewable energy, emission reduction, waste management and recycling programs, climate mitigation efforts, and overall environmental stewardship. This plan would represent a shared community approach to this overall topic of environmental stewardship, and the role the community can play. This could be a very exciting initiative and is an ideal topic to continue the important community engagement work.



The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future 'Community Representation Model'. Below are their original ideas color coded in relation to the source of the idea.



4.6.1 | IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

As a newly formed and independent municipality, the City of Essex Junction is working to build a sense of community and identity. The geographic scale of the community is small, which can naturally help in building connection and engagement. However, many residents are also new to the community and may work elsewhere. This can make connecting with people more challenging. A lot of the planning workshops have explored how to make these connections with people in the community, and many good ideas have been offered, which have focused on how to create an environment of connection and meaningful community dialogue.

The leadership of the City of Essex Junction views community engagement as a critical building block to create an inclusive and healthy community fabric.



ResidentValue

- In the second stakeholder survey, participants were asked what the focus of community engagement should be, and whether it is important for the City to create a plan that fosters a strong sense of community. Overwhelmingly, respondents thought the City should create a community engagement plan. The weighted average on the responses was 6.96 out of 10 (see Survey #2 results on portal).
- There is a strong underlying desire to create an inclusive and engaged community in the City of Essex Junction. This will require dedicated work, especially to reach the various segments of the population that traditionally do not participate.
- This pillar was ranked as the fourth most important for action over the next 5 years.

4.6.2 | KEY ACTION AREAS

The three main action areas below were identified during the focus groups and refined by the Steering Committee. They represent the big 'building blocks' that help define action for this strategic pillar. Additional information on ideas has been added from the second community survey.

Action 16: Promote Community Vitality

The subtext of a lot of the discussions about community engagement was about how to create a more vibrant and connected community. The issue of vibrancy is intriguing, as it gets to the heart of community character and vitality. Community based events are seen as central to the process of building vitality. Examples offered during the planning work included the Farmers Market, art and music events, multicultural events and other seasonal events. These are all seen as part of building the vitality of the community and bringing people together.

Action 17: Enhance Community Connectivity

There is a strong desire to build community connectively, which is at the heart of an engaged community. Ideas offered have included multilingual communications, welcome packets / wagons, volunteer openings and regular community meetings. Residents have appreciated the town hall format of the City Council and are keen to see more City engagement opportunities. The challenge is to reach all of the residents, and ideas were suggested about boosting social media, using print media and having volunteer 'community connectors' and local influencers.

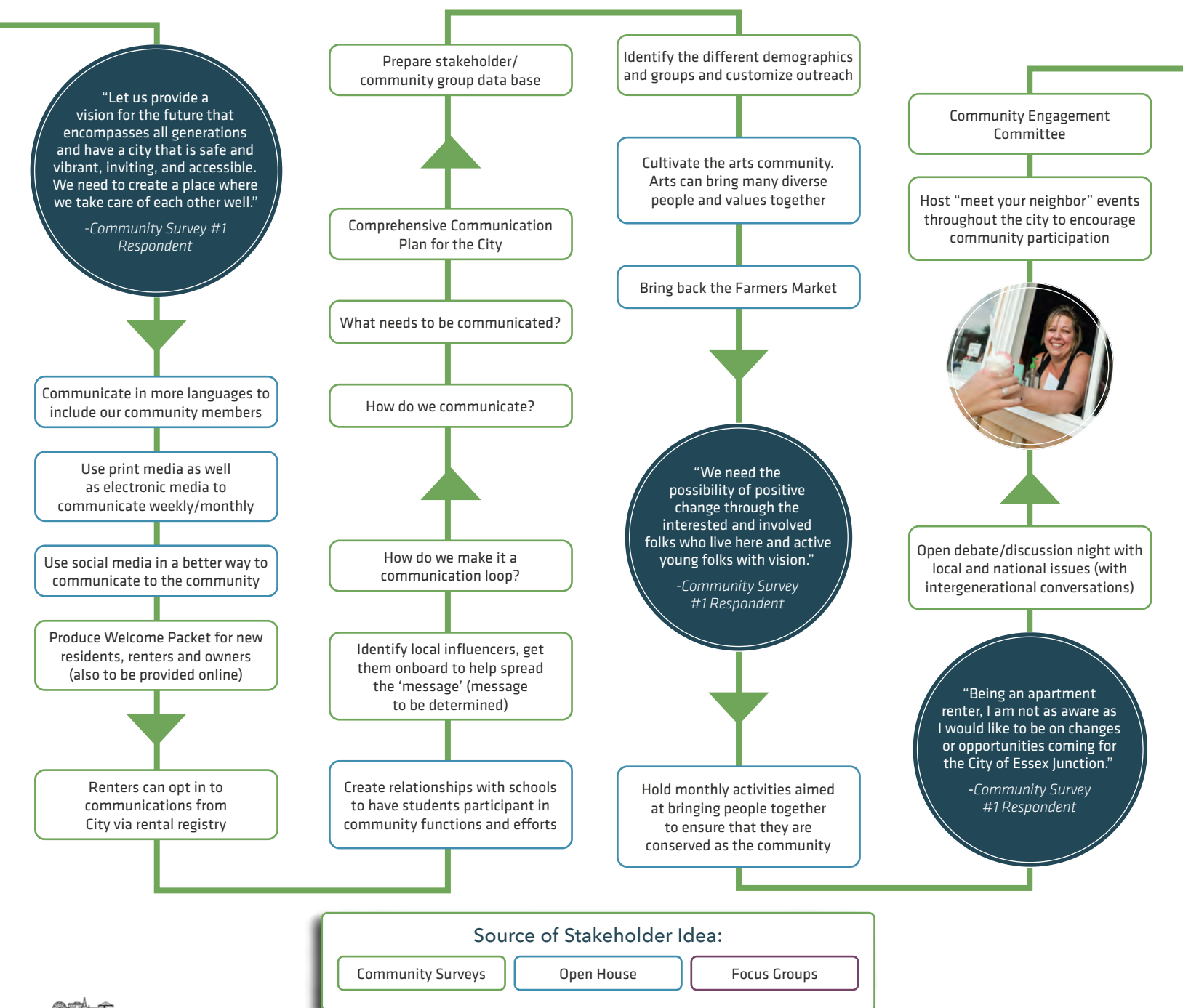
Action 18: Create a Comprehensive Community Engagement Plan

Given the importance and complexity of engagement, it has been proposed that the City develop a comprehensive community engagement plan. This would identify what needs to be communicated, how it is done and how to create a communication loop. The plan may also explore the formation of a Community Engagement Committee or Taskforce, that works to bring in all the segments of the community and helps build the communications network. Such a Taskforce could include members from key stakeholder groups and representatives of key community segments.



4.6.3 | IDEAS FROM THE COMMUNITY

The following bullet points are ideas and actions that emerged during the community engagement process. Focus group participants and survey respondents were asked for specific ideas on actions the community could take to achieve the preferred future 'Community Representation Model'. Below are their original ideas color coded in relation to the source of the idea.



5.0 | COMBINED STRATEGIC ACTION FRAMEWORK

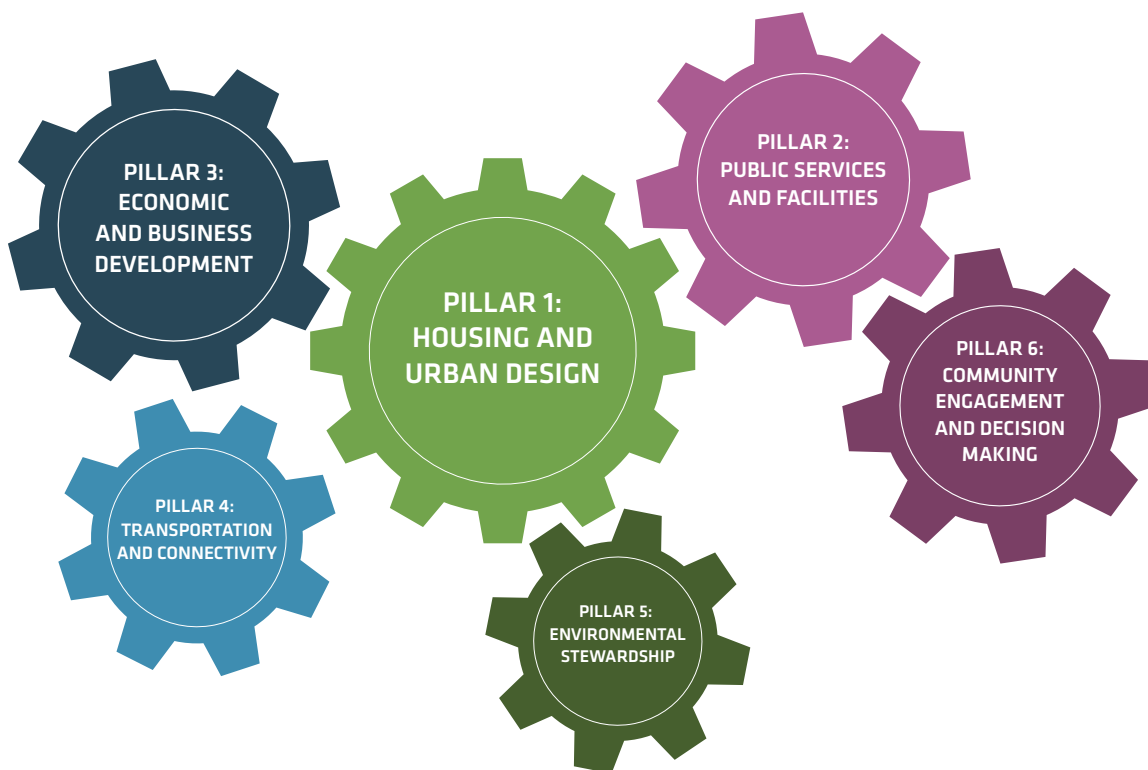
The framework for action developed through the community visioning and strategic action planning process has identified a set of key actions that will help the City of Essex Junction pivot its trajectory towards the 'Community Representation Model' future. This framework is the culmination of community input, surveys and deliberation by the focus groups. The resulting overall framework creates the basis of the roadmap to the future and the guiding vision that will inform future planning efforts by the City of Essex Junction.

	<p>KEY ACTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 1: Enhance the 'Neighborhood Village Feel'• Action 2: Include Contemporary Design Principles into the City of Essex Junction• Action 3: Improve the City's Landscaping and Design Standards		<p>KEY ACTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 4: Promote and Enhance Safety• Action 5: Address and Focus on Community Wellness• Action 6: Provide Responsible, Open and Transparent Government
	<p>KEY ACTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 7: Enhance Downtown and Corridors• Action 8: Provide and Promote Partnership Driven Institutional Support and Advocacy• Action 9: Bring Businesses Together to Work Collaboratively		<p>KEY ACTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 10: Improve Community Education• Action 11: Enhance Transportation Safety• Action 12: Develop a Citywide Multimodal Transportation Plan
	<p>KEY ACTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 13: Support Green Spaces and Tree Planting• Action 14: Encourage Clean Energy and Efficiency Options• Action 15: Create a City-wide Comprehensive Sustainability Plan		<p>KEY ACTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action 16: Promote Community Vitality• Action 17: Enhance Community Connectivity• Action 18: Create a Comprehensive Community Engagement Plan

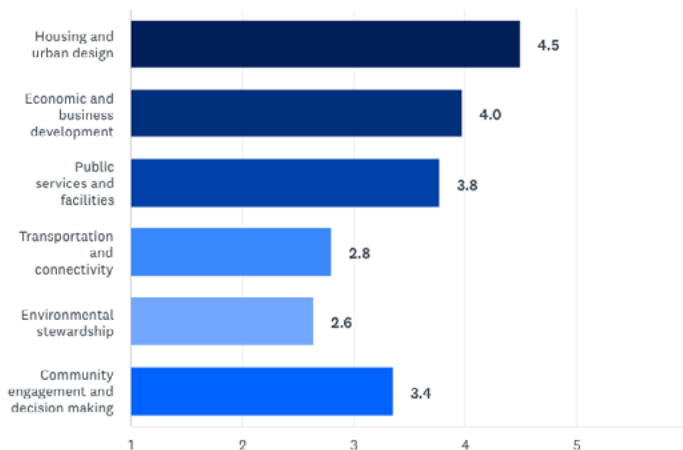


6.0 | DYNAMIC SYSTEMS-THINKING APPROACH

Communities function as ecosystems, where actions in one area can impact other areas. The recommended strategic pillars and actions for the City of Essex Junction will be most effective if they operate in concert.



PILLARS RANKED IN TERMS OF IMPORTANCE FOR ACTION, OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



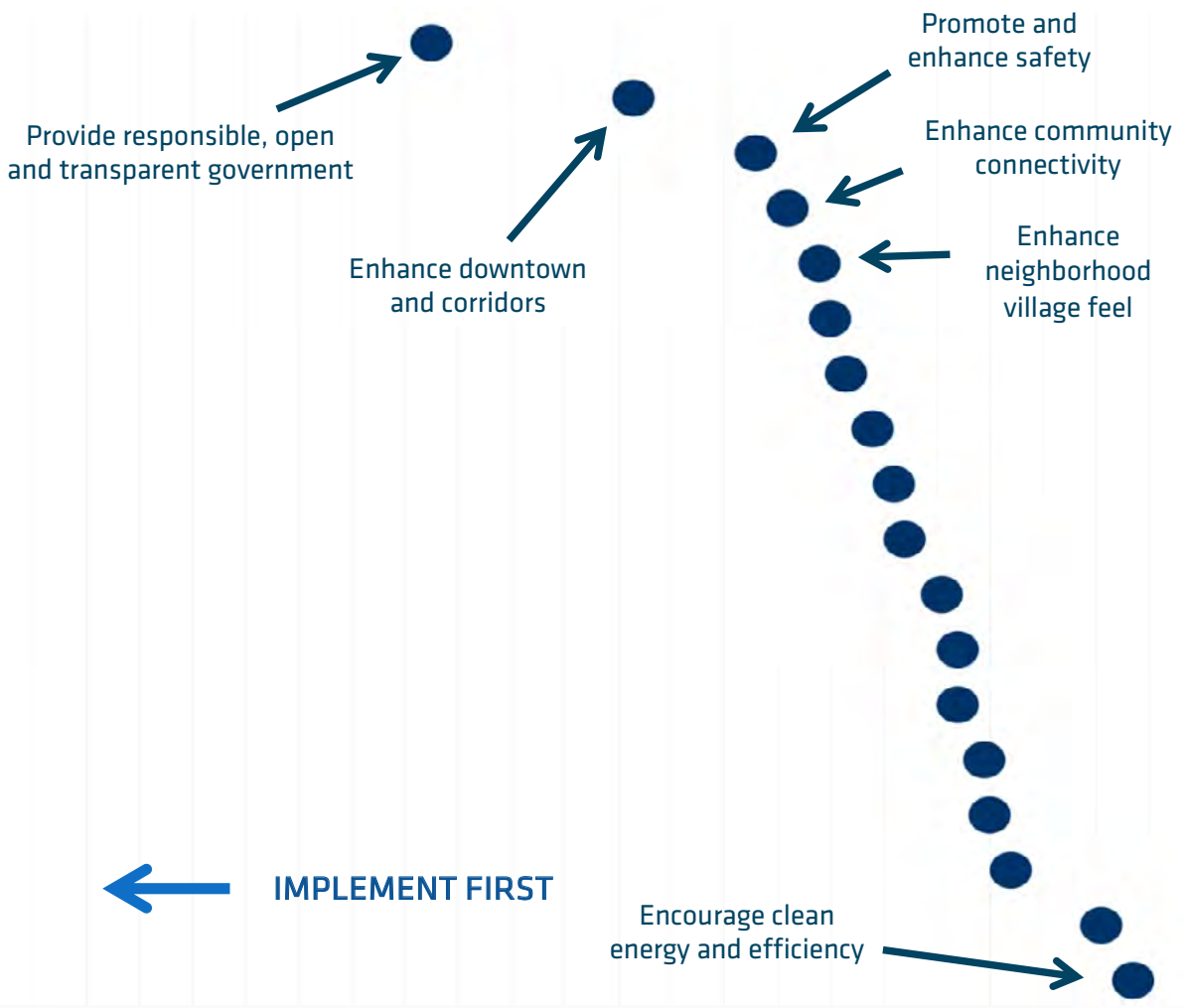


7.0 | INITIAL PRIORITIZATION

ORDER OF IMPLEMENTATION

As we think about implementation, please rank the order of implementation over the next 5 years.

- ACTION 6
- ACTION 7
- ACTION 4
- ACTION 17
- ACTION 1
- ACTION 5
- ACTION 18
- ACTION 3
- ACTION 2
- ACTION 11
- ACTION 10
- ACTION 12
- ACTION 8
- ACTION 16
- ACTION 9
- ACTION 15
- ACTION 13
- ACTION 14



Preliminary data





8.0 | NEXT STEPS – ROADMAP TO THE FUTURE

The City of Essex Junction has undertaken an extensive community visioning and strategic planning process that has produced the following outcomes:

- Documented a detailed understanding of the community’s views across a range of important topics and future shaping factors.
- Allowed detailed examination of plausible future scenarios, explored expected, least desired, and preferred futures, and built an understanding of the implications of these future options.
- Identified a vision for the future, acknowledging that there are a variety of viewpoints, with the majority in a central range.
- Identified key strategic pillars, action areas, and community ideas.

The community of Essex Junction has shown a healthy appetite for change going forward. This is the first step toward the preferred future ‘Community Representation Model’, that will guide the City’s future planning efforts.

This work has been built on public participation and open and transparent dialogue. The vision looks out to 2030. Now, the next phase of work needs to begin. The following immediate next steps are recommended:

- Consideration and acceptance of the *City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan* by the City Council.
- Incorporation of the key elements of the community vision into the City’s future planning efforts



9.0 | FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan Project and next steps, please contact:

ASHLEY SNELLENBERGER

Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director
City of Essex Junction
802.878.6944 EXT: 1601
ASnellenberger@essexjunction.org

To read all reports and to explore the City of Essex Junction Community Vision and Strategic Action plan process, please visit the project portal :

lab2.future-iq.com/essex-junction-visionstrategic-action-plan/



THINK-TANK REPORT

November 2023



BENCHMARK REPORT

January 2024



STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

April 2024

ABOUT FUTURE IQ

Future IQ specializes in applying innovative tools and approaches to assist municipalities, organizations, regions, and industries shape their economic and community futures. With over two decades of experience, the company's global clientele spans three continents.

To learn more about Future IQ, and our recent projects visit www.future-iq.com or email info@future-iq.com.

DAVID BEURLE

Chief Executive Officer
Future IQ
612.757.9190
david@future-iq.com





CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
**COMMUNITY VISION &
STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN**

VERMONT, USA

JULY 2024