

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF MEETING
AUGUST 1, 2024
APPROVED September 5, 2024**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Jeff Arango, David Achee, Phil Bieber, Marcus Certa, Raj Chawla, Laura Corell, Jeffrey Cram, Cora Delucia, Patrick Donahoe, Logan Dye, Hope Freije, Michael Herbert, Joe Leavitt, Sarah Lukins, Katherine Magee, John O'Brien, Jennifer Robbins

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Clemens 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. July 3, 2024

MOTION by SCOTT MCCORMICK, seconded by ELIJAH MASSEY, to approve the minutes of July 3, 2024, with corrections. Motion passed 5-0.

-In Item 6b, the spelling of Mr. Yuen's name was corrected.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Introductions for new Planning Commission member(s)

Ms. Paschall introduced herself as the newest Planning Commissioner and said that she is excited to be a member. All the other members introduced themselves to Ms. Paschall.

b. Global Foundries Energy Storage 45 Days Notice Presentation

Mr. Herbert, of Lightshift Energy, introduced the firm and gave a project overview. Lightshift Energy intends to be the owner and operator of a battery storage facility at Global Foundries. The energy storage facility will reduce operating costs at Global Foundries, help to support renewable energy and provide local jobs. He presented the site plan and said that it will be accessible via Robinson Parkway. Ms. Corell, also of Lightshift Energy, discussed the permitting process with the state of Vermont. There is no evidence of wetlands, endangered species, and there is no undue burden on the public infrastructure. The full certificate of public good process will begin in the fall, with construction intended to begin in 2025 and full operations in 2026. Mr. Leavitt, also of Lightshift Energy, discussed the technology behind lithium-ion battery safety as well as the emergency response for battery fires. Ms. Juodisius noted that this site is a flood area for a 500-year storm. Mr. Herbert said that the worst-case scenario is that all the equipment would get destroyed and said that there would be no public safety risk.

Answering a question from Mr. Massey, Mr. Hebert said that the end of life for the project would result in it being decommissioned, and the batteries recycled. A decommissioning plan would be required to be submitted to the Vermont Public Utilities Commission as well. Answering a question from Mr. McCormick, Mr. Cramm, of Global Foundries, said that all the energy will be used on-site and said that other businesses signing up to use this same technology would help to reduce the cost for all. In public comment, Mr. Bieber asked about the process of replacement in the case of new battery technology. Mr. Herbert said that the battery lifespan is a minimum of twenty years and they would not be replaced during this time.

c. Transit Oriented Development Master Plan Existing Conditions Presentation

Mr. Arango, of Framework, said that the purpose of this meeting is to share initial observations and site conditions. Essex Junction is one of ten communities in the northwest Vermont to have a grant through the federal funded Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program. He reviewed the study area and presented draft goals and strategies. Ms. Freije, also of Framework, discussed the community engagement plan. She displayed the project branding logo, and the project name Connect the Junction. A project website will soon be launched which will allow for direct public input on the planning process. Answering a question from Ms. Clemens, Ms. Freije said that in-person opportunities for engagement will be available as well. Focus groups will be utilized to obtain feedback and the largest event will be a four-day charette. Mr. McCormick said that the City just went through a strategic planning process and found it difficult to get people involved. He encouraged Framework to be more creative and use less digital outreach. He also suggested methods of engaging those who are “non-traditional volunteers.” Ms. Delucia suggested targeted mail outreach.

Mr. Arango discussed related plans and policies that were reviewed when developing this project. Ms. Lukins, of Framework, discussed zoning in the study area and secondary study area, and showed a map of such. The PC suggested some changes to the map. Ms. Lukins said that she has been working with City staff to discover which properties may provide the most opportunities for redevelopable land. Mr. Arango discussed the land value per acre, noting that walkable areas provide more of a return on investment. Ms. Lukins discussed the current Land Development Code (LDC) standards and noted some elements that could limit desired development. Ms. Freije showed streetscapes which can accommodate high vehicle traffic while safely allowing for pedestrian and biking traffic. The Essex routes have the highest number of bike boardings for all of Green Mountain Transit’s routes. Answering a question from Mr. Massey, Mr. Arango said that his team would engage with GMT and are aware of their current financial challenges. Ms. Freije discussed the need for public plaza space for gatherings and said that there is a concentration of community facilities at the Five Corners and that additional transit opportunities may provide for increased opportunity.

Mr. Certa suggested that GMT be fully engaged in this process. Mr. McCormick said that there is a lack of knowledge of the Design Five Corners project and suggested that this project be re-introduced via this initiative. Ms. Clemens suggested that the project focus more on Pearl Street, rather than just the Five Corners area. Mr. Arango said that this is just as much, if not more, of a focus area. Mr. Massey discussed tensions between biking and cars in Essex Junction. Mr. Arango said that the Crescent Connector provides the opportunity to test out some of the ideas in Design Five Corners. Mr. McCormick discussed the lack of bike connectivity between Essex Junction and other communities.

d. Vermont Climate Action Plan feedback

Mr. McCormick said that he is on the Rural Resilience subcommittee for the Vermont Climate Action Commission. The Vermont Climate Action Plan needs to be reviewed and updated by 2025. He said that the subcommittee is working towards prioritizing the action plan items and that there will be public outreach in the fall. He encouraged all members to review this document and provide feedback. This plan will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

None.

7. STAFF UPDATES

Mr. Yuen said the dates for the design charette has been set for October 4-8, and the Community Development Department is working to get the word out to the public. He is exploring the possibility of pedestrianizing a portion of Main Street for one of the days of the charette. He said that he will be at National Night Out next week to promote the project. There is work being done to get the Amtrak station renovation process going and the pocket park is currently being designed.

8. ADJOURN

MOTION by SCOTT MCCORMICK, SECOND by ELIJAH MASSEY, to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 PM. Motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville