

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
MARCH 6, 2025
DRAFT**

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Diane Clemens, Chair; Scott McCormick, Vice-Chair; Elena Juodisius; Elijah Massey, Kirstie Paschall
ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director
OTHERS PRESENT: Bethany Clark, Jake Clarke

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Clemens called the Planning Commission 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. February 6, 2025

MOTION by ELIJAH MASSEY, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to approve the minutes of February 6, 2025. Motion passed 5-0.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. 45-day Notice for Essex C Parking Lot Solar project

Mr. Clarke, of Encore Renewable Energy, said that his company will be the operator of the 3 MW solar project in an unused parking lot at Global Foundries. A transformer will be placed as close to the building as possible. The asphalt will be left in place, as underground utilities are present. The certificate of public good, from the Public Utility Commission, will be filed later this spring. After the permitting is complete, construction is expected to conclude in the middle of 2026. To receive a certificate of public good, the Planning Commission (PC) must make a recommendation to the City Council that this project is in line with the City Plan. Mr. McCormick said that he would like to see Global Foundries to do outreach and education and allow the public to view the project once completed. Global Foundries is looking for a letter of support from the City, and it would be helpful to have this when the certificate of public good is filed.

The PC has reviewed the plans and see no concerns with the project. Mr. Yuen will prepare a letter of support for the project, which will be approved by the PC at their next meeting.

b. Land Development Code Amendments Final Report to DHCD

Mr. Yuen said that the City Council has adopted the Land Development Code updates as warned. The PC is required to submit a Bylaw Reporting Form to the Vermont Department of Housing & Community

Development (DHCD). Answering a question from Ms. Clemens, Mr. Yuen said that he will edit the document to ensure that the box for “on the record review” would be checked.

ELIJAH MASSEY made a motion, seconded by ELANA JUODISIUS, that the Planning Commission approve the final Bylaw Report for the Land Development Code Amendments as amended. Motion passed 5-0.

c. Municipal Planning Grant for Comprehensive Plan Update

Mr. Yuen said that he is preparing a grant application for a Municipal Planning Grant. The City could obtain up to \$30,000 in state funding to assist with the Comprehensive Plan update. The City currently budgeted \$10,000 for the plan. Mr. Yuen said that this is anticipated to be a competitive grant. The additional funds would be used for technical assistance and public engagement.

ELANA JUODISIUS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, that the Planning Commission recommend applying for the Municipal Planning Grant for the 2027 Comprehensive Plan Update Project. Motion passed 5-0.

d. Animating Infrastructure Grant Update

Mr. Massey said that he reviewed the webinar for this grant. He plans to work on the pitch, as it is due on April 1, 2025. Ms. Pascall and Mr. McCormick will assist with reviewing the pitch prior to submittal. No letters of support are required at this time. A video should be prepared with the application as well, and City staff may be able to assist with this.

e. Consideration for scheduling a joint meeting between the DRB and the Planning Commission

Ms. Clemens said that the City Council suggested holding joint meetings between the DRB and PC, and that the Chair of the DRB has also requested such. This will allow the two boards to discuss their different points of view on the amended bylaws and housing targets. Mr. Yuen will work towards scheduling a joint meeting, potentially on May 15, 2025.

f. Update on Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan

Mr. Yuen said that this project is still on pause due to uncertainty about federal funding. He anticipates learning more in the next two weeks or so and said that municipal funds could be used to complete this project if necessary.

g. Update on current and upcoming Planning Projects

Mr. Yuen said that he added this to the agenda to keep the PC up to date on major departmental priorities.

• 1 Main Street Park

Mr. Yuen said this park is located outside of the Firebird Café and was donated to the City by Gabe Handy for the purpose of creating a pocket park. The City has a Downtown Transportation Fund grant (\$200,000) for establishing this park. Based on Council direction, the design has been scaled down to require only the minimum \$40,000 local match and to maintain flexibility to integrate with possible future changes to Main Street. The state has approved the scope amendments and project extension. The project will require a site plan hearing with the DRB. Work will likely begin this summer.

• Essex Junction Multimodal Station Improvements

Mr. Yuen said that the City is about to sign a contract to begin work on preliminary design. Stakeholder and public engagement will take place as the project proceeds. Some elements have been removed from the original project design because of cost increases. The traffic pattern may be left as is. Signage and striping changes are proposed to enable bicyclists to travel both ways on Ivy Lane. Railroad Avenue needs a water main replacement; however this will not be done at the same time as this project. Mr. Yuen said that a new shelter area is being proposed for passengers to wait under. The ADA station improvements are already underway and will be finished when the station improvements begin. Mr. Massey asked if there was a possibility that the TOD Master Plan project could influence this project. Mr. Yuen said that this is possible, however the rail infrastructure and private ownership would make the addition of permanent structures as envisioned by the TOD project. However, the two consultants for these projects could connect to cross-pollinate ideas. Mr. McCormick expressed concern that this project would interfere with holding events in downtown Essex Junction. Mr. Yuen said that the ability to host events on Railroad Avenue is important and will not be affected by this project.

• Pearl Street Road Diet

Mr. Yuen said that this a scoping project for this project was originally completed in 2018. Stantec is working on a new alternative to be an addendum for the current scoping study that addresses budgetary constraints, utility conflicts, and considers the needs of transit operations. Ms. Clemens said that a path from Susie Wilson to West Street Extension had been scoped, and asked if this would be included. Mr. Yuen said that the path included with this project is eight feet wide and can be considered a shared use path. This shared-use path will likely be included in the updated alternative.

The current speed limit on the western side of Pearl Street is 40 mph, and this project may require this to be lowered to match the rest of Pearl Street. Mr. Yuen will continue to update the PC as this project moves forward. He will bring their feedback to the consultants at the project kick-off meet. The project timeline will depend on whether or not the City plans to pursue additional grant funds. Mr. Massey said that he would like to see bus stops and effective ways of reducing speed addressed with this project. Mr. McCormick suggested having a rumble strip to separate the bike path from the roadway. Mr. Yuen said that the on-road bike path could be removed to save money if the shared-use path could be further improved. All agreed that this would be desirable.

• Park Street Potential Striping Changes

Mr. Yuen said that UVM engineering students are working to draft a proposal for this project. He said that this path could provide a continuous north-south connection for bicyclists through Essex Junction. Currently, on-street bike lanes on Park Street terminate when approaching the city center, transitioning to on-street parking. Cyclists are then required to ride in mixed-traffic which is less safe, and more uncomfortable for all road users. Ms. Clemens said that the light on 2a near Rocky's is very difficult, and said that a turning lane should be looked at in this location. Mr. Yuen said that addressing this is not the primary goal of this project, but that it could be looked at. He said that this could be included as a part of a phased approach. Mr. McCormick suggested that street parking on the south end of Park Street be eliminated as a part of this project. Mr. Yuen said that parking assessments can be done at different times to determine which spaces, if any, are necessary. This project will be presented to both the PC and the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee prior to being presented to the City Council. Mr. Massey said that many children use this intersection to bike or walk to school and said that the safety needs to be improved. This may be intensified with the proposed closure of Summit Street School. Mr. McCormick said that a bike

connection to Williston would be very helpful. Ms. Clemens asked if a traffic study could be done at this location. Mr. Yuen said that this could be done in future years. Signal timing to mitigate traffic was discussed.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

Mr. McCormick said that he had a discussion with Elaine Haney regarding committees and said that they discussed developing a working group to focus on energy. This could be made up of Commissioners as well as members of the public. It would not require any additional staff time and would be volunteer led. There would be no cost involved. This working group could assist with the energy chapters in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. McCormick said that he is willing to coordinate this working group. Some potential projects include low-income weatherization, a rental registry, and how to use state funds for energy projects. Mr. McCormick said that this could help improve the efficiency of older homes and the housing stock. Many older homes also have vermiculite homes which need to be corrected, and this can be more costly than weatherization itself. The legislature is considering developing a fund for rehabbing a home prior to weatherization. Mr. McCormick said that there is a lack of statewide coordination, and that programs vary by location within the state. This will be discussed further at the next meeting.

7. STAFF UPDATES

None.

8. ADJOURN

ELIJAH MASSEY made a motion, seconded by ELANA JUODISIUS, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed 5-0 at 8:47 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville