

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING
MINUTES OF MEETING
December 5, 2024
APPROVED JANUARY 14, 2025**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Michael Giguere, City Planner.

OTHERS PRESENT: Cora Delucia, Alia Liebowitz, Brandon Streeter.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Clemens called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

City Planner Giguere suggested adding Agenda Item #6a, a draft summary for the City Council.

3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

None.

4. MINUTES

a. November 7, 2024

MOTION by SCOTT McCORMICK, SECOND by ELIJAY MASSEY to approve the minutes of November 7, 2024 as amended. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.

The following amendments were made:

- **Adjust comments attributed to Commissioner Juodisius to be attributed to Commissioner Paschall, and vice versa.**

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Traffic calming policy presentation

City Planner Giguere introduced Alia Liebowitz, a geography and urban planning student at the University of Vermont, noting that she has interned with the City and has assisted in drafting an updated traffic calming policy. He noted that the City's traffic calming policy hasn't been updated since 2004, and further noted that the policy is limited in scope in terms of the types of measures residents can request for traffic calming. He said the goals of updating this policy have been to modernize it and lower the barriers to entry for residents to make requests for traffic calming measures.

Ms. Liebowitz described the process she used to inform updates, which included interviewing planners in neighboring municipalities (Burlington and South Burlington) about the strengths and weaknesses of their traffic calming policies, reviewed case studies, consulted with local nonprofits, used federal guidelines and strategies, and researched traffic calming policies of larger cities to inform potential innovative approaches.

She then walked through the proposed updates, which were compiled into a draft traffic calming manual. She described a revised process by which an individual can suggest areas for traffic calming measures and criteria by which those requests can be scored by City staff to determine eligibility. She noted that this process includes community engagement and technical review by City staff to inform the scoring. She noted a proposed approach that would pilot a measure prior to permanent installation, to determine effectiveness and gather additional feedback. She noted various traffic calming features, include speed bumps, humps, tables, cushions, chicanes, and marked crosswalks.

Commissioner McCormick asked about fund sources for new traffic calming measures, and Commissioner Clemens suggested that staff research what part of the budget pays for current traffic calming measures as a starting point. Commissioner McCormick also suggested the use of rumble strips for bicycle lanes as a physical barrier, rather than painted lines demarcating bicycle lanes. Commissioner Massey asked about the thresholds used for the scoring criteria, and City Planner Giguere replied that the thresholds will need to be right sized for Essex Junction to make sure they're flagging conditions as appropriate. He also asked whether there are additional municipalities that the Planning Commission should look into, and Ms. Liebowitz suggested looking at Winooski's policy, but she noted that many municipalities in other areas don't have traffic calming policies at all. Commissioner Juodisius asked about whether this policy would be open for any individual to submit comments or whether it would be more limited to residents, and City Planner Giguere replied that staff would welcome feedback on this aspect of the draft policy. She also asked whether the City could explore having a more proactive approach to study known areas of concern, rather than waiting for requests to come in from individuals. City Planner Giguere agreed, saying that identifying a responsible body (such as the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee) could be a good step. Commissioner Clemens said that anyone who uses the streets or sidewalks should be able to submit comments to utilize this process. Commissioner Massey asked if all primary strategies are tested in snowy environments, and Ms. Liebowitz replied that all were taken from Vermont, and some perform better than others with regards to snow removal.

b. Land Development Code Amendments progress update and additional items

City Planner Giguere noted that though the Planning Commission had prepared a set of Land Development Code (LDC) amendments to the City Council, the City Council will not discuss this topic until its December 18, 2024 meeting, and further, recent development applications have highlighted the need for potential additional adjustments to amendments prior to Council consideration. He said that one item is the definition of "Multi-Family Dwelling", which is currently defined as three or more dwelling units. He said that this definition has triggered several parking, driveway, and buffering requirements designed for larger-scale developments. He said that recently, this has come up where a small multi-family dwelling has needed to have 15-foot buffers, even though the district only requires 8-foot setbacks for single-family dwellings of similar structure size. He said that staff are recommending that the definition of "Multi-Family Dwelling" be adjusted to five or more dwelling units, which aligns better with state statute. Commissioner Clemens confirmed that this adjustment would still allow the Development Review Board (DRB) to require appropriate buffering. City Planner Giguere said the next item pertains to the waiver option for screening and buffering requirements, which currently does not have regard for site-specific context or the design of multi-family apartments and is preventing applications with structures of similar size to single-family homes from being allowed without a 15-foot buffer. He noted that staff are recommending the waiver of this requirement Citywide where there are clearly no adverse impacts, rather than just allowing a waiver in the Village Center District. City Planner

Giguere then noted an item around residential parking requirements, noting that Act 47 places a requirement of 1 parking space per unit for multi-family residential uses (and the LDC currently requires 1.1 spaces). He said that this does not preclude developers from offering more parking spaces but does not allow the City to require developers to build more than 1 per unit. City Planner Giguere then noted an item related to curb cut width limits for retrofits versus new builds, noting that it may be beneficial to consider the two separately when regulating the widths for triplexes and fourplexes. He noted that staff are recommending a 20' curb cut width limit for new builds and added flexibility through a 27' limit if they involve retrofitting or adding to existing single-family dwellings or duplexes. He also noted minor edits from the City Attorney related to Section 201 (Footprint Lots), Section 502.A (Zoning Permit Requirements – Land Survey), Section 503.B (Subdivision Classification – Footprint lots), Section 502.F (Final Site Plan Application Requirements – Land Survey), Section 716 (Fire Access), and Section 719.D (Shade Trees).

MOTION by ELENA JUODISIUS, SECOND by SCOTT McCORMICK, that the Planning Commission approve the summary report as amended. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.

MOTION by ELIJAH MASSEY, SECOND by SCOTT McCORMICK, that the Planning Commission resubmit the Land Development Code amendments as discussed to the City Council for consideration. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.

c. Discussion about Connect the Junction Transit Oriented Development Master Plan

City Planner Giguere said that staff anticipate conducting a review of the vision and summary of changes, and that they anticipate having a public facing version for the Planning Commission's consideration soon. He said that the Master Plan will be available to the public on and will then go to the City Council for its consideration. He asked the Planning Commission what it needs in terms of information to provide buy-in and support for the Master Plan. Commissioner McCormick said that given that some the proposed changes, such as introducing form-based code and changing the physical layout of the entire Pearl Street area, are significant, staff should think more seriously about how to engage the community in communicating and soliciting feedback about these changes. He said that he has worked with Communications Director Snellenberger on some of the City's strategic planning initiatives to figure out what stakeholder groups to target and how to meet them in the community. Commissioner Clemens agreed, saying that Commissioners and other board members need to be more proactive in engaging directly with the community. Commissioner Massey added that having the Master Plan and visions' key points distilled into an executive summary to communicate them via social media or other platforms would be extremely helpful. Commissioner Juodisius suggested that having more accessible packaging or places to field surveys would be extremely important for the community engagement component of this process. Commissioner Clemens emphasized the importance of engaging community members who may not be as proficient in the English language.

d. Mural Application

City Planner Giguere said that the Vermont Arts Council has an Animating Infrastructure Grant opportunity available for communities to integrate public art into upcoming infrastructure projects. He said that the City would need to have a sketch-level pitch by March 18, 2025, and a full proposal by June 3, 2025. He noted that projects under consideration in the past have included the retaining wall on Park Street and the Fire Station. He noted that some staff have expressed a preference for the Fire

Station location, given that it is closer to the Five Corners area and will see more traffic, but that others prefer the retaining wall option, and that both are potentially viable (though the retaining wall may be privately owned and may require additional engagement with the property-owner). Commissioner McCormick asked if some of the funding for rebranding could be used for one mural and if a grant could be pursued for the other, and City Planner Giguere said he would look into this. Commissioner Massey suggested soliciting feedback from the schools on what they would like to see in terms of art. City Planner Giguere said that he would like to confirm that this timeline works with the Planning Commission's schedule and noted that a Commissioner could step up to be the single point of contact for this application with staff support. Commissioner McCormick asked whether task forces of the Planning Commission are subject to Open Meeting Law, and City Planner Giguere said he would investigate this. Commissioner Massey said he would be willing to begin working as the point person on this and will keep the Planning Commission updated on progress at future meetings.

e. Future Initiatives for the Planning Commission

City Planner Giguere began by noting the initiatives that will likely need to be addressed by the Planning Commission in 2025 and the first half of 2026. These include work on the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan, working on the Comprehensive Plan update, LDC amendments resulting from the TOD Master Plan and Comprehensive Plan updates, the public mural initiative discussed above, the traffic calming policy update discussed above, work on the Regional Future Use Land Map, policies to address upcoming housing production targets, any implementation of changes resulting from statutory changes, any proposals for various changes on Pearl Street and Park Street, and the Amtrak station renovation's stakeholder engagement activities. Commissioner Clemens spoke about the importance of identifying and engaging with relevant stakeholder groups and relevant experts both for soliciting input for Comprehensive Plan updates as well as input for overall Planning Commission activities. Commissioner McCormick noted that one of his priorities for the City is the topic of weatherization and said he would be interested in pursuing the topic with the Planning Commission, either through Comprehensive Plan updates or other activities. He said he would also be interested in seeing the City's development of a public engagement strategy. He further noted his interest in working on LEED construction, low-emission and modular construction, and affordable construction of new builds and retrofits, likely in tandem with the DRB. Commissioners talked about the lack of an Energy Committee and a Housing Committee for the City, and that there are a few hurdles to forming these topic-specific groups at the municipal level. Commissioner Juodisius asked about the feasibility of forming subcommittees to facilitate updating different sections of the Comprehensive Plan, and City Planner Giguere replied that this is a good suggestion to take into consideration. City Planner Giguere also noted that Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) staff will be at the Planning Commission's January meeting to discuss the Regional Future Land Use Map, which will also inform regional housing plans and commercial plans.

6. COMMISSIONER UPDATES

a. Discussion about communication summary for City Council

Commissioner Clemens talked about the need for the City Council to be in better communication and have more opportunities for engagement with some of its boards and commissions, such as the Planning Commission, which could help advance some of the City's initiatives (such as the rental registry) and shared priorities. Other Commissioners concurred with this need for more synergy, and said they would provide feedback to Commissioner Clemens on her draft communication within the next several weeks.

Commissioner Clemens then spoke about the housing conference she and other Commissioners attended recently, which included topics such as equity and housing. She encouraged others to attend future local or regional housing conferences, especially virtual ones.

The Planning Commission discussed rescheduling its January meeting to Tuesday, January 7, 2025, or Tuesday, January 14, 2025 (backup date).

7. STAFF UPDATES

None.

8. ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION by SCOTT McCORMICK, SECOND by ELENA JUODISIUS, to adjourn the meeting.
VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carries.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:09 P.M.

RScty: AACoonradt