

Report to the City Council

Summary for the year on the activity of the EJ Planning Commission

Diane Clemens, Chair 

December 18, 2024

The PC spent over a year investing and researching what a rental registry could do for the well being of tenants and landlords in our city. We researched who in the State has a registry, how they run it and pay for it, and what benefits the municipality derives from it. We visited with some of the directors of the programs, had UVM graduate students do a study and search project, and interviewed a software developer/contractor to understand that end of the service. An ordinance was written. A proposal was to have the health inspector and registry staff member also serve as a part time city planner; funds generated would have paid for the costs associated with any residuals going to fund a housing trust fund. The position would have been in-house of the Community Development Dept. unlike others that house it in the Fire Dept. The City would have gained the data on the rental housing stock while taking the fear of complaining in a tight housing market off the shoulders of the renters.

The Village Center Designation has been renewed. The Neighborhood Development Area has been expanded to include part of Pearl Street. Benefit is reduced Act 250 regulation process and priority for consideration for State grants.

The Global Foundries Solar Installation presentation started the series of required presentations. Next was the Essex A North Solar Project petition for Certificate of Public Good. Global Foundries will no longer attempt to bring other businesses per 2012 Master Plan. Last was Global Foundries Energy Storage 45 Day Notice Presentation by Lightshift Energy ( lithium battery storage) site location.

Ongoing has been a discussion of LDC amendments and technical changes due to legislation that was passed: Home Act (Act 47) and federal sign neutrality requirements made this a project for almost every meeting. Major topics were: sign neutrality (language) and design standards; Temporary Use – Food trucks and trailers; tandem parking spaces for residential use; PUD Open space – for multistory residential buildings; with the State Statute change MF3 needs to increase to 4 units/lot as R1 and R2 will be required to do so. Also discussed EV charging stations ( private and public); affordable housing; and public art. An error from 2005 on the Zoning **map** will be corrected. H612 ( Act 166) Cannabis Regulations – LDC cannot be used to prohibit outdoor cultivation but a 50 foot setback can be set – limiting outdoor cultivation to small area.

Participation in projects: 1. Launch of EJ Vision and Strategic Plan. Scott is on this committee. Weekend workshops. Low participation for survey and workshops; low diversity in participants. 2. Selection of Consultant for TOD Study by PC. 3. TOD Master Plan Existing Conditions Presentation “Connect the Junction”website PC questions engagement opportunities. Design charette this weekend; many PC members drop in. 4. Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan update: focus group meetings were held with various community organizations and partners. PC suggested direct communication with business owners to participate. Two walking tours were planned. LDC public engagement activity dropped for TOD one to occur.

Respectfully, over the last two years, there have been multiple times where a joint discussion on a weighty topic of the day would have aided both our discussions in meetings with the public. It is time with various planning events lined up – Strategic Plan and TOD study – and the housing encouragement legislation passed last session that are going to change the lay of the land. We look forward to the opportunity to connect more in depth by setting up a joint discussion in the new year.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Clemens, Chair