

City of Essex Junction

Planning Commission

Meeting Agenda



MONDAY, SEPT 21, 2026 • 7:00 PM
Online & 2 Lincoln Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452

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1. **CALL TO ORDER** [7:00 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
 - a. Comments from Public
4. **MINUTES**
 - a. September 3, 2026
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Comprehensive Plan Update: Work Session #3* [7:05 PM]
 - i. Recap of recent progress
 - ii. Chapter 4.2 Agriculture and Community Forestry
 - iii. Chapter 4.4 Open Space, Recreation, and Public Health
 - iv. Chapter 4.5 Natural Environmental Resources (revised)
 - v. Chapter 4.6 Natural Hazards Resilience
 - b. Municipal Code Chapter 17 Poultry Amendment: Review and Recommendation to City Council* [8:10 PM]
6. **MEMBER UPDATES**
7. **STAFF UPDATES**
8. **ADJOURNMENT**

*attachments included in the packet

Agenda item timestamps are estimates of the starting time of each topic and are subject to change.

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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
PLANNING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
SEPTEMBER 3, 2026
DRAFT**

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Elijah Massey, Chair; Diane Clemens, Vice-Chair; Elena Juodisius, Finn Hamilton (non-voting), Scott McCormick; Kirstie Paschall

PLANNING COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

ADMINISTRATION: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Gail Boundy, Kevin Collins, Cora Delucca, Brett Grabowski, Theresa Gookin, Stephen Lemcke, Sue McCormick, Resa Mehren, Nick Meyer, Reed Nye, Mitchel Stern, Stephen, RMJ

1. CALL TO ORDER

E. Massey 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

G. Boundy said she recently installed a fence on her property and received a letter from the City stating that she is in violation of the Land Development Code (LDC). She feels that complying with the guidelines will prevent her from enjoying her privacy, as she would need to move the fence substantially further into her yard and make a portion of her yard unusable. She would like to request a waiver from the City to address this issue. C. Yuen said staff reviewed this case, noted that the PC cannot make immediate decisions on waivers and that he does not see a viable path forward within the LDC as written. He said there is no substantial proposed change to the LDC that would currently allow this to occur. The PC agreed to discuss these concerns after the Public Hearing.

4. MINUTES

a. August 11th, 2026

ELENA JUODISIUS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to approve the minutes of August 11th, 2026. Motion passed 5-0.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. 2026 Land Development Code (LDC) Amendments

i. Overview Presentation on Proposed Amendments

C. Yuen presented the proposed 2026 Land Development Code amendments aimed at implementing the Connect the Junction Transit Oriented Development Master Plan adopted in December 2025. The most significant change is increasing the allowable building height limit to a maximum of nine stories, with an additional story for affordable housing, in specific areas of the City Center and Pearl Street Corridor. Much of this change is driven by a desire to accommodate the majority of the City's 2050 housing target within the City Center and Pearl Street corridor. C. Yuen provided an overview of form-based standards to regulate building form and public realm interactions. This will allow the Development Review Board to review projects against clearer and more defensible standards. Permitted and conditional uses are still

covered by the use chart and historic resources will remain protected. C. Yuen provided an overview of the street room ratio and intent to have human-scale development in Essex Junction. Properties which exceed the 1:1 street room ratio would not be permitted. C. Yuen presented renderings to demonstrate the impact that this would have on the pedestrian-level view from Pearl Street and from Park Street in Essex Junction. He reviewed the residential adjacency standards, which are intended to mitigate the impact of increased height on established, lower-density neighborhoods. C. Yuen discussed changes to façade composition, articulation and materials standards. He described how structured parking frontage can be used to conceal the location of parking in mixed-use buildings. A new performance-based landscaping system is proposed to replace the previous cost-based approach. C. Yuen detailed the extensive online and in-person public outreach associated with the LDC update, noting that this project was also featured by the local news media and Reddit. Additional technical adjustments are included in the LDC, as well as changes to meet statutory requirements.

ii. Public Hearing on LDC Amendments

E. Massey requested public input and asked that commenters keep their input under three minutes.

M. Stern described high-rise buildings as a threat to the Vermont way of life. He said changes to the height standards could result in Essex Junction having some of the tallest buildings in Vermont. He questioned the results of the survey stating that most residents are amenable to buildings this high. Taller buildings block sunlight and will result in the need for significantly more infrastructure. The fire department is not equipped to protect buildings of this size. He described Essex Junction as a community of single-family homes and said more starter homes are needed in the community. The infrastructure needs from the construction of taller buildings will result in higher taxes. M. Stern said housing within 500ft to 1,000ft from highways is not recommended, and housing less than 500ft from highways is a health hazard. The mitigation for buildings in these locations is keeping windows always closed and utilizing air conditioning filters, which is not environmentally sustainable. He cited several studies which have found unhealthy air quality along highways. M. Stern described housing within 1,000 feet of a major highway, such as Route 15 or Route 2a as being a health risk and a “death threat.” C. Delucca emphasized the need for affordable housing rather than luxury apartments. She said she is a public-school teacher and pays more than 50% of her income in rent. Raising the height limit does not mean that housing will be more affordable. She believes that affordable housing should need to be required prior to building the 10th story. She asked how the PC is addressing affordability and helping seniors and young families in obtaining affordable housing.

N. Meyer, Chair of the Tree Advisory Committee (TAC), asked for additional details on what the changes to the landscaping standards would involve. He also stated that ten stories is too high for buildings in Essex Junction. He discussed the need for street trees in new developments. N. Meyer asked for clarification on setback standards in specific areas of the City Center and said such variability may reduce the pedestrian-friendliness and ability to plant street trees. He believes the mandate to build housing should be done in a way that protects the livability of Essex Junction. S. Lemcke said he lives in a neighborhood adjacent to Pearl Street. He said he understands the pressure to carry tax revenue and develop new housing but said he believes that nine or ten stories is too high on Pearl Street. He would like to see a more livable scale building height. He does not believe such a high concentration of housing is healthy in a community. He encouraged the PC to consider livability, not just tax revenue. He suggested 5-6 stories as a livable height for the Pearl Street corridor. R. Mehren concurred with S. Lemcke that

livability needs to be considered along with housing demands. She also said it is important to ensure that all developers meet the standards of the LDC, even if they already have a building constructed. She suggested setting fines and ramifications for not meeting the LDC. M. Stern asked what the repercussions would be for not meeting the housing targets. C. Yuen said the housing targets do not come with an enforcement mechanism; however, municipalities need to prove that they are working towards these goals.

iii. Discussion and Consideration of LDC Amendments

D. Clemens said the Fire Department was consulted when developing LDC standards and can serve high-rises with their current apparatus. S. McCormick thanked all members of the public for their comments. He said he would like to see the PC be more proactive with what they would like to see in specific areas and buildings in downtown core. He would also like to see methods of integrating public feedback throughout the process. E. Juodisius said the PC would like to make the development process as understandable as possible, which is why the landscaping regulations were changed. Regarding affordability, the PC has discussed incentives and further regulations. S. McCormick said Essex Junction is working to update the Comprehensive Plan and is looking into alternative methods of transportation. Denser housing may result in less room for parking, and thus additional options need to be investigated. K. Paschall said, just because ten story buildings are allowed, does not mean that they will be built. This allows for making space for possibilities for the future.

D. Clemens said the street room standards may make it so that ten stories would not be allowed in many areas. She said it would be helpful to hear from developers about the practicalities of the LDC. She encouraged members of the public to continue communicating with the PC and the City Council regarding what is important to them about their community. E. Massey said all input provided at this meeting has been delivered with care and knowledge. He said the PC is aware that these changes are not small nor simple and have consequences. As Vermonters, he said issues of housing are not something that can be handled in isolation or that we can push off on other communities or groups. The City is engaged in other efforts to increase different types of housing other than multi-family developments along Pearl Street and the City Center. E. Massey said that what is built is dependent on market drivers and the intent of developers. D. Clemens said she would like to see typos and other formatting issues resolved with the LDC draft and ensure that all requested changes are incorporated.

E. Massey noted that the setback requirements for fences were brought up during public comment. C. Yuen said that while they may discuss this issue, an actual change to the LDC amendments would require re-warning a hearing. Per the regulations, corner lots are considered to have two front and two side yards for setback purposes. Combined with the prohibition of full-height non-transparent fences in the front yard setback, this means that corner lots face more restrictive fence standards than non-corner lots. He said the property at 1 Mansfield Road had a privacy fence installed and the City has had complaints from drivers about blocking their view. The fence is outside of the visibility triangle; however, he believes it does have an impact on visibility. He said he does not know the full history of why these regulations were put in place. He noted that trees and hedges are allowed in front setbacks so long as they do not block the visibility triangle, while full-height non-transparent fences are prohibited. He said this distinction suggests an urban design rationale behind the regulations. The intent appears to be improving the pedestrian connection with the surrounding environment and avoiding long, featureless opaque surfaces along pedestrian routes, similar to the form-based code prohibitions on blank walls. E. Massey noted that he considers the recently installed fence is attractive, however a different property owner could put something

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up with a less neighborly feel. S. McCormick discussed how large fences can impact the community feel of a neighborhood but said he can see the need for it in a more heavily traveled area.

E. Massey asked if there is a precedent for offering a solution for properties which are facing a highly traveled road. C. Yuen described how some communities do not have this similar prohibitions against full-height fences and how that impacts the pedestrian experience. E. Juodisius said corner lots can have high visibility, and she understands the conflict between the need for privacy and maintaining an attractive public realm. G. Boundy discussed privacy concerns at her property. E. Massey recommended that the PC move forward with the LDC draft as presented, with the clarification cross-references between the Fence regulations and the corner lot set-back regulations already included in the draft. He suggests adding this subject to the PC's list of possible adjustments for further consideration.

M. Stern asked how the height limits had been established and asked if they could be changed by the PC. E. Massey said it was originally suggested by a consultant and approved by the City Council. E. Massey asked if PC members would like to open back up discussion on height limits based on tonight's discussion. S. McCormick said he understands these concerns, but that Essex Junction will be unable to meet the housing targets if they do not increase the allowable building heights. He said not meeting the targets may prevent Essex Junction from obtaining state or federal grants in the future.

DIANE CLEMENS made a motion, seconded by SCOTT MCCORMICK, to close the public hearing on the Land Development Code amendments. Motion passed 5-0.

SCOTT MCCORMICK made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUOSIDIUS, that the Planning Commission approve the revised § 4441(c) Report and submit it, together with the proposed 2026 Land Development Code amendments, to the City Council for consideration. Motion passed 5-0.

6. MEMBERS UPDATES

D. Clemens suggested that all members listen to a new piece by Carly Berlin on Vermont Public Radio regarding Vermonters who are "stuck" in larger homes because there are no options for downsizing. S. McCormick thanked C. Yuen for his hard work on the LDC project.

7. STAFF UPDATES

C. Yuen said staff continue work on the Comprehensive Plan, and there will be an additional PC meeting on September 21, 2026 to discuss this.

8. ADJOURNMENT

DIANE CLEMENS made a motion, seconded by ELENA JUOSIDIUS, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0. Meeting adjourned 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Darby Mayville

TO: Essex Junction Planning Commission
FROM: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director
DATE: Darren Schibler, Senior Planner & Project Manager; Maya Balassa, Planner
RE: September 21, 2026 Meeting on Draft Plan Chapters

Project Scope of Work Review

To level-set where we are in this project, below is a summary of the contract tasks with the status of each:

Task	Description	Start	End	Status
1	Project Management	Jan-26	Apr-27	Ongoing
2	Review Existing Plans	Jan-26	Jan-26	Complete
3	Mapping and Analysis	Feb-26	Jun-26	Substantially complete
4	Public Engagement	Feb-26	Oct-26	Substantially complete
5	Policy Updates / Plan Drafting	Apr-26	Nov-26	In progress
6	PC Work Sessions	May-26	Dec-26	In progress
7	Plan Adoption	Dec-26	Apr-27	Not yet started

Recap of Last Meeting

At the August 11th Planning Commission meeting, CCRPC staff presented a first round of edits to Chapter 2, Community Values, Vision and General Goals, incorporating the outcomes of the 2024 Community Vision & Strategic Action Plan (CVSAP) and other recent / concurrent planning efforts. We also discussed bringing forth the CVSAP themes into the chapters of the plan to show how the vision is being implemented and make connections between overlapping themes. Finally, we confirmed the approach of reviewing and prioritizing all goals and actions with the City Council after all chapters have been drafted. However, we did not discuss Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 as mentioned in last month's cover memo, since those materials were not included in the packet draft. Instead, we will address those topics in October.

New Materials

- Chapter 4.2 Agriculture & Community Forestry
- Chapter 4.4 Open Space, Recreation, and Public Health
 - Map 3: Recreation
- Chapter 4.6 Natural Hazards Resilience
 - Map 11: Flood Hazard Areas
- Revised Chapter 4.5 Natural Environmental Resources

PDF copies of the revised chapters and new draft chapters with track changes are included in the PC's packet. Clean versions are available on Sharepoint here:

<https://ccrpcvt.sharepoint.com/:f:/s/ExternalShare/IgD376nRHM0sR55z69WT4GK5AQSar3X1YqUL7LM8b3UrDDM?e=LU5nXL>

Broad Questions for the Planning Commission

In addition to the specific comments and edits included in the drafts, CCRPC staff would like the Commission to consider the following:

- Are there important themes or concerns missing?
- Does anything feel inconsistent with the community's priorities?
- Are the goals and actions SMART and reflective of current priorities?
- What actions should be the highest priority?

Looking Ahead

At the October meeting, CCRPC will plan to present drafts of the following content:

- Chapter 3.1 Historical Development Patterns
- Chapter 3.2 Historic Resources
- Chapter 4.9 Housing
- Chapter 4.11 Land Use

The current schedule of chapter drafting and adoption timeline is attached to this memo.

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Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan Update

Chapter Drafting & Adoption Timeline (version 9/14/2026)

PC Plan Work Session #1	7/2/2026	4.1 – Energy 4.5 – Natural Environmental Resources
PC Plan Work Session #2	8/11/2026	2 – Community Vision and Strategies
PC Plan Work Session #3	9/21/2026 (moved due to LDC hearing)	4.2 – Agriculture and Community Forestry 4.4 – Open Space / Recreation / Public Health 4.6 – Natural Hazards Resiliency Follow-up on 4.5 – Natural Environmental Resources
PC Plan Work Session #4	10/14/2026 (moved for CCRPC staff availability)	3 – History, Trends 4.9 – Housing 4.11 – Land Use
PC Plan Work Session #5	11/5/2026	4.8 – Utilities / Facilities 4.10 – Transportation
PC Plan Work Session #6	12/3/2026	4.3 – Business / Economic Development 4.7 – Education and Child Care
PC Plan Work Session #7	1/7/2027	1 – General Planning Background / Executive Summary 5 – Implementation
PC Plan Work Session #8 (Complete Draft)	2/4/2027	Final Draft Plan Report / Checklist
Annual Meeting / Elections	3/2/2026	Annual Meeting has been moved to Town Meeting Day
PC 1st Hearing Notice / Report Distributed	3/4/2027	At least 30 days before first PC hearing [24 V.S.A. 4384(e)]
PC 1st Hearing	4/8/2027	Note that this would be a week later than the normal Planning Commission meeting, but is a better fit for statutory timelines
CCRPC PAC Review of Plan	4/14/2027	Next available PAC meeting after public hearing notice and time for CCRPC staff review [CCRPC Municipal Plan Review Guidelines]
PC 2nd Hearing (optional)	5/6/2027	Can submit to Council immediately or do so at June meeting
Council Warns Public Hearing	5/12/2027	Warned for 6/23/2027
1st Council Public Hearing	6/23/2027	At least 30 days after PC submits to Council [24 V.S.A. 4385(a)]
Final Council Public Hearing	7/21/2027	At least 15 days after prior public hearing [24 V.S.A. 4385(b)(1-2)]
Council Adopts Plan	8/11/2027	At next meeting following final public hearing [24 V.S.A. 4385(c)]
CCRPC Approval of Plan	8/18/2027	Next CCRPC Board meeting following City Council approval of plan [24 V.S.A. § 4350, CCRPC Municipal Plan Review Guidelines]

4.2. Agriculture and Community Forestry

Agriculture is alive and strong in Essex Junction as evidenced by conservation of the Whitcomb Farm, a waitlist for community garden plots, restaurant participation in the Vermont Fresh Network, and Farm to School.

While most farms in Essex Junction have been converted from agricultural to other uses since the arrival of the railroad in the mid-1800s, agriculture still has a role in the City.

The Whitcomb Farm provides many valuable resources to the VillageCity, including productive agricultural land. The Whitcomb Farm also promotes agriculture education, open space, recreation and wildlife habitat. The Whitcombs and the VillageCity also benefit from the farm's utilization of treated biosolids from the Waste Water Treatment Plant as fertilizer. Additionally, a 2.2 MW solar project was installed on the Whitcomb Farm in 2014 which contributes to the Village's City's renewable energy generation target (See Chapter 4.1 – Energy and Appendix D the Essex Community Energy Plan for more information regarding energy).

Since 2011, The Village Trustees provided the Whitcomb Farm has maintained a local property tax reduction agreement with Essex Junction with a three-year tax break in 2011, securing in exchange for public recreation access on the property, which helps and supporting support the Whitcomb's efforts to conserve the landkeep the land open and conserved. In addition, in the Village voted to use \$20,000 of the land acquisition fund toward the Vermont Land Trust's purchase of development rights from the Whitcomb Farm. This resulted in 414 acres being protected from development and will keep it as a working farming in perpetuity. While the farm has transitioned out of dairy operations, it still produces livestock feed and has started specialty crops like pumpkins, squash, apples, and Christmas trees.

In addition to the Whitcomb Farm, the importance of local agriculture to the residents of the VillageCity is evidenced by the following:

- Restaurants have joined the movement by participation in the Vermont Fresh Network.
- The Village's City's Recreation and Parks Department also run a Community Garden Program with approximately 150-100 garden plots at the West Street Garden and the Meadow Terrace Garden (and there are waitlists for use of these plots). The Department also hosts gardening classes.

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Commented [DS40]: Should these be split into two different chapters? Consolidate Agriculture into Natural Environmental Resources? If these are kept together, should we put Community Forestry first since that's more directly tied to the community's goals and values?

Commented [MB41]: That feels bold?

Commented [MG42]: Fact check with WWTF that we still do this

Commented [CY42R2]: It still does- but increasingly strict federal rules may mean we eventually may have to stop

Commented [MB43]: Is this the Enhanced Energy Plan?

Commented [DS43R2]: Yes - but will be renamed / reorganized. Make sure to update this reference.

Commented [CY44]: Regarding public recreation access- we should cross reference in open space. Also, it might be worth mapping out and advertising the public sometime

Commented [DS45]: <https://www.pcrn.org/news/news-releases/vermont-farming-family-finding-success-growing-specialty-crops-and-grain-after>

Commented [MB46]: Is this history still relevant?

Commented [DS46R2]: History probably less relevant, but maybe relevant to note that the tax stabilization agreement with the Whitcomb Farm is still in effect, as reported by Jess Morris on 7/22.

Commented [DS47]: Defunct as of April 2026: <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/food-drink/vermont-fresh-network-on-indefinite-hiatus-leaves-legacy/>

Commented [MB48]: Is this still true?

Commented [MB48R2]: Can't find any information on the website

- The Village adopted a chicken ordinance to allow homeowners to have chickens in their backyard. As of March 2019, 9 chicken permits have been issued. The City has amended how it regulates raising of farm animals to comply with Act 166 of 2026, which clarifies municipal authority over agricultural activities; and
- Essex Westford School District is committed to providing made additions to their nutrition policy in 2018 and formed an advisory group to provide the best in nutrition and overall wellness education for students of all ages, their families, and the surrounding community.

HELPFUL RESOURCE

The Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program has developed a Vermont Tree Selection Guide to help select the appropriate tree based on the purpose of the planting, site conditions, type of maintenance needed and best tree species for long term success. Resources can be found on their website at the following web address:

<https://vtcommunityforestry.org/tree-care/tree-selection-planting>

Commented [MB49]: Current permits issued? Is that important?

Commented [DS50]: Update if LDC has changed this

Commented [DS50R2]: Per Chris Yuen: Yes, it's now up to 12 per act 166. Also we can't ban other poultry anymore. There's a draft ordinance in the works

Commented [DS50R3]: Will keep this language here in anticipation of LDC and ordinance amendments being passed prior to adoption of the Comp Plan, but make sure to check before finalizing.

Just as agriculture is important to the residents of the Village-City and is a key goal for municipal plans, so is community forestry. While there is not much of a traditional forestry industry within Essex Junction, the City continues to encourage awareness and good forestry practices for its urban trees and community forest. This is reflected in Pillar 5, Action 13 of the 2024 Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan:

The green spaces in the City of Essex Junction are highly regarded, and tree planting work is strongly supported by residents; [there is] 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 tree planting across the community. Tree planting is seen as helping climate resiliency, improving habitat, and enhancing the aesthetics of the community.

The benefits of a healthy and robust community tree canopy are extensive. The International Society of Arboriculture, names the following (plus many more) benefits:

- Environmental benefits include climate control by moderating the effects of sun, wind and rain; improve air quality by removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in biomass and soils (a process called carbon sequestration); conserving water by intercepting water, storing some of it, and reducing stormwater runoff and the possibility of flooding; and providing wildlife habitat and food.
- Social benefits include providing privacy, emphasizing views, or screening out objectionable views.
- Economic benefits include energy cost savings as trees can provide shade thereby lowering summer air conditioning bills, and trees can protect structures from wind

thereby lowering winter heat bills; increase property values; and can help encourage patronage to downtown retailers.

Essex Junction received a 2013 Tree Steward Award from the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Council for taking tremendous strides to improve the condition and quality of trees in the [VillageCity](#). This includes the completion of a tree inventory, passing a tree policy, and planting 22 trees in the Village Center in a two-year period prior to the award. The award recognizes the collaborative effort among multiple Village departments and volunteers. In addition, the Village Trustees established a Tree Advisory Committee in 2013 that works with the [Village-City](#) Tree Warden to promote the improvement and preservation of a healthy environment as it relates to public trees. The committee provides a mechanism for the planting, maintenance, protection and removal of trees on public streets, parks and Village-owned properties. [Additionally, the committee assists Community Development's review of Landscaping Plans for Development and Zoning Permit Applications. These efforts, combined with the City's commitment to funding tree planting and maintenance at over \\$2 per capita and hosting a public celebration of Arbor Day, have earned Essex Junction the designation of Tree City USA since 2015.](#)

~~This Comprehensive Plan is required to meet the State planning goals established under Title 24 §4302(c). These goals include "to encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries." While there is not much of a traditional forestry industry within the City to encourage and strengthen, the city continues to encourage awareness and good forestry practices for its urban trees and community forest.~~

Agriculture and Community Forestry Goals and Actions

~~Goal 1: Continue to support the Whitcomb Farm in their conservation efforts.~~

~~Goal 2: Support value added agricultural businesses to ensure Village residents have access to fresh healthy foods.~~

~~Objective 2.1: Work with the community to re-establish the Farmer's Market.~~

~~Objective 2.2: Hold farm-to-table community events to benefit local organizations and residents.~~

~~Goal 3: Continue support of the Community Garden Program, home gardening and micro-farming.~~

Commented [MB51]: Is the Five Corners Farmer's Market up and running? It is hard to tell online.

Commented [DSS1R2]: It is not - hasn't been around for many years.

~~Objective 3.1: Continue to offer incentives for developments that include community gardens and/or allow residents to have home gardens on common land.~~

~~Objective 3.2: Strengthen language in zoning regulations to protect topsoil during construction so that yards are more suitable for gardening.~~

~~Objective 3.3: Utilize the Chittenden Solid Waste District's materials to educate households on the food scrap ban from the landfill, that will be in effect in 2020.~~

~~Objective 3.4: Develop a method to donate excess food from community gardens.~~

~~Objective 3.5: Encourage the practice of edible landscaping.~~

~~Objective 3.6: Inventory and designate additional public space for community gardens (including roof tops and wall gardens).~~

~~Goal 4: Establish a Tree Management Plan to improve and maintain the community tree canopy within public parks and rights-of-way.~~

~~Objective 4.1: Increase the Village tree canopy with thoughtful planning, planting and maintaining of trees on public spaces or intruding into/onto public spaces.~~

~~Objective 4.2: Educate residents on the value of the urban forest.~~

~~Goal 2.1: Continue to support efforts to support agricultural activities within the City of Essex Junction in harmony with other land uses.~~

~~Action 2.1.1: The City Council will consider extending the tax stabilization agreement with the Whitcomb Farm when it is due for renewal as a method to continue supporting the economic viability of working lands and recreational access in Essex Junction.~~

~~Action 2.1.1: The City Council will continue to support residential food production through measures such as allowing homeowners to raise chickens in residential districts.~~

~~Goal 2.2: Support value-added agricultural businesses to ensure residents have access to fresh healthy foods.~~

~~Action 2.2.1: Work with the community to re-establish the Farmer's Market.~~

~~Action 2.2.2: Hold farm-to-table community events to benefit local organizations and residents.~~

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Commented [CY52]: Not sure if this is necessary anymore since Act 166 of 2026 requires municipalities to allow poultry.

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Commented [DS53]: Bringing back the farmer's market was a specific idea from the CVSAP. Has the City made progress on this since 2019? Is it likely to attempt this by 2027? Are there other actions the City could take to increase food access, such as helping establish more grocery stores in the community, or supporting the ethnic markets and restaurants that already exist?

Commented [MG53R2]: No recent progress on the farmers market - I most recently spoke to the person who used to run it in Summer 2024, who cited volunteer challenges and the difficulty of finding the right mix of produce and prepared food vendors.

Commented [CY53R3]: Yup everyone wants a farmers market but nobody wants to put in the work.. I suppose the City could hire somebody in an economic development sort of role and make the farmers market one of their responsibilities. That is a big lift though....

Goal 2.3: Continue support of the Community Garden Program, home gardening and micro-farming.

Action 2.3.1: Continue to offer incentives for developments that include community gardens and/or allow residents to have home gardens on common land.

Action 2.1.2: Develop a method to donate excess food from community gardens.

Action 2.3.2: Encourage the practice of edible landscaping.

Action 2.3.3: Inventory and designate additional public space for community gardens, including locations with excess ROW, areas unsuitable for construction due to flood risk, City-owned utility parcels, and lands owned by other public agencies.

Goal 2.4: Continue to grow and maintain the City's urban forest to improve climate resiliency, wildlife habitat, and community aesthetics.

Action 2.4.1: Led by the Tree Advisory Committee, the City will plant at least 30 trees per year in locations for potential public shade trees identified through the Street Tree Inventory and Urban Forest Management Plan. Where there is insufficient space to plant trees on public property in high-priority locations, the City (led by the Tree Advisory Committee) will continue to collaborate with private property owners as outlined in the City's Policy for Tree Planting on Private Property.

Action 2.4.2: The Tree Advisory Committee and Public Works Department will continue to collaborate to maintain existing public shade trees, prioritizing work on identified hazard trees as outlined in the Essex Junction Tree Policy.

Goal 2.5: Foster partnerships and increase capacity to maintain the City's urban forest.

Action 2.5.1: With assistance from the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program, by 2035 the Tree Advisory Committee will update key urban forestry data and documents for the City, including:

- i) The 2013 Tree Policy
- ii) The 2014 Street Tree Inventory
- iii) The 2016 Essex Junction Urban Forest Management Plan

Action 2.5.2: Within 3 years, the Tree Advisory Committee, City Management, and City Council, and Capital Program Review Committee will study creating a dedicated capital fund for urban forest investments in Essex Junction. If recommended, the fund will be established in the following fiscal year.

Commented [MB54]: Could these objectives be updated to be more actionable?

Commented [MB55]: Are there bylaw updates that can support this?

Commented [CY55R2]: I suppose the LDC be include this in some list of accepted / encouraged amenities in site plans / pud applications

Commented [CY56]: I don't know if we need to delve in this programmatic detail- I think some people already do donate excess food from the gardens.

Commented [MB57]: Did this happen?

Commented [MG57R2]: This would be a good question for EIRP

Commented [MB58]: Did this happen?

Commented [MG58R2]: Not that I am aware of

Commented [CY59]: Perhaps it's more practical to say "including locations with excess ROW; areas unsuitable for construction due to flood risk; city owned utility parcels; lands owned by other public agencies.

Commented [DS60]: Combine with Goal 5

Commented [DS61]: Can the TAC estimate a number of trees to be planted per year?

Commented [MG61R2]: Nick Meyer probably has exact counts or estimates from recent years

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Action 2.5.3: The Tree Advisory Committee will continue supporting Branch Out Burlington's work to maintain a tree nursery that supplies Essex Junction with lower cost trees for planting through annual work day assistance.

Action 2.5.4: City management and the Tree Advisory Committee will continue to recruit volunteers for tree planting, monitoring, maintenance, and planning with a diversity of options for time commitment and expertise needed.

Action 2.5.5: Within 1 year, the Tree Advisory Committee, with support from City management, will create an outreach plan continue to educate the public on the mission and work of the Tree Advisory Committee and the value urban forestry provides to the community through newsletters, signage, and public events like the Arbor Day Celebration.

Action 2.5.6: Within 8 years, City management will work with the Tree Advisory Committee to explore establishment of a paid City Arborist position, which may be part-time and/or shared with neighboring communities.

Action 2.5.7: City management will provide ongoing professional development opportunities for the Tree Warden and Tree Advisory Committee, such as attendance at the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Conference.

Action 2.5.8: City management will continue to maintain Tree City USA status for Essex Junction, which includes:

- i) Maintaining an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita for urban forestry efforts;
- ii) Maintaining the Tree Advisory Committee;
- iii) Maintaining a tree policy or ordinance;
- iv) Hosting an annual Arbor Day Celebration;

Action 2.5.9: Annually meet with Essex Westford School District teachers to identify opportunities to engage students in efforts to maintain and grow the City's urban forest.

Goal 2.6: Improve the outcomes for green spaces for new development and redevelopment projects.

Action 2.1.3: Within 4 years, the Community Development Department and Planning Commission will work with the Tree Advisory Committee to:

- i) Update the Land Development Code to require more space for trees and landscaping between buildings and the street.
- ii) Revise the Land Development Code to ensure that development projects are approved according to required landscaping standards; consider a payment in lieu

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Commented [DS62]: Update this to include having the TAC and City create a specific outreach plan / calendar for tree-related outreach

Commented [MG63]: Inconsistent use of "By 2035" and "Within 8 years" formatting throughout the plan

Commented [DS64]: Add timeline

Commented [CY65]: This is in tension with our other urban design / densification goals. The LDC has recently been updated to decrease front setback requirements in some instances. IMO, we would be better served somehow ensuring that underground tree infrastructure like silva cells and properly designed and implemented.

Commented [CY66]: All of these things below- I think we ought to lean on the new landscaping scoring system in the land development code developed for the form based standards. Instead of re-writing the rules yet again.

Commented [MG67]: How does this interact with VC/TOD District goals as drafted in FBC? Do the Terrace, Landscape, and Stoop Frontage Types satisfy this space requirement?

Commented [CY67R2]: I think that's the intent of those frontage types, but it's arguably not an "increase" over the deep setbacks possible with lower density development.

Commented [MG68]: What revisions are desired? The LDC already has landscaping standards for development projects. If a more objective approach is desired, I would add a goal to extend the Landscape Scoring system proposed by FBC to other districts.

Commented [CY69]: Makes no sense- that is the premise of the existing and proposed code. We don't need a further revision to re-iterate that people need to follow the rules.

option whose funds are allocated to capital improvements for the City's urban forest.

- iii) Increase the weight of the Tree Advisory Committee's recommendations in the development review process.

Action 2.6.1: In 5 years, the Tree Advisory Committee will work with the Planning Commission to review the effectiveness of the score-based landscaping requirements in the City Center and TOD districts, and possibly adjust and expand citywide if successful.

Commented [CY70]: This is a good point- payment is lieu should be perhaps added as an option.

Commented [CY71]: This is conflict with the new point based landscaping scoring system, which is meant to be objective and performance based.

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4.5.4.4. Open Space, Recreation, and Public Health

Pillar 2 – Public Services and Facilities, Key Action 5: Address and Focus on Community Wellness

*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.***

Open Space bolsters local economies, ensures residents have opportunities for physical activity, preserves significant natural resources, provides recreational opportunities, and guides growth into appropriate areas. ~~Through the Heart & Soul project residents put great value in their public places for outdoor and indoor recreation for all ages and abilities. Residents treasure Indian Brook Reservoir, neighborhood parks and the chance to connect by bicycle or on foot.~~ This section describes the protection and management of these valued open spaces ~~like as follows:~~ including local parks, schools and recreational facilities that provide extensive active recreational opportunities; along with the City's urban amenities such as sidewalks and plazas. Additionally, this section discusses the link between the health of the population on the design of the community in which people live, work, and play/recreate.

Commented [MB74]: Indian Brook Researvare is only under the jurisdiction of Essex Town. EJ pays the higher price to use that. It was a concession to get the separation going.

Local Parks, Schools and Recreational Facilities

The provision of parks and open space for active and passive recreation is an essential and treasured urban function. Essex Junction undertook a master planning process for parks and recreation in the mid 2000's to produce the The 2007-2016 Essex Junction Recreation and Park Master Plan, which identified all park lands within the Village and determined that there is sufficient parkland to serve Essex Junction's residents. The plan also noted significant natural areas in close proximity to the Village-City including the Indian Brook Reservoir in the Town of Essex. Essex Junction Recreation and Parks are planning to update the Essex Junction Recreation and Park Master Plan in 2027 to guide the department in the coming years to best support the city and region.

~~Within Essex Junction, the management of the parks, recreation programs and facilities are the responsibility of the Village. In 2017 the Essex Junction Recreation Program governance transferred from the school district back to the Village. This includes the management of all three of Essex Junction's formal parks along with all the school properties that contain the majority of active recreation facilities within the village. A full-time Recreation Director~~

Commented [MB75]: Add something about adding waterfront access for the public. Update regulations?

~~administers the program. A Recreation and Park Master Plan for 2007-2016 sets the vision, goals and implementation of future recreation projects and park maintenance.~~

Essex Junction's existing parks and open spaces include the following (See Map 3):

Commented [MB76]: Park is used regionally for pool and play ground

Commented [MB77]: Outdated?

- A. Stevens' Park: 8.2-acre neighborhood park designed for passive, nature-oriented activities ~~that includes~~. ~~Designed a short~~ walking/jogging trail system (also used by bikers).
- B. Cascade Park: 10-acre neighborhood park designed for active recreation use ~~that includes~~ a youth baseball field; three (3) tennis courts; one (1) basketball court; one (1) mini-basketball court; one (1) established play equipment area; one (1) picnic pavilion; parking lot for 18 vehicles. ~~There is a sketch proposal for Cascade Park that would overhaul the park's recreational facilities, relocating and significantly expanding the courts, converting the current court area into green space, and upgrading amenities like restrooms and the playground. The plan also adds parking near the WWTF access drive and reworks the baseball field setup, while leaving some details, like access routes and lighting, for future phases.~~
- C. Maple St. Park: 38-acre Community Park, designed for active recreation use ~~and serving users throughout the region~~. Facilities include one (1) lighted baseball field, two (2) lighted tennis courts; one (1) lighted basketball court; three (3) picnic pavilions; two (2) outdoor swimming pools with bath house;; two (2) multi-purpose fields; two (2) Little League baseball fields; a trail system; one (1) skatepark; one (1) bike park; (1) Gaga Ball Pit; low level playground activity with established play equipment; and parking lot for 128 vehicles.
- D. Essex Community Educational Center: 93-acre site housing ~~the~~ high school complex. Outdoor facilities include: multi-use stadium; all weather running track; one (1) baseball diamond; one (1) football field; four (4) lighted tennis courts; 400-meter track; and parking lot for 370 vehicles.
- E. Albert D. Lawton Intermediate School: 33.5-acre site housing ~~a~~ middle school building. Outdoor facilities include: One (1) baseball field, one (1) soft-ball field, four (4) multi-purpose field areas, parking lot for 110 vehicles.
- F. Fleming School: 5.44-acre site that houses ~~an~~ elementary school complex. Outdoor facilities include: one (1) basketball court; high intensity playground area; one (1) youth baseball field, multi-purpose play area; parking lot for 301 vehicles.

Commented [MG78]: Summary of EJR's current sketch proposal for the redevelopment of Cascade Park. Right now they are in pre-application/seeking grant funding:

- *Move courts to baseball field location.
- *Expand courts from 1 tennis, 6 pickleball, 1 small basketball, and 1 regular basketball to 2 tennis, 9 pickleball and 1 regular basketball.
- *The area where the courts currently are would become green space. Little League would still use it for the youngest groups.
- *New bathrooms with four individual stalls.
- *An updated playground.
- *Gravel parking area along access drive to WWTF with 10 additional parking spaces.
- *The existing baseball fencing would come down but the dugouts would stay.
- *We are working on a solution for faster access from the parking lots to the new courts.
- *We would eventually include lights for the courts.

- G. Hiawatha School: 15.65-acre site that houses [an](#) elementary school complex. Outdoor facilities include: one (1) youth baseball field; two (2) multi-purpose fields; low level playground activity area.
- H. [Summit Street School: 3.7-acre site that houses a elementary-school complex. Outdoor facilities include high intensity playground area, and a large open space area that are open to the public during non-school hours.](#)
- I. Park Street School: 1.29-acre site that houses alternative [a pre-school](#) building. Outdoor facilities include [a low-level playground activity area that is open to the public during non-school hours.](#)
- J. Parizo Farm Property: 7.73 acres adjacent to the Hiawatha School [used as parking, a running track, and open field.](#)
- K. Fairview Farms: 10 acres owned by the [villageCity](#); currently natural area open space.
- L. Whitcomb Heights: 9 acres designated [as a](#) natural area ~~open space~~.
- M. Community Gardens: Essex Junction Recreation and Parks organizes two community gardens with over 100 garden plots.
- a. [The Meadow Terrace Garden is our organic site and is located next to the Center of Technology, Natural Resources Building.](#)
- b. The West Street Garden is located at 111 West Street, on State of Vermont property.
- N. Tree Farm Recreational Facility: 99.1 acres of green space including 13+ soccer fields which are home to a variety of soccer tournaments; [a trail network runs through the forested portion of the site. and t](#)he space is available to community members for dog walking, kite flying, and bike riding. [The property is co-owned with the Town of Essex, which manages the property with the City in partnership with the non-profit Tree Farm Management Group.](#)
- O. Other Available sites: There are several facilities owned by other [agencies/entities](#) which provide recreation opportunities to [Village-City R](#)esidents:

Commented [DS79]: Should this be removed entirely now that the school is closed? Are the recreation elements still usable by the community?

Commented [DS79R2]: EWSD has repurposed this to a preschool and behavioral support program (ARC): https://www.essexreporter.com/news/summit-street-school-sees-new-life-as-home-for-alternative-program-and-preschool/article_b545b0de-2a19-426d-bd56-e5e5ceaf7e9b.html

Commented [DS80]: Is this playground open to the public?

Commented [MB80R2]: Not during school hours.

Commented [DS81]: Chris notes that EWSD may end this community garden program in the coming years - check with Mark Brislin for details.

- i. Indian Brook Park: 577 acres, Town of Essex Natural Park. Essex Junction residents pay a higher non-resident rate for entry. Outdoor activities
- ii. Winooski Valley Overlook Park: 4 acres, Winooski Valley Park District Natural area with free entry to all.
- iii. Sixty-eight Acre Park Woodside Natural Area: 58 acres, located in the Town of Essex natural area and managed by the Winooski Valley Park District.
- iv. Pearl Street Park: 14 Acres, Town of Essex- Active, athletic park accessible from the City through the West St. Extension jughandle.
- v. Champlain Valley Exposition Fairgrounds: 129 acres North of Pearl Street used for the Champlain Valley Fair as well as concerts, special events, and winter indoor soccer.
- vi. The City is situated along the Winooski River, and several public properties about its banks, though public access to the water remains limited. Future public access could be pursued directly on City-owned land, or negotiated as part of PUD and subdivision review for riverfront private development.

Commented [DS82]: What is the current status of Junction resident access to these spaces?

Commented [CY83]: Add?

At Essex Junction Recreation & Parks (EJRP), significant improvements have taken place over the past several years to accomplish master plan goals and meet community needs. A Head of Grounds and Facilities Maintenance was hired to oversee the maintenance and operations of the parks and facilities, a maintenance plan is in place for the athletic fields and playgrounds, several fields at Maple Street park have been irrigated, a court resurfacing schedule has been established, there is new signage at each of the three Village parks, a Bike/Walk Advisory Committee was established by the Village Trustees, the skate park at Maple Street Park was constructed, the Essex Dog Park was built at 111 West Street, the Bike Park at Maple Street Park was constructed, and new garden plots were added at the Community Gardens at 111 West Street.

Commented [MB84]: Is this outdated? Should it be removed?

Commented [DS84R2]: Michael Giguere says: Definitely outdated, worth reaching out to EJRP to update to see what efforts they would like highlighted since 2019

The only pieces of the recreation master plan related to facilities that are not yet implemented include building two sand volleyball courts at Maple Street Park, and further investigating the need for more indoor recreation space, including an indoor swimming pool. Maple Street Park has some space constraints for accommodating sand volleyball courts. The creation of a new Recreation and Parks Master Plan will provide an opportunity for the Town/City to reassess and engage the community to improve access and prioritize projects.

Commented [MB85]: Still true? Maybe remove and point to the fact that EJRP is going to reassess improvements and growth?

In 2009, the vote for a previously established one cent (\$.01) tax on the municipal grand list to support the Recreation and Parks Capital Replacement Reserve Fund failed. In a subsequent vote,

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\$75K was approved by taxpayers to support the fund. Since 2009, the annual vote continues to be on the question of \$75K and has been approved. The difference between the one cent (\$.01) on the grand list vs. the \$75K results in \$25K less investment each year. With increasing demands on programs, parks, and facilities, more capital funding will be required to maintain and enhance parks and facilities, especially as the building and pools both age.

Commented [MB86]: Confirmed that the one cent is still around?

The Recreation Advisory Committee was ~~started~~ established in 2025 to represent the best interest of the eCity and its residents by serving in an advisory role to Essex Junction Recreation and Parks in the development, maintenance, and stewardship of the parks and recreation system. The committee meets every other month.

Other Urban Amenities

Essex Junction also puts great value in its downtown public streetscape, comprehensive sidewalk network, off-road bike-paths, and several quiet residential neighborhoods where biking and walking are a common form of recreation. ~~Heart & Soul participants identified these resources as vital to Health, Safety, Thoughtful Growth and Community Connections.~~

~~Essex Junction has invested significant resources towards the revitalization of its historic downtown in the Five Corners over the last five years. The EJRP puts on events for community members throughout the year including Maple Street Park Summer Performances, Essex Pride Festival, July 4th Celebration, an Egg Hunt, Essex Memorial Day Parade, Maple Street Pool Dog Day, and an MSP Running Series. In the summer of 2025, the A major piece of that effort has been public streetscape and open space improvements. The annual Village Block Party has been a huge success but requires the closing of Railroad Avenue. Noticeably absent in the downtown is a village green, a symbol of the New England Village. As proposed, the Design Five Corners Project and resulting reconfiguration of the Five Corners intersection would create a village green immediately adjacent to Main St. City held an event in Five Corners called Meet Me on Main to bring together neighbors for food, music, shopping, and family fun. The event temporarily closed a short portion of Main Street to cars.~~



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The Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan project, “Connect the Junction”, was adopted December 17th, 2025. Alongside other objectives, the plan supports the connection of The Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Zoning District along Pearl Street encourages the provision of passive outdoor spaces such as a plaza or green in redevelopment projects. Sidewalks and urban street trees are critical components of open space in an urban area. They help to connect residents with the larger open spaces, and help to create a walkable, welcoming downtown.

In the more urban areas of the Village Center, wider sidewalks will be required on new streets along with benches and pedestrian amenities. The Village City has widened sidewalks as part of the Main Street and Railroad Avenue Streetscape Projects, and Park Street as part of the Essex Junction Redevelopment Project.

The Tree Advisory Committee, established in 2012, works to promote the improvement and preservation of a healthy environment as it relates to public trees. The committee provides a mechanism for planting, maintenance, protection, and removal of trees on public streets, parks, and City-owned property. In addition, the City of Essex Junction has been named a Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation in honor of our commitment to effective urban forest management. See Chapter 4.2 for more information about Community Forestry in the City.

In addition, the Village tree planting program to replenish and maintain trees in the Village right-of-way is an essential component of the urban open space infrastructure. This work of the Village Tree Advisory Committee is discussed further in the Agriculture & Forestry section. Bike paths are also critical components of urban open space; see Chapter 4.10 – Transportation for more information on bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure. This transportation element is discussed in more detail in the Transportation section of the plan.

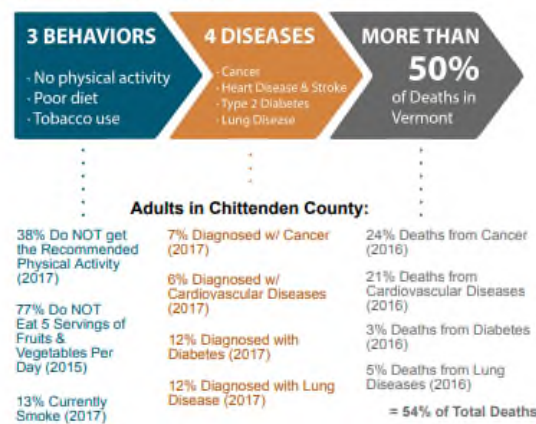
Public Health

To further the Heart & Soul value of health and recreation, the City Village places importance on the health of its residents and understands that health is inextricably linked to the design of the community in which people live, work, and recreate. Addressing public health also means addressing impacts of climate change. Essex Junction is going to see increased heat, decreased air quality during more frequent wildfires, and more intense flooding, all of which threaten the health and safety of residents, particularly children, older Vermonters, and those with chronic respiratory or cardiovascular conditions. Warmer temperatures will also extend the range and activity of ticks and mosquitoes that carry disease.

Commented [MB87]: Should this be removed? Does it still feel relevant?

To address access to healthcare, a change in only three behaviors (activity, diet, and smoking) can have a major influence on health. Many efforts are underway to keep Vermonters healthy to prevent chronic disease and lower health care costs. At the State level, Vermont has directed a statewide health care transformation effort under Act 167 (2022) and Act 68 (2025). These acts charged the Agency of Human Services with leading system-wide changes to build a more affordable, accessible, and equitable health system for all Vermonters. Under this framework, all 14 Vermont hospitals have developed individual and regional transformation plans focused on reducing costs, improving health outcomes, reducing health inequities, and increasing access to essential services through strategies such as shared services, care coordination, expanded telehealth, and the reallocation of care to more appropriate, lower-cost settings. Essex Junction faces many of the same equity and access challenges seen statewide that these healthcare reforms are designed to address. These include the Vermont Department of Health's 3-4-50 campaign as shown here with statistics from Chittenden County, although not available Essex Junction data would not be statistically different.

A change in only three behaviors can have a major influence on the health of Vermonters.



Commented [DS88]: [Megan Balazs](#) Can you connect this more directly to Essex Junction?

According to the World Health Organization, key determinants of health include the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and individual characteristics and behaviors. While addressing health outcomes for residents goes beyond public spaces, the Essex Junction is an active participant in addressing the 3 behaviors identified above.

Commented [MB89]: Does this still feel relevant?

Essex Junction Recreation and Parks provide recreational experiences for all ages and promote lifelong health and wellbeing opportunities through camps, facilities, youth sports, and adult/senior fitness classes. Essex CHIPS also is working to maintain and improve the health and wellbeing of the community through substance use prevention. For example, Essex CHIPS works with law enforcement on Rx-prescription drug take back initiatives, empowers youth to use their voice to influence positive changes in the community, and provides resources to parents on substance use prevention. There is no "one size fits all" approach to creating a community that supports and advances healthy youth residents. However, there are aspects of health that the town can and is supporting through their work. Youth are impacted

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by messages they receive in the community. These messages come in the form of advertising, the presence of alcohol/tobacco at community events, or the number of locations that sell products intended for adult (21+) use. It is essential to consider strategies in the built environment to ensure that substance use prevention is the norm.

Open Space, Recreation, and Public Health Goals

Goal 4.1: ~~Goal 1:~~ The City Council will support the Essex Junction Recreation and Parks Department (EJRP) in providing a wide range of recreation and leisure opportunities for all residents of the Village City.

~~Action 4.1.1:~~ 2007 Within 12 year, EJRP and the City Council will adopt a new Essex Junction Recreation and Park Master Plan.

~~Action 4.1.2:~~

~~Action 4.1.3:~~ Objective 1.3: Encourage increasing the annual funding of the Recreation Capital Replacement Reserve Fund to one cent (.01) of the municipal grand list.

Action 4.1.1:

~~Action 4.1.4:~~ Following adoption of the EJRP Master Plan, the City Council and Recreation Department will study

~~Objective 1.4:~~ Encourage implementation creation of a recreation impact fee to create a fund to support future community park and facility needs. If favorable, the fee will be established in a further 3 years.

Action 4.1.2: ~~Action 1.3:~~

~~Action 4.1.6:~~ Meet with the Walk/Bike Committee once a year to coordinate transportation access and connectivity between parks.

Action 4.1.3:

~~Action 4.1.4:~~ Continue to ~~Action 1.4:~~ Coordinating with neighboring municipalities with support resident access to regional recreation opportunities.

Goal 4.2: ~~Goal 2:~~ Create and improve urban open spaces.

~~The Development Review Board~~ Planning Commission will continue regulations which require the dedication of usable park lands and open spaces as a requirement of major development approval.

~~The Development Review Board will~~

~~Action 4.1.9:~~ Objective 2.1: Encourage the provision of plazas and other urban outdoor areas in major redevelopment projects in the Village City Center and Transit Oriented Development Districts.

Commented [MB90]: Is river access a goal/objective for Essex Junction? If so, where should it go?

Commented [MB91]: Has this happened?

Commented [DS91R2]: Based on the 2022 budget, it looks like this is in effect. If so, delete or modify to address current needs.

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Commented [DS92]: This is optional language that will have no enforceability. Should this be changed to "require?"

Commented [MB93]: Should we remove this?

~~Action 4.1.10:~~ **Action 4.2.1:**

~~Action 4.1.11:~~ The ~~Development Review Board~~ Planning Commission will

~~Action 4.1.12:~~ Objective 2.2: Require pedestrian and bicycle amenities in the creation of new development and public streets in the Village City Center and Transit Oriented Development Districts.

Action 4.2.2:

~~Action 4.1.13:~~

~~Objective 2.3:~~ Consider implementing the Design Five Corners Project including the creation of a village green.

~~Action 4.1.16:~~ Objective 2.34: Encourage or require the preservation of open space in new residential developments. Allow for innovative design in the preservation of open space through clustering and design techniques.

Action 4.2.3:

Action 4.2.4: Over the next 5 years, ~~Monitor the implementation of the Form Based Code aspects of the Land Development Code and reevaluate regulatory frameworks to encourage ensure a balance of the different types of publicly accessible, privately developed plazas and other urban outdoor areas in the City Center and TOD district. If needed, adjust the LDC to incentivize any missing types.~~

~~Action 4.1.17:~~ Within 8 years, Explore upgrades to Stevens Park that enhance its quality as a community and regional asset.

Action 4.2.5:

Action 4.2.6: Within 5 years, create a small citizens group to support the prioritization and implementation of the pocket park in Five Corners.

Action 4.2.7: Explore opportunities to support businesses to improve their streetscape.

Commented [DS94]: Should this be combined with Action 2.1?

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Commented [DS95]: Should this be more specific - i.e., complete a scoping study for improvements to Stevens Park? Or does the community not support this?

Commented [DS96]: Can this be more specific? Does it belong in Economic & Business Development?

~~Goal 4.2:~~ **Goal 4.3:** Create more equitable access and recreational infrastructure at open spaces and parks.

~~Action 4.2.1:~~ **Action 4.3.1:** Research incorporating Augmented Communication Boards into parks and open spaces for inclusive and equitable accessibility.

Action 4.3.2: Implement language access resources in parks and recreational opportunities, including translated materials.

~~Action 4.2.2:~~ **Action 4.3.3:** Sustain and increase funding to reduce barriers to recreational activities for underserved populations.

Action 4.3.4: Coordinate with regional resource centers and schools to promote recreational events and scholarship opportunities.

Goal 4.4: Improve adult and youth health outcomes and access to health resources.

Commented [DS97]: The actions here should be clearer as to who in the City is responsible (staff? Council?), exactly what will be done, and when / how often.

Action 4.4.1: Objective 3.1: Work in collaboration with Essex CHIPS and the Essex Westford School District to integrate healthy choices and substance use prevention into the culture of the VillageCity.

Action 4.4.2: Objective 3.2: Communicate State and regional healthcare efforts to residents through Town newsletters and communication channels.

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Map 3: Recreation Facilities and Open Space Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan

Legend

-  Railroad
-  VT e911 Road Centerline
-  Stream Centerline
-  Winooski Valley Park District Parks
-  Public Passive Open Space
-  Neighborhood Park
-  School Park
-  Regional Recreation Facility
-  Community Park
-  Community Garden
-  Property Boundary (2024)
-  Water Body

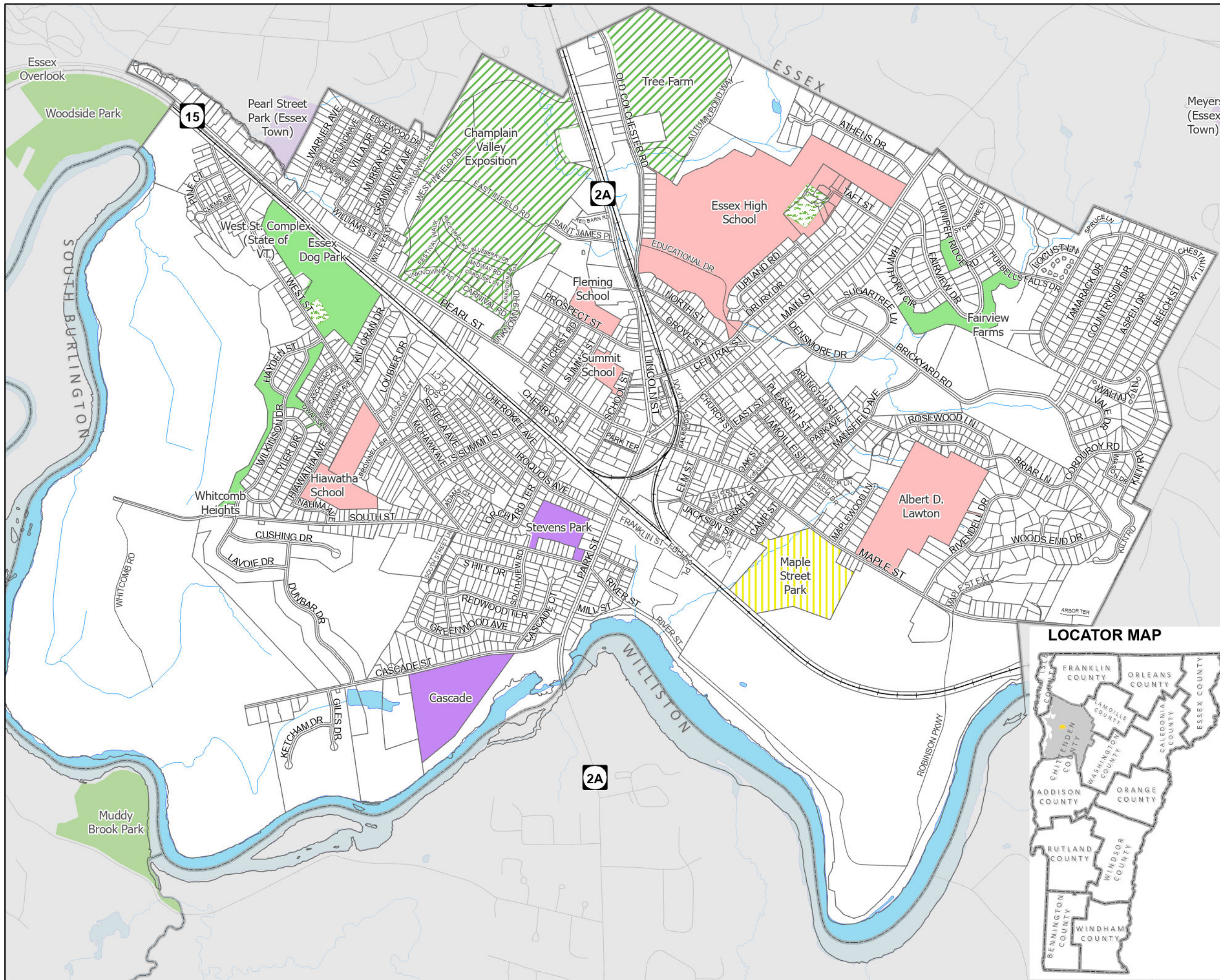


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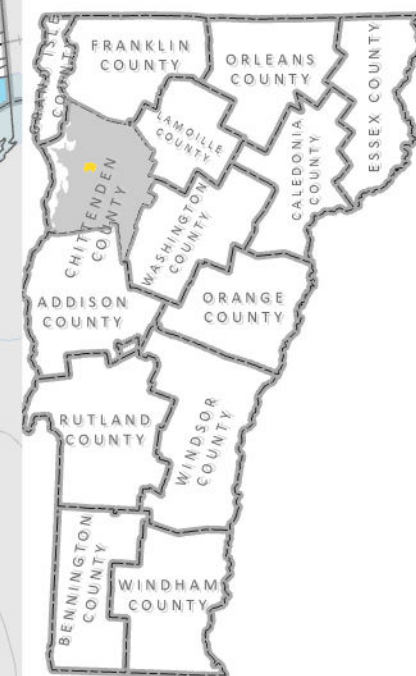
0 0.25 0.5 Mile

Source:
Rec Properties - CCRPC, 2007
Parcels - 2024
Road Centerline - e911, 1/2019; Railroad - VTrans
Map created with ArcGIS Pro. All data is in State Plane Coordinate System, NAD 1983.

Disclaimer:
The accuracy of information presented is determined by its sources. Errors and omissions may exist. The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission is not responsible for these. Questions of on-the-ground location can be resolved by site inspections and/or surveys by registered surveyor. This map is not sufficient for delineation of features on-the-ground. This map identifies the presence of features, and may indicate relationships between features, but is not a replacement for surveyed information or engineering studies.



LOCATOR MAP



4.7.4.6. Natural Hazards Resiliency

Commented [MB98]: Should we talk about increased flooding due to climate change here?

Pillar 2 – Public Services and Facilities, Action 4: Promote and Enhance Safety.

*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.*

Pillar 5 – Environmental Stewardship:

*The residents of the City of Essex Junction share a deep commitment to environmental sustainability and stewardship. There [is] 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**.*

While Essex Junction is less susceptible to risk from flooding and other natural hazards, it is not immune from them, and scientists predict that natural hazards will become more frequent and impactful due to a changing climate. This plan sets out some of the challenges and pathways for the City to mitigate and adapt to the risks posed by natural hazards. This section serves as a summary of ~~Additionally, the Village City's and Town joint~~ All Hazards Mitigation Plan (AHMP), developed in conjunction with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (adopted in 20172022) also identifies the most significant hazards for Essex and Essex Junction. See the discussion of these hazards below. Essex Junction is also a member of the Chittenden County Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC). The REMC provides a forum for Chittenden County municipalities to coordinate emergency planning and preparedness activities to improve the region's ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from all disasters.

Extreme Temperature

Climate change will bring greater extremes of temperature in both winter and summer. Urbanized areas like Essex Junction are also typically a few degrees hotter than less developed areas due to higher absorption of solar energy by roads and buildings, higher density of heat-producing equipment for buildings and vehicles, and lack of shading vegetation – collectively referred to as the urban heat island effect.

While Vermonters are accustomed to cold winters and have building heating systems to withstand this, most Vermont homes do not have air conditioning, particularly those with lower incomes or who live in larger, older apartment buildings. These residents may need to seek places outside their homes to stay safely cool on extreme heat days. The City should

continue providing warming and cooling centers at Maple Street Park, the Brownell Library, and the Senior Center / Essex CHIPS to ensure vulnerable populations can remain safe during extreme temperature events. See Chapter 4.1 for more information, goals, and actions related to Energy, including promotion of heat pump adoption that can reduce exposure to heat risk while increasing energy efficiency and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, the City's efforts to maintain a healthy urban forest will mitigate the urban heat island effect, and the City should prioritize increasing canopy in areas where there is currently less. Currently, urban forest canopy coverage is lowest in the more densely developed and populated parts of the City, including City Center and its surrounding neighborhoods, the Exposition and Light Industrial areas, Pearl Street between Summit Street and Willeys Court, and on the east side of Park Street. See Chapter 4.2 for more information, goals, and actions related to Community Forestry.

Commented [DS99]: Ask VT UCF if we can reference / include a screenshot of the urban canopy coverage map.

Flood Safety

As of July 1, 2014, municipal plans are required to include a flood resiliency goal and element. The requirements include identification of flood hazard areas, the river corridor and designation of those areas to be protected. ~~These could include floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests,~~ to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property. These are described later in this section and are shown on Maps 1 and 11. In recent years, the City has experienced damage from floods to public infrastructure and private property; the increased intensity of rainstorms has certainly contributed to higher flood risk. This Plan calls for avoiding new development in these areas and eliminates exacerbation of flooding and fluvial erosion; encourages protection and restoration of these areas; and plans for flood emergency preparedness and response by recommending policies and strategies to protect these areas and mitigate risks.

~~Identification of the floodplain, and, river corridor and the areas to be protected are described in this section below, and are mapped on Map 1, and Map 11. Additionally, the Village and Town joint All Hazards Mitigation Plan (AHMP) developed in conjunction with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (adopted in 2017) also identifies the most significant hazards for Essex and Essex Junction. See the discussion of these hazards below.~~

Flood Plains

Floodplains are ~~these~~ areas adjacent to rivers that are under water during periods of high stream flow. For regulatory purposes the floodplain consists of the Special Flood Hazard Area and the Floodway - as identified by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA). The Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA), depicted on Map 11, is the area ~~subject to a~~

~~100-year~~ with a 1% chance of flooding in any given year and is the area where the National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) ~~floodplain management regulations must be enforced and the area where the~~ requires the mandatory purchase of ~~the~~ flood insurance ~~applies~~ mandatory for federally-backed mortgages. ~~Thus, w~~While on average such lands flood once every 100 years on average, floods can and do occur more frequently ~~and can occur outside mapped floodplains.~~

The Floodway means the channel of a river or other watercourse and the adjacent land areas that must be reserved in order to discharge the base flood without cumulatively increasing the water surface elevation more than one foot at any point. The floodway is the area where the fastest moving and most destructive floodwaters will flow during the ~~100-year-size of~~ flood likely to occur with a 1% chance every year. Thus, while all land within the floodplain will be wet during a ~~100-year 1% annual chance~~ flood, the most damage to property and loss of life will occur in the floodway.

~~The largest designated flood plain in Essex Junction lies adjacent to the Winooski River, and is composed of entirely conserved or agricultural land with little risk of property damage. The natural vegetative cover not only provides key wildlife habitat and unique natural communities, it also helps absorb and slow floodwaters, preventing greater impacts downstream. There are also several hydroelectric dams along the Winooski River that allow for regulation of floodwaters. The A second mapped floodplain area is located in the northern section, along Indian Brook, from the northeast corner of the Fairgrounds across Lincoln and Main Streets to the easterly western boundary of the Countryside subdivision.~~

~~Essex Junction protects its flood plain through flood hazard zoning regulations which limits the amount of damage by limiting the amount of development and fill in flood plains. These development regulations Limiting development in floodplains also presents opportunities to maintain natural open spaces. The largest designated flood plain lies adjacent to the Winooski River. The second area is located in the northern section, along Indian Brook, from the northeast corner of the Fairgrounds across Lincoln and Main Streets to the easterly boundary of the Countryside subdivision. Community members have advocated for establishing recreational and boating access to the Winooski River, possibly through Cascade Park. See Chapter 4.4 for more information on open space and recreation.~~

FEMA is currently in the process of updating its flood maps, which may shift the floodplain boundaries so that some of these structures are no longer in the floodplain, while others might be mapped in it. There are also structures that are not located in the Special Flood Hazard Area, but may be located in the 0.2% annual chance floodplain. Regardless, flooding can happen even outside the boundaries of mapped floodplains, and FEMA maps cannot

necessarily predict where future flood risk is present. The City can play a key role in making buildings, businesses, and households more resilient to flooding by providing education on the real risks and impacts of flooding and technical or financial assistance to install mitigation measures.

River Corridors

River Corridors are areas where a river or stream naturally moves to establish equilibrium, plus adjacent land to provide “wiggle room” for the river’s movement. River Corridors are a relatively new term, and protection of these areas is not required by the State, but is strongly encouraged and incentivized through the State’s Emergency Relief Assistance Fund (ERAF); and ANR-the Department of Environmental Conservation regulates development subject to Act 250 in these areas that go to Act 250. While Essex Junction currently has regulations for the Floodway and Special Flood Hazard Area, it does not have specific regulations to protect the River Corridor.

~~When federal disasters are declared, towns may receive assistance money from the ERAF to help cover the 25% of damage repair costs not covered by FEMA. Towns that protect river corridors (and meet the other four ERAF requirements) will be eligible for a lower share of the match requirement for these funds. Essex Junction currently has an “interim” eligibility (aka “early adopter”) because they protect streams and rivers through setback requirements. However, in the future the ERAF rule is anticipated to change and will likely require municipalities to regulate development in these areas in order to receive the best ERAF match in accordance with the Vermont Department of Environment Conservation’s regulatory framework summarized here:~~

- ~~i. — Adopt a River Corridor overlay for all streams and rivers draining greater than two square miles.~~
- ~~ii. — Adopt a river corridor setback for small streams as part of their flood hazard/river corridor bylaws. The setback must be a minimum of 50’ from top of bank for streams with a watershed area between 0.5 and 2 square miles. The setback shall be regulated as the River Corridor for streams draining between 0.5 and 2 square miles.~~
- ~~iii. — Adopt a minimum regulatory requirement for River Corridors that are at least as restrictive as those outlined in the ANR Model River Corridor bylaws in effect at the time of adoption.~~

~~While Essex Junction currently has regulations for the flood hazard area, it does not have regulations to protect the River Corridor. For the health of the river systems, protection of property and maintaining the best ERAF match in the future, the City Village should review the~~

CCRPC online river corridor map to understand the location of the river corridor boundary; work with the state to make sure it is accurate; and develop land use regulations to protect these areas.

Flood Safety Mitigation

Map 11 shows that as of 2026, in Essex Junction there are no residences located within the Special Flood Hazard Area (some are officially excluded by FEMA even if they appear on maps to be in the SFHA). However, there are several non-residential structures in the SFHA, and numerous structures in the mapped River Corridor. Most are located along Indian Brook between Brickyard Road and Grove Street.

- **Critical Facilities:**
 - Essex Rescue, the volunteer paramedic service that serves the City and surrounding communities, is exploring options to either flood-proof their headquarters or move to a new location outside the floodplain and river corridor.
 - The Town of Essex has purchased property to relocate its municipal office at 81 Main Street to 80-90 Upper Main Street outside the City and the floodplain and river corridor.
 - There is a primary health care clinic complex located at the corner of Main Street and Densmore Drive that includes Essex Pediatrics and the Community Health Centers of Burlington – Essex. Though these buildings have approved Letters of Map Amendment excluding them from being in the FEMA-regulated floodplain, access to these buildings may be impeded by floodwaters, and they are located in the mapped River Corridor.
- **Residences:** three condominium complexes (Sherwood Square, Brookside, and Sugartree Lane condos) are excluded from the Special Flood Hazard Area due to Letters of Map Amendment. However, portions of these complexes are in the River Corridor, and all may still experience the impacts of flooding and stream erosion, as proven by the damage to Densmore Drive in October 2019. Several single-unit homes located on the west side of Main Street, Drury Drive, and Brookside Avenue are also located in the river corridor and may see erosion of streambanks towards their buildings during high-volume flow events.
- **Other Non-Residential Structures:**
 - A municipal sewer pump station and a private telecommunications tower are located at the west side of Educational Drive in the SFHA and River Corridor.

Commented [DS100]: Find out whether they have done any floodproofing - I think CHCB at least moved their building equipment to the roof when they renovated a few years ago.

Commented [DS100R2]: Confirmed by phone call to Essex Pediatrics Office Manager that utilities are located on the roofs, but otherwise buildings are not floodproofed. See LOMAs:

89 Main St: <https://map1.msc.fema.gov/mipdata/22-01-0497A-500035.pdf?LOC=d60dc738ef4e475b3334bdc25dbd46e8>

87 Main St: <https://map1.msc.fema.gov/data/50/L/12-01-0270A-500035.pdf?LOC=591ecf78953266620a31d853210a6532>

o The Green Mountain Power hydroelectric dam #19 powerhouse is located just west of Park Street at the Winooski River within the Winooski River SFHA and River Corridor.

- While existing structures in the floodplain are at risk, Essex Junction participates in the NFIP and requires that buildings adjacent to the floodplain to be floodproofed if they are substantially improved or repaired after substantial damage, and building owners are encouraged to undertake floodproofing measures regardless of regulations. Additionally, the City regulates development near other waterbodies and wetlands. As a result, little to no new development is likely to take place in hazard areas; any that does will be made resilient to flooding.
- In addition to buildings, Map 11 shows all bridges and culverts located in the floodplain. As of 2026, 28 structures are within the River Corridor, 10 structures are in the Special Flood Hazard Area, and 7 structures are within both. 24 road segments are within the river corridor, 14 road segments are within the special flood hazard area, and 14 road segments are within both. These pieces of infrastructure are most susceptible to damage from floods and erosion; when repaired or replaced, they should be designed to withstand the increased stream flows anticipated in the future, as demonstrated by the repair of Densmore Drive and its culverts in 2019-2021. The capabilities of the Department of Public Works to mitigate flood impacts on municipal roads are considered adequate, except for a potential breach of the Indian Brook Reservoir Dam.

Many communities, including Essex Junction, participate in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), which provides federal flood insurance to all members of a community that imposes development regulations in the Floodway and Special Flood Hazard Area to reduce flood risk. In addition, when federal disasters are declared, towns may receive recovery funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which requires a 25% local cost-share. The State of Vermont covers up to half of this local share with the Emergency Relief Assistance Fund (ERAF) for municipalities that meet certain disaster prevention standards, including:

- Participation in the NFIP;
- Adopting Road and Bridge Standards for designs that are disaster-resilient;
- Annually adopting a Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP);
- Adopting a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan

An additional 2.5% cost share is provided to municipalities that protect river corridors or, like Essex Junction, were early adopters of development setback requirements for streams and flood zones. However, in the future the ERAF rule is anticipated to change due to the passage

of the Flood Safety Act (Act 121 of 2024), which established a statewide permit authority for development in river corridors and a new minimum municipal flood hazard bylaw may exceed NFIP standards. While specific rules to be adopted in 2027 will determine the exact role of the state and municipalities in river corridor regulation, there may be an incentive for municipalities to regulate development of smaller mapped streams to receive the best ERAF match. For the health of the river systems, protection of property and maintaining the best ERAF match in the future, the City will work with the state to ensure its Land Development Code (LDC) meets the Vermont minimum municipal flood hazard bylaw once it is adopted under the Flood Safety Act of 2024, and that the LDC protects these areas in coordination with state permitting rules.

Goal 6.1 of this chapter below calls for maintaining and expanding on these flood resiliency efforts.

Commented [DS101]: Confirm that this date won't change due to new legislation

All Hazard Mitigation Planning

The CCRPC worked with member municipalities to prepare the 2017-2022 Chittenden County Multi-Jurisdictional All Hazard Mitigation Plan. While the AHMP includes much more detail on these hazards, issues identified regarding natural hazards include:

Commented [MB102]: Consult Chistine?

- **Natural hazardsHazards:** include severe winter storms, flooding/erosion, severe rainstorm, extreme temperatures, and wildfire. Winter storms are predicted to include more ice, which can damage power lines and cause outages and create a public safety risk as more homes are heated with electricity instead of fossil fuels.

Dam Failure: "Parts of Essex Town and Essex Junction lie downstream of the Essex Dam #19, which is the only high-hazard dam located in Chittenden County. Green Mountain Power, which owns the dam, has mapped the area that would be inundated in the unlikely event of a dam failure. Inundation maps are routinely reviewed and updated to identify new developments that might be affected by inundation. The emergency action plan for the dam is updated annually and provided to appropriate first-responder organizations."

- **Flooding and River Erosion:** As noted above, there are several structures located in floodplains and river corridors in Essex Junction.

The AHMP identifies Critical Facilities: two critical facilities (The Center for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance defines critical facilities as: "Those structures

critical to the operation of a community and the key installations of the economic sector.") associated with Green Mountain Power in the floodplain in Essex Junction. The Center for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance defines critical facilities as: "Those structures critical to the operation of a community and the key installations of the economic sector." Several critical facilities in Essex Junction are located in high-risk areas around Indian Brook. However, as Map 11 shows there are actually three critical facilities in the floodplain, including Essex Rescue

- As of 2019, there are 5 residences and three commercial/industrial structures, including Essex Rescue, located within the 100-year floodplain in Essex Junction.

The AHMP finds that while existing structures in the floodplain are at risk, Essex Junction participates in the NFIP and has zoning bylaws to regulate development in designated flood hazard areas. These zoning requirements mitigate flood hazards to future structures. Additionally, the Village also regulates development near other waterbodies and wetlands. As a result, little to no development is likely to take place in hazard areas. These zoning requirements effectively mitigate damages from flood and erosion hazards to future structures. Through the Village's proactive policies on flooding risk, the Village receives a higher rate of reimbursement in declared disasters and property owners are eligible for discounted flood insurance rates via the State's Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF). However, as described above, the Village only has interim status for River Corridor protection and will need to follow the State's requirements in the next few years to make this permanent.

- Map 11 maps all structures, including bridges and culverts, in the floodplain. As of 2019, 28 structures are within the River Corridor, 10 structures are in the Special Flood Hazard Area, and 7 structures are within both. 24 road segments are within the river corridor, 14 road segments are within the special flood hazard area, and 14 road segments are within both. The capabilities of the Department of Public Works to mitigate flood impacts on municipal roads are considered adequate, except for a potential breach of the Indian Brook Reservoir Dam.

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~~and Assistance Fund (ERAF). However, as described above, the Village only has interim status for River Corridor protection and will need to follow the State's requirements in the next few years to make this permanent.~~

~~• The capabilities of the Department of Public Works to mitigate flood impacts on municipal roads are considered adequate, except for a potential breach of the Indian Brook Reservoir Dam.~~

The AHMP also identifies several actions the ~~Village-City~~ is taking to address these concerns. For example:

- ~~• The Village-City has an Emergency Operations Plan that provides direction for emergency preparedness and response planning.~~
- ~~• The Village-City maintains a culvert inventory and works to upgrade and maintain these culverts through the Capital Improvement program; and the Land Development Code protects these areas through the following mechanisms: Floodplain regulations in accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program;~~
- ~~• The City also requires new development to utilize Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to manage stormwater on-site; is required of all developments. Applicants must demonstrate why LID is not possible before being granted access to the Village stormwater system.~~
- ~~• The City is also working to replace and retrofit stormwater catch basins as part of regular maintenance to ensure the system can accommodate high rainfall events. More information on the City's stormwater management program is contained in Chapter 4.8. Review of all development within 200' of any waterway, floodplain or wetland. A 15 foot or more undisturbed buffer must be maintained adjacent to streams this may be increased based on flood plain profile, slope of the land or other conditions. A 50 foot setback is considered above the high water mark of the floodplain for stream meandering, flooding, or other natural processes. It is the objective of these standards to promote the establishment and protection of heavily vegetated areas of native vegetation and trees along waterways in order to reduce the impact of stormwater runoff, prevent soil erosion, protect wildlife, and fish habitat and maintain water quality.~~

The ~~2017-2022~~ AHMP set forth ~~two Categories of nine~~ Mitigation Actions for ~~Essex Junction to implementation from 2017 to by early 2022~~2027; the City has made progress on most of them, such as acquiring a Fire Department ladder truck, implementing a public alert system, increasing funding for community outreach, and retrofitting stormwater catch basins. Others are ongoing work, such as promoting the skilled building trades education program at the Essex Center for Technology; reducing waivers in the development process and promoting the

use of heat pumps and rain barrels or rain gardens. Updating to the river corridor zoning standard has been deferred due to new state legislation.

~~• —. These are “Category A: Improve capabilities of existing road and stormwater management infrastructure to address identified vulnerable infrastructure” and “Category B: Operate an effective stormwater management system.” Implementation of the various projects detailed in the Village’s AHMP will further improve flood resiliency.~~

~~— Goal 1 below calls for maintaining and expanding on these flood resiliency efforts.~~

Natural Hazards Resiliency Goals

Goal 6.1: ~~Goal 1:~~ Avoid new development in floodplains, river corridors, and land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests; eliminate the exacerbation of flooding and fluvial erosion; encourage protection and restoration of these areas; and plan for flood emergency preparedness and response.

~~—The City will c~~

~~**Action 6.1.1: Objective 1.1:**~~ Continue to enforce ~~its the~~ flood-plain regulations consistent with the standards of the National Flood Insurance Program and Vermont statutes to protect flood prone areas and minimize fluvial erosion.

~~**Action 6.1.1:**~~ The Community Development Department, with assistance from its partners at the Regional Planning Commission and Vermont Emergency Management, will provide technical assistance to owners of buildings in the floodplain and river corridor to develop plans and identify funding sources to improve the flood resilience of their structures. Outreach to property owners will begin once new FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps and a new state River Corridor Rule are adopted.

~~**Action 6.1.2:**~~

~~**Action 6.1.3: Objective 1.2:**~~ Monitor the area south of Cascade Street that is not currently regulated by the flood plain regulations to determine if additional flood or erosion protections are needed.

~~—The Water Resources Department and Capital Planning Committee will~~

Commented [DS103]: Ask Chelsea Mandigo about this?

—
Action 6.1.4: Objective 1.3: Plan culvert replacements for any undersized culverts in conjunction with roadway improvements.

Goal 6.2: Maintain community safety by building resilience to all types of hazards and disasters.

Action 6.2.1: In 2027, the City Council will readopt a FEMA-compliant All Hazards Mitigation Plan (AHMP), ideally as part of the Chittenden County multi-jurisdictional AHMP.

Action 6.2.2: The City will implement the actions of the 2027 AHMP and report annually on progress to the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission.

—The City Council and Police Department will c

—Objective 1.4: Review the All Hazard Mitigation Plan on a regular basis and follow up and report progress on action steps.

—
Action 6.2.3: Objective 1.5: Continue annual certification and update of the Local Emergency Management Plan.

Objective 1.6: Adopt a river corridor overlay in the Land Development Code which includes the mapped river corridor and small streams with a drainage area of 0.5 sq.mi. to maintain the natural function of waterways including fluvial equilibrium and natural erosion processes, and to protect public/private property.

Map 11: Flood Hazard Areas Essex Junction 2027 Comprehensive Plan

Legend

-  VT e911 Road Centerline
-  Railroad
-  Stream Centerline
-  Water Body
-  Special Flood Hazard Area (100 yr flood)
-  .2 % annual chance flood hazard (500 yr flood)
-  River Corridor

Structures/Infrastructure within Special Flood Hazard Area or River Corridor

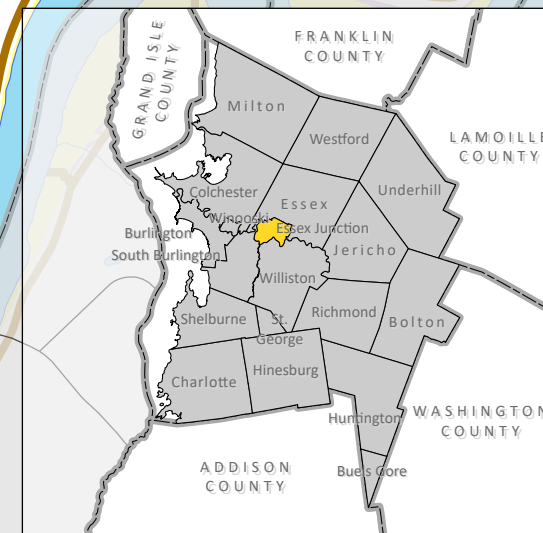
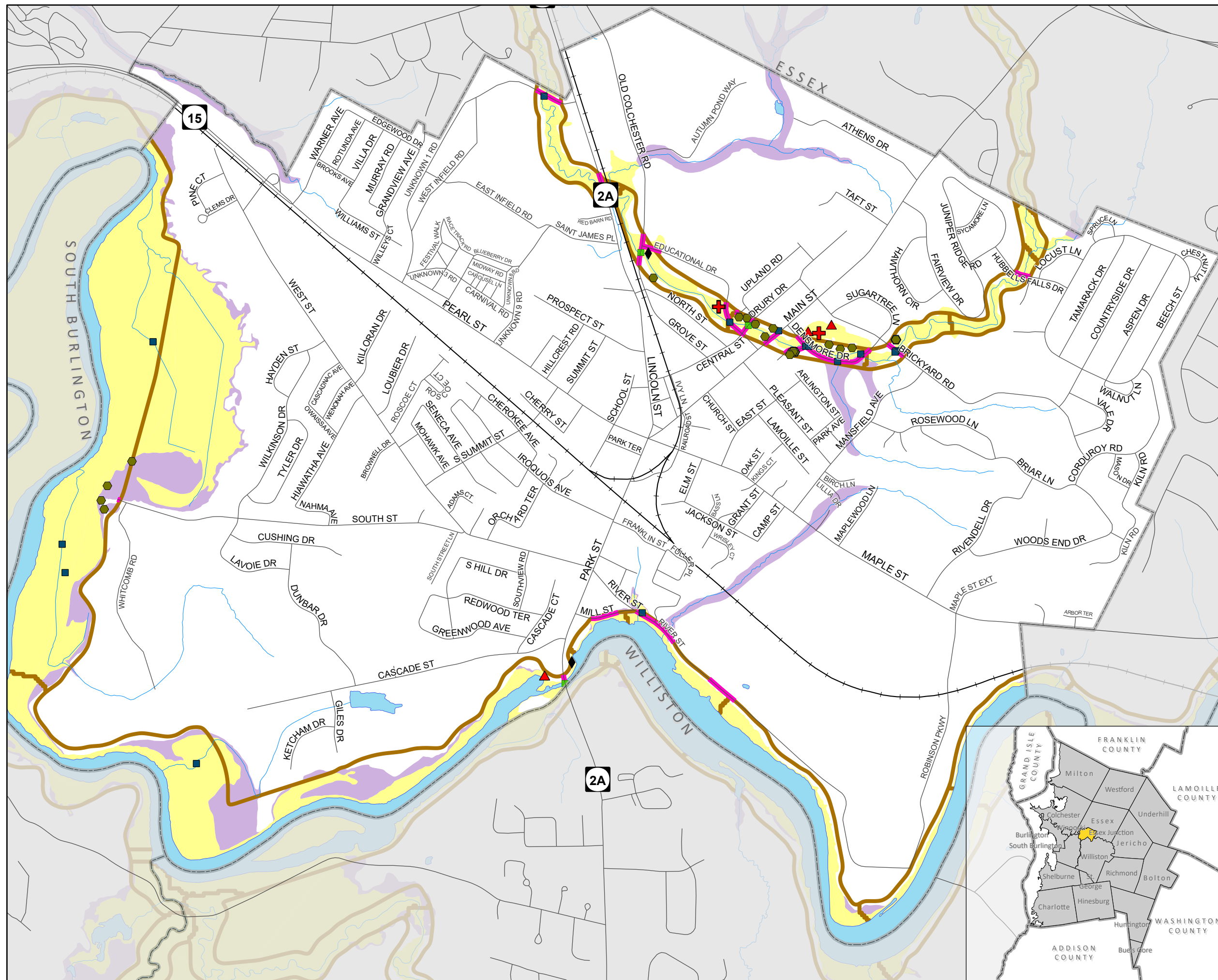
-  Residential
-  Health Clinic
-  Commercial/Industrial
-  Utility/Pump Station
-  Bridge
-  Culvert
-  Road



1:15,000
0 0.25 0.5 Mile

Source:
River Corridor - ANR, 2019; Floodplain - FEMA, 2011;
Structures in floodplain or River Corridor - e911, roads, Vtculverts, ANR DMS, 2019
Surface Water - VHD, 2008 (VCGI)
Map created by using ArcGIS. All data is in State Plane Coordinate System, NAD 1983.

Disclaimer:
The accuracy of information presented is determined by its sources. Errors and omissions may exist. The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission is not responsible for these. Questions of on-the-ground location can be resolved by site inspections and/or surveys by registered surveyor. This map is not sufficient for delineation of features on-the-ground. This map identifies the presence of features, and may indicate relationships between features, but is not a replacement for surveyed information or engineering studies.



4.5. Natural Environmental Resources

The 2024 Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan highlights that Environmental Stewardship is one of the six main pillars of Essex Junction’s vision for its future:

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.

As an urban community, Essex Junction will achieve this vision primarily through actions to reduce its environmental impact and make its developed spaces more habitable for both people and wildlife in the face of climate change. These actions are addressed throughout the other chapters of this Plan, primarily including Chapters 4.1 (Energy), 4.2 (Agriculture and Community Forestry), 4.4 (Open Space/Recreation/Public Health) and 4.6 (Natural Hazard Resiliency). This chapter specifically addresses management and protection of important resources present in the City before humans lived here.

The natural resources base within, and adjacent to a community, are important factors to consider for several reasons. First, they may limit, or direct the type of development which will occur. Second, they contribute to the quality of life within the community. Third, they provide opportunities to preserve important environmental areas. Finally, they provide important recreational opportunities for residents. The safe, attractive, and efficient utilization of land is largely dependent upon these important natural resources. These resources all contribute to the identity of the City as a desirable place to live and work. Residents value these resources as reflected in the Environmental Stewardship pillar of the 2024 Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan. Map 1 and Map 11 identify several important natural resources within the Village, briefly described below. Protection of these resources are listed here and in several other sections throughout the Plan.

Watersheds and Rivers

An integrated watershed approach to the protection of land and water resources is key to ensuring fresh, clean water, habitats, and healthy natural resources. There are two basin-level watersheds in Essex Junction: the Winooski River and direct drainages to Lake Champlain. In addition to the Winooski River itself, which serves as the southern boundary of the City, the

Commented [DS66]: @Darren Schibler Elijah asked about access to Winooski River for recreation being a plan priority - big opportunity

two waterways passing through the City feed these larger basins – Indian Brook drains into Malletts Bay of Lake Champlain, and Sunderland Brook drains into the Winooski. These rivers serve as habitat for fish and wildlife, as natural flood control features, and as an attractive scenic feature.

The Resiliency and Utility sections of this plan describes the City’s programs for erosion control and stormwater management to restore and protect these resources. . In addition, the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation’s Tactical Basin Plans for the [Winooski River](#) and [Northern Lake Champlain](#) provide more detailed information on the health of these watersheds as well as strategies to protect high quality water and to improve degraded water resources. The discussion on floodplains and river corridors in the Resiliency Section of this plan contains further details on the mechanisms to protect river systems and property/infrastructure from flooding and erosion.

Wetlands

Development on or near wetlands is strictly regulated. Wetlands provide a natural habitat for animals and preserve natural areas (described in more detail in the following section). They also serve important ecological functions including flood attenuation, stormwater purification, and groundwater recharge. The wetland areas identified by the Vermont Significant Wetlands Inventory are indicated on Map 1. It should be noted that there may be additional wetlands that are not currently mapped and may be subject to regulation by the [Vermont Wetland Rules](#).

Wildlife Habitat, Connectivity & Forest Integrity

Considering Essex Junction is a growth area, this plan calls for promotion of vegetative landscaping in new development projects and municipal improvement projects to manage stormwater, protect water quality and air quality, increase carbon sequestration, enhance urban spaces and provide wildlife habitat. Secondly, this plan calls for protection of forest blocks, wildlife connectivity resources and crossings/corridors, surface waters, riparian areas, and other significant habitats (e.g. wetlands) from development and fragmentation, especially along the undeveloped parts of the Winooski River and Indian Brook. These resources are further described below in the context of the Agency of Natural Resource’s Vermont Conservation Design (VCD) Project.

The Essex Junction landscape is mostly a developed urban core which, for wildlife, presents highly fragmented and isolated backyard, woodlot, wetland, and streamside environments marked by a strong human presence. This type of habitat is home to wildlife species that can live near roads, houses, industry, people, and their pets.

Much of the land that was forested has been developed within the Village. The State of Vermont abandoned its tree nursery operation on Old Colchester Road and has sold the property to the City and Town for recreational use. Other heavily forested areas are located on the Whitcomb Farm. Maintaining the forested areas on the Whitcomb Farm along the Winooski River is particularly critical for wildlife habitat and flood protection.

Vermont's Act 171 calls for the protection of "forest blocks" to maintain current biological diversity by allowing wildlife to move throughout their natural habitat, and to maintain connectivity so wildlife can migrate in the face of both natural and human disruptions. The City relies on the components (described below) of VCD ranked as "highest priority" and priority to identify areas of important ecological function. Use of VCD will inform decision making regarding identification of locations most suitable for development and those on which to focus conservation efforts through regulation in the Land Development Code and in how the City manages its parks and open spaces. Considering some of these areas are in developed neighborhoods of the City, the community will work to ascertain local choices for protecting the functional forest network identified in the VCD project to support species and to connect habitats. Areas of ecological significance, shown on Map 1, include highest priority and priority components found at both the landscape and species/community scale. These areas are described below.

- **Landscape Scale Components** are identified at a larger scale than species specific habitats. Landscape scale components are areas of land that need to remain healthy and intact to provide plants, animals, and natural resources the best chance of survival over time. These landscape scale components consist of interior forest blocks, connectivity blocks, riparian connectivity areas, surface water and riparian areas, and geological diversity blocks. Because a fully functional landscape includes all components, all areas are amassed and given a ranked status being either priority or high priority. The ranking and location of the landscape components found in Essex Junction are mapped on Map 1 and the State's [BioFinder platform](#).
- **Species and Community Scale** represents lands and waters highly important for maintaining individual species or groups of species that contribute to Vermont's biodiversity. Similar to landscape-scale priorities, the dataset was created by assigning a priority status to numerous components, then amassing these components so that a location appearing as "highest priority" on any component appears as "highest priority" on the map. Highest priority components in Essex Junction include: rare, threatened, or endangered species; uncommon species; rare natural communities; wildlife road

Commented [DS67]: Point of discussion for the PC: Does the City want to include both "highest priority" and "priority" elements? The former is required for enhanced energy plans. "Priority" is optional, though you must explicitly state whether it is considered a constraint. Both are important ecologically, but the distinction provides a mechanism to balance conservation with other goals.

crossings; vernal pools; and class 2 wetlands. Priority components include uncommon species.

As Map 1 shows, there are a number of these habitat locations in the City – most, but not all, are associated with the Winooski River, Indian Brook, Sunderland Brook, and the tributaries that feed them. The intact floodplain forest in the Winooski Valley Park District's Woodside Natural Area is significant because this type of forest is uncommon in Vermont as most have been cleared for agriculture. Efforts to protect these habitats and species are critical to protecting and preserving Vermont's heritage and can include conservation, restoration, and management plans. In summary, significant wildlife habitat includes those natural features that contribute to the survival and/or reproduction of the native wildlife of Essex Junction. In addition to any applicable state regulations on wetlands, floodplains, and river corridors, Essex Junction has adopted regulations to limit development adjacent to streams and to require natural vegetation alongside them. This achieves a balance between sustaining the natural functions and wildlife habitat provided by waterways while enabling compatible high-density development in areas planned for growth to minimize development pressure in other areas where impacts would be more detrimental.

Scenic Views

Although there are many outstanding view sheds within the City, three areas have been particularly identified. First, in the northeasterly section of the City, between Upper Main Street and the Countryside development, is the highest point within the City. Views Village. Spectacular views of Mount Mansfield and the Adirondack Mountains are visible from this location, though they would be difficult to protect without limiting development potential. Second, the river crossing on Park Street provides views of the Winooski River and serves as a scenic entrance to the City, which is protected from development by floodplain and river corridor regulations except for the hydroelectric dam, which continues to be operated by Green Mountain Power. Third, along the westerly end of Pearl Street there are spectacular views of the Winooski River Valley, which is conserved and protected from conversion to non-natural land cover through conservation easements or ownership by the Winooski Valley Park District.

New development can also create scenic asset. Multi-story buildings near City Center have clear views towards Mt Mansfield and Camels Hump. A rooftop terrace or restaurant with public or semi-public access could turn spaces like this into a shared amenity. Improvements in public access to the Winooski River could similarly improve river views.

Agricultural Areas

The City Village is fortunate to have an active farm still in existence. The Whitcomb Farm is in the southwest sector of the City and has been actively farmed by the Whitcombs since 1879. The Vermont Land Trust, with funding assistance from the City, purchased development rights on 414 acres of the Whitcomb Farm in March 2014. See the Agriculture section for more details.

Primary agricultural soil classifications are another important natural characteristic within the City, particularly as they pertain to development review. While the State of Vermont considers primary agricultural soils in its review of proposed developments under Act 250 and Section 248, which may limit development potential on or require mitigation of these soils, it is not the intent of Village to protect primary agricultural soils from development. Mitigation and protection of primary agricultural soils in the Village does not seem appropriate in an urban environment because commercial agriculture is not feasible on small parcels isolated from more intact agricultural areas. However, the Village is supportive of its community garden plots, gardening on private land, and existing agricultural activities at the Whitcomb Farm. In addition, the City has updated its regulations regarding raising of livestock to be consistent with Act 166 of 2026, which arose out of the court case *In re 8 Taft Street DRB & NOV Appeals, 2025 VT 27*.

Commented [DS70]: Should this plan address regulation of livestock (i.e., chickens, ducks, etc.) within the City?

Sand & Gravel

Most of the City of Essex Junction rests on a deposit of delta river sand several hundred feet deep, which was formed about 12,500 years ago as glaciers drained into Lake Vermont (the precursor to Lake Champlain) and stratified sediment along the banks of rivers much larger even than the Winooski.³ This made Essex Junction a very suitable place for development due to a generally low water table and high capacity for septic disposal before a municipal sewer system was established. Because all of the land potentially viable for mineral resource extraction is now developed, there are no sand and gravel operations or resources mapped in the City.

³ Champlain Valley Natural Heritage Partnership (2020). *Geology of the Champlain Valley*. <https://champlainvalleynhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Geology-Guide-2020.pdf>

Thrust Faults

As noted in the 2024 Essex Town Plan, there are two thrust faults running southeast to northwest through the southwest quadrant of the Town, near Lost Nation Road and VT Route 2A. (and therefore, in the Village). These are described in the 2024 Essex Town Plan as follows: "No record of movement along the faults exists, so seismic danger seems minimal. A deep layer of porous carbonate sits beneath the fault, allowing ready movement of water and facilitating the aquifer recharge process." ~~Analysis of these areas should be considered in order to determine how properties along the thrust faults should be managed.~~

Landslides

Landslide

The Vermont Geological Survey conducted an [inventory](#) of instability features that could result in a landslide. There were no mapped instability features in Essex Junction.

Air Quality

Outdoor air pollution in significant concentrations can raise aesthetic and nuisance issues such as impairment of scenic visibility and unpleasant smoke or odors. More importantly, outdoor air pollution in the form of particulate matter and ozone can also pose human health problems, especially for more sensitive populations like children, asthma sufferers, and the elderly. ~~As reported in the 2026 ECOS Regional Plan for Chittenden County:~~ ~~As reported in the 2026 ECOS Regional Plan for Chittenden County:~~ "While Chittenden County's air quality meets current National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), it is close to the limits for ground-level ozone. (The attainment level for ozone is .070 ppm; levels should not exceed this. Ozone levels in Chittenden County have continuously decreased for the last twenty years. The 2021 ozone level measured 0.057 ppm. [2.5 microgram particulate matter (PM2.5)] is well below the attainment level of 12.0 ppm. Chittenden County's level in 2021 measured 6.7 ppm. The county is also subject to pollution from other areas and regions beyond local jurisdiction. If the NAAQS are revised to be more stringent, or if air pollutant levels increase and the county exceeds the NAAQS, additional and costly environmental regulations will apply to our region.

Commented [DS71]: Add link to final plan once approved by the LURB

Commented [DS72]: Add link to final plan once approved by the LURB

~~Climate Change~~

~~Temperature and precipitation records for the latter half of the 20th century show that Chittenden County's climate has changed: winters became warmer and summers became hotter. Lake Champlain freezes over later and less frequently, and the growing season lasts longer. While it is unknown exactly how future climate trends will specifically affect Chittenden County, precipitation throughout the northeast is projected to increase as much as 10 percent over the century. Climate model forecasts for the Northeast US predict that during this century~~

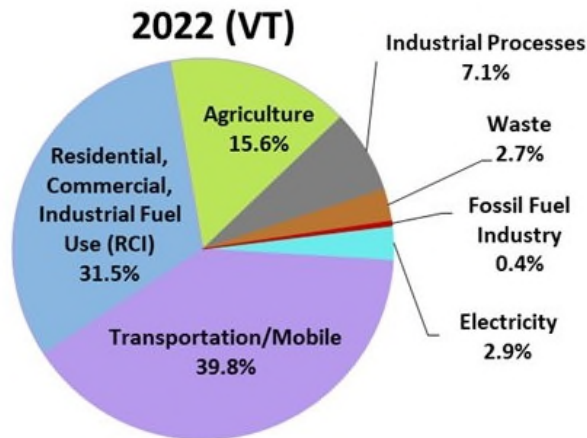
2027 Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan

temperatures will continue to increase, as will extreme heat days and heat waves. As captured in the Global Warming Solutions Act (GSWA), there is consensus in Vermont that that changes in climate worldwide are a result of human activities, mainly the burning of fossil fuels. Current and predicted changes in climate will have broad implications for environmental quality, natural communities, public health, built environment, and local economy. The 1990-2022 Vermont Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Forecast determined that 8.09 metric million tons of carbon dioxide equivalents (MMTCO₂e) were generated in the state in 2022. The GSWA set goals to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 26% of 2005 levels (7.26 MMTCO₂e) by 2025; 40% of 1990 levels (5.23 MMTCO₂e) by 2030, and 80% of 1990 levels (1.74 MMTCO₂e) by 2050. As shown in Figure X, there are two main sectors that generate most of these emissions: transportation accounts for 39.8 of state's emissions, and heating fuels account for 31.5%.

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Field Code Changed

Figure 3. Vermont's Emissions by Sector in 2022



Source: 1990-2022 Vermont Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Forecast.

~~As noted in the Vermont Climate Action Plan, climate change mitigation and adaptation measures are varied and include many strategies the City is already undertaking for other reasons. For example, the City's efforts to increase sidewalks and bike paths will provide residents with an alternative mode of transportation that does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. The Climate Action Plan identifies priority strategies and actions, and provides guidance on actions for interested municipalities, employers, and individuals. The Plan includes actions for both reducing the ways we contribute to climate change (climate mitigation) and to adapt in ways that make us more resilient to a changing climate (climate adaptation).~~

Development Constraints

Some areas are not appropriate for any type of development. The State of Vermont has defined certain resources as known and possible constraints, which are protected by the ECOS Regional Plan and are considered during review of development that falls under the jurisdiction of Act 250 as well as the Public Utility Commission (for energy generation and telecommunications projects). Municipalities can add local constraints based on their own land use policies; Essex Junction has not identified any local constraints to development beyond those identified by the State. Further information about development constraints is contained in Appendix D.

These constraints shall be applied in review of Act 250 permits and the PUC's review of a petition for a renewable generation facility. The City of Essex Junction will use these land conservation measures to determine support for identifying a municipally designated preferred site and in the review of Section 248 applications. In addition to these constraints, which serve as land conservation measures, Essex Junction has created siting policies included in Appendix D, the Enhanced Energy Plan. These provide more guidance specifically on how renewable energy development projects can meet the City's goals for land use, energy, and urban design.

Field Code Changed

Commented [DS73]: Still need to beef up this section using the Municipal Climate Planning Toolkit

Natural Environmental Resource Goals and Actions

Goal 5.1: ~~Goal 1:~~ Preserve the natural beauty and resources found of Vermont within the City of Essex Junction while incentivizing growth in areas planned for growth to reduce development pressure on natural resources and open spaces.

Action 5.1.1: Development, which includes renewable energy generation facilities, shall not take place in areas with known constraints. Development shall first explore alternatives to creating adverse impacts on possible constraints; if adverse impacts cannot be avoided, they shall be minimized and mitigated where possible. In determining whether known or possible constraints are present, on-site field verification shall be conducted.

~~Action 5.1.1:~~ **Action 5.1.2:** ~~Objective 2.1:~~ Continue to enforce Enforce stormwater treatment standards in the Land Development Code to improve water quality in impaired waters and to minimize non-point source water pollution from new development.

~~Action 5.1.2:~~ **Action 5.1.3:** ~~Objective 2.2:~~ Continue to require Require retention of vegetation or effective re-vegetation of areas vulnerable to erosion.

Objective 1.1: Maintain regulations which encourage the preservation of trees in new development.

Objective 1.2: Implement a program of selective planting of trees on private property adjacent to existing road right-of ways.

Objective 1.3: Promote and actively participate in an annual tree planting program.

Objective 1.4: Consider protection of the outstanding view sheds identified in this Plan through amendments to the Land Development Code.

Goal 2: Continue protection of existing natural resources identified in this section.

Objective 2.3: Continue to work with the Center for Technology Essex to develop a nursery to raise street trees for the Village City and Town.

Objective 2.4: Continue incentivizing growth in the areas planned for growth, so ~~that~~ development pressures on natural resources and open spaces are lessened.

Commented [CY74]: Already adopted through reference in LDC

Commented [DS75]: Consider moving to / consolidating with Agriculture and Community Forestry chapter

Commented [DS76]: Per Chris Yuen: Two of the identified view sheds are undevelopable so they don't need protection. The upper main street one probably is VERY difficult to protect without hampering development potential.

Commented [CY78]: Check status of this with Tree advisory committee. Not sure if it's still a thing.

Commented [DS78R2]: Deleting because Action 2.5.3 directs the TAC to continue partnering with Branch Out Burlington as a local nursery source of trees.

Commented [DS79]: Not really an action, so I incorporated it into a revised goal for this chapter.

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Objective 2.5: Ensure protection ~~of~~ the Village's significant wildlife habitat as identified by the Vermont Conservation Design's highest priority priority landscape and species components identified on Map 1 by inventorying the resources, determining their current level of protection if necessary, define them establish standards for protection of them in the Land Development Code.

Objective 2.6: Analyze the thrust faults to determine how properties in these areas should be managed for protection of aquifer recharge ~~and rescue~~ ~~facilities~~ minimizing undue property damage.

Goal 3: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions contributing to climate change and adapt to become more resilient to a changing climate.

Objective 3.1: Engage in climate mitigation strategies to reduce the region's contribution of greenhouse gases. For example, continue to implement policies that promote investment in transportation options that reduce emissions—such as sidewalks and bike lanes; and implement programs to increase urban forest canopy.

Objective 3.2: Engage in climate adaptation strategies to help individuals, businesses and communities be able to withstand and bounce back from—or even take advantage of—the impacts of climate change. For example, prepare and maintain plans for emergency operations, emergency response, business continuity and business recovery.

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Commented [DS80]: While this is potentially important, is this actually a priority for the City? If not, I'd suggest deleting as a discrete action (the plan text still discusses the importance of thrust faults).

Commented [DS80R2]: Per Michael Giguere: Not sure this is needed as an objective.

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MEMO

To: Planning Commission
From: Chris Yuen, Community Development Director
Meeting Date: September 21, 2026
Agenda Item: Chapter 17 Poultry Ordinance Amendment

ISSUE: Chapter 17 of the Municipal Code, which regulates the keeping of backyard poultry, needs to be amended to comply with Act 166 of 2026. Staff seek the Planning Commission's review of the draft before it goes to the City Council.

DISCUSSION:

Chapter 17 was adopted in January 2012 and has not been amended since. It allows a maximum of four chickens per lot, prohibits roosters, limits the flock to personal use, and charges a thirty-five dollar initial permit fee with a ten dollar annual renewal. It does not address any poultry other than chickens.

Act 166 of 2026 took effect on July 1, 2026 and makes several of those provisions unenforceable. The Act amends 24 V.S.A. § 4412 to provide that a municipality shall not prohibit, or charge a fee for, the raising, feeding, or management of a poultry flock for personal use, donation, or sale. It sets a floor of twelve chickens, meaning a municipality may not cap the number below that. It allows municipalities to set numerical limits on other poultry, and to consider parcel size in doing so. Roosters and ratites, which are ostriches, emus, and similar flightless birds, are excluded from the protection, so the City may continue to prohibit them.

Act 166 also responds to a 2025 Vermont Supreme Court decision by reinstating limits on the municipal regulation of farming or farm structures that are subject to State agricultural regulation, particularly on lots larger than one acre. That portion of the Act is addressed separately in the draft 2026 Land Development Code amendments.

The proposed Municipal Code Chapter 17 amendment brings the chapter into compliance and modernizes it. The substantive changes are:

- Raises the flock limit from four chickens to twelve poultry per lot, with no more than four of the twelve being poultry other than chickens.
- Eliminates the permit fee. The permit itself is retained, so the City continues to know where flocks are located and can inspect on complaint.
- Expands the chapter from chickens to poultry generally, and adds a definitions section.
- Prohibits ratites, which Act 166 permits the City to do.
- Permits the sale and donation of poultry products, which the 2012 language limited to personal use.
- Updates Village-era references to the City, the City Manager, and the City Council, and makes other housekeeping corrections.

The City Attorney has reviewed the proposed amendment.

POLICY QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMISSION:

The standards governing enclosures, setbacks, odor, noise, waste storage, and enforcement are carried forward from 2012 with minor cleanup. Two questions are worth the Commission's attention before this moves to Council.

- **The number of non-chicken poultry.** State law sets a floor of twelve chickens but leaves the limit on other poultry to the City, so long as it does not have “the effect of prohibiting the raising, feeding, and management of a poultry flock”. Staff propose four per lot, which mirrors the City’s previous limit on Chickens. The Commission may prefer a different number, or a limit that varies with lot size.
- **Setbacks.** Section 1705(d) requires enclosures to be no less than ten feet from side property lines and fifteen feet from the rear, or to meet the zoning district setback, whichever is greater. The draft does not change these numbers because no one has asked for a change. For reference, the side setback for structures in the R1 and R2 districts is eight feet, so the poultry standard is the controlling one on most residential lots. Enclosures are also barred from front yards and, where a primary residence exists, limited to rear yards. If the Commission wants these figures adjusted in either direction, now is the time.

ORDINANCE AMENDMENT PROCESS:

Chapter 17 is a Municipal Code ordinance rather than a Land Development Code bylaw, so the Commission's role is advisory. The City Council adopts the amendment through the following process:

1. Council votes to move the proposed amendments forward.
2. Council holds at least one public hearing before adopting. If Council changes the proposal after that hearing, a second hearing is required.
3. After adoption, the City publishes the amendment or a short summary in a local newspaper, along with notice of the public’s right to petition.
4. The Ordinance becomes effective upon passage (City Charter Section 503).
5. Voters can petition for a vote on the change, which takes signatures from more than 5 percent of voters, filed within 44 days of adoption.

Assuming the Commission is comfortable with the draft, staff intend to bring it to the City Council on Wednesday, October 14, 2026 and ask Council to warn a public hearing for Wednesday, October 28, 2026 at 6:30 p.m. That date aligns with the public hearing scheduled for the Land Development Code amendments, which are a separate matter.

COST:

The City issued seven poultry permits in 2025. Act 166 prohibits charging a fee for these permits as of July 1, 2026, and the City stopped collecting the fee on that date. The resulting revenue loss is nominal. Administering the permit program requires no additional staff time beyond what is already budgeted.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommend that the Planning Commission review the draft, resolve the policy questions above, and recommend that the City Council move the amendment forward.

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

“I move that the Planning Commission recommend that the City Council move the proposed amendments to Municipal Code Chapter 17 forward and warn a public hearing.”

ATTACHMENTS:

- Draft Chapter 17 Amendments
- Act 166 of 2026, Act Summary, Office of Legislative Counsel

This act summary is provided for the convenience of the public and members of the General Assembly. It is intended to provide a general summary of the act and may not be exhaustive. It has been prepared by the staff of the Office of Legislative Counsel without input from members of the General Assembly. It is not intended to aid in the interpretation of legislation or to serve as a source of legislative intent.

Act No. 166 (H.941). An act relating to municipal regulation of agriculture

Subjects: Municipal and county government; municipalities; municipal and regional planning and development; municipal regulation of agriculture

This act prohibits municipalities from regulating agricultural activities that are subject to State regulation, with some exceptions for smaller parcels of land and swine waste. Municipalities are also prohibited from regulating the cultivation or other use of land for growing plants, excluding cannabis and hemp. Municipalities may regulate, but not prohibit, the keeping of a poultry flock, excluding roosters and ratites, and must allow the keeping of at least 12 chickens. Finally, this act updates the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets' Required Agricultural Practices Rule to conform to changes in statute and makes technical corrections to the Rule.

Effective Date: July 1, 2026

CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION**MUNICIPAL CODE****CHAPTER 17****ORDINANCE REGULATING KEEPING OF
DOMESTICATED POULTRY IN BACKYARDS**

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Ordinance is to provide standards for the keeping of Poultry. It is intended to enable residents to keep a small Poultry flock while creating standards and requirements that ensure that Poultry do not adversely impact the neighborhood surrounding the property on which the Poultry is kept. This Ordinance is intended to comply with 24 V.S.A. § 4412(15).

DEFINITIONS

As used in this Ordinance:

- a) Poultry means chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys, guinea fowl, pheasants, partridge, quail, and other domesticated birds of a kind customarily kept outdoors for eggs, meat, or other agricultural products. Poultry does not include Companion Birds.
- b) Companion Bird means a domesticated bird kept indoors as a household pet, including parrots, parakeets, cockatiels, canaries, finches, and similar species. Companion Birds are not subject to this Ordinance.
- c) Chicken means a domesticated fowl of the species *Gallus gallus domesticus*.
- d) Rooster means a male chicken.
- e) Ratite means a flightless bird of the ratite group, including ostriches, emus, rheas, and cassowaries.

SECTION 1701. PERMIT REQUIRED

- a) An annual permit is required for the keeping of any Poultry. The annual permit is personal to the permittee and may not be assigned.
- b) No fee shall be assessed for the issuance or renewal of a permit to keep a Poultry flock. The annual permit will expire twelve (12) months from date of issuance. Accessory structures less than fifty square feet (50 sq ft.) do not require a zoning permit under the Land Development Code, but the structure may not be placed within the property line setbacks.
- c) A Permit is not valid until fifteen (15) days after the date of issuance.
- d) The Permit may be appealed within fifteen (15) days of its issuance.
- e) The applicant shall post the Permit immediately after receipt of the Permit on the property to which it refers in a location visible from the street until thirty (30) days after the issuance of the permit.
- f) An applicant for a Permit to keep Poultry must demonstrate compliance with the criteria and standards in this Ordinance in order to obtain a permit.
- g) The application for a Permit shall be submitted to the City Manager or designee.

SECTION 1702. EXCEPTIONS

- a) Farming and farm structures that are exempt from municipal regulation under 24 V.S.A. § 4413(d) are exempt from this Ordinance.
- b) Any use permitted under Section 724 of the Land Development Code shall be exempt from this Ordinance.

SECTION 1703. NUMBER AND TYPE OF POULTRY

- a) The maximum number of Poultry allowed is twelve (12) total per lot regardless of how many dwelling units are on the lot.
- b) No more than four (4) of the Poultry allowed under subsection (a) may be Poultry other than Chickens. This limit applies regardless of the number of Chickens kept on the lot.
- c) Roosters and Ratites are prohibited. There is no restriction on Chicken breed.

SECTION 1704. USE

Poultry and Poultry products may be kept and used for personal use, donation, or sale, consistent with 24 V.S.A. § 4412(15). Slaughtering of Poultry is not permissible in public view.

SECTION 1705. ENCLOSURES

- a) Poultry must be kept in an enclosure, such as a henhouse, coop, Poultry tractor, or fenced area at all times during daylight hours. Enclosures must be clean, dry, and odor-free, kept in a neat and sanitary condition at all times, in a manner that will not disturb the use or enjoyment of neighboring lots due to noise, odor or other adverse impact. Enclosures may be portable, but cannot be set up within the property line setbacks.
- b) Poultry shall be secured within a structure (such as coop, Poultry tractor) during non-daylight hours. The structure shall be enclosed on all sides and shall have a roof and doors. Access doors must be able to be shut and locked at night.
- c) Enclosures shall not exceed fifty (50) square feet in size but may be located within a larger structure approved through the Land Development Code.
- d) Henhouses, enclosures, Poultry tractors, and fenced areas are not permitted in the front yard of any property and must meet either minimum setback requirements of the zoning district or be kept no less than ten (10) feet from side yard property lines, and fifteen (15) feet from the rear yard property lines, whichever is greater.
- e) If a primary residence exists on the property, coops, enclosures, Poultry tractors and fenced areas shall be located only in rear yards. For a corner lot or other property where no rear yard exists, these facilities shall not be located within the front yard setback for the zoning district.
- f) Poultry are not allowed to be located in any part of a home or garage.

SECTION 1706. ODOR AND NOISE IMPACTS

- a) Odors from Poultry, Poultry manure, or other Poultry-related substances shall not be perceptible at the property boundaries.
- b) Perceptible noise from Poultry shall not be loud enough at the property boundaries to disturb persons of reasonable sensitivity.

SECTION 1707. LIGHTING

Lighting for the exterior of the coop shall not impact or illuminate adjoining properties or disrupt the neighbors.

SECTION 1708. PREDATORS, RODENTS, INSECTS, AND PARASITES

The property/Poultry owner shall take all necessary action to reduce the attraction of predators and rodents. Infestation of insects and parasites that may result in unhealthy conditions to human habitation will result in the Poultry facility being removed by the City, through the animal control officer, or any other designee, and the cost of the same shall be borne by the property/Poultry owner. In tandem with any removal of a Poultry facility the City will revoke any permit for same.

SECTION 1709. FEED AND WATER

Poultry must be provided with access to feed and clean water at all times; such feed and water shall be unavailable to rodents, wild birds and predators.

SECTION 1710. WASTE STORAGE AND REMOVAL

Provision must be made for the storage and removal of Poultry manure. All stored manure shall be covered by a fully enclosed container or compost bin. No more than one, twenty (20) gallon container of manure shall be stored on any one property housing Poultry. All other manure shall be removed or composted. In addition, the coop, poultry pen and surrounding area must be kept free from trash and accumulated droppings. Uneaten feed shall be removed in a timely manner.

SECTION 1711. VIOLATION

Each violation of this ordinance shall be subject to a daily \$25.00 fine. Each day a violation continues shall constitute a separate offense. The City shall retain the right to inspect any property to determine whether a violation has been corrected.

SECTION 1712. PERMIT REVOCATION

- a) A permit may be revoked or suspended by the City Manager or designee for:
 - 1. Misrepresentations on an application;
 - 2. Violation of the provisions of this Ordinance or other City of Essex Junction regulations, and failure to correct said violation upon re-inspection.
 - 3. Any permit revocation or suspension may be appealed to the City Council.

SECTION 1713. APPEAL PROCEDURE

A person aggrieved by the issuance of a permit, revocation or suspension of a permit, or the issuance of a penalty pursuant to this Ordinance may appeal the action taken by the City Manager or designee to the City Council.

SECTION 1714. ENFORCEMENT

Any violation of this ordinance may be enforced by seeking an injunction or penalties or both or any other action available at law.

SECTION 1715. REMOVAL OF POULTRY

- a) In addition to the penalties in Section 1711, any violation of the provisions of this Ordinance shall be grounds for an order for removal of the Poultry and the Poultry-related structures. The health officer, animal control officer and/or City Manager's designee may order the removal of Poultry upon a determination that the Poultry poses a health risk and/or there is evidence of abuse or neglect.
- b) If Poultry dies, it must be disposed of promptly in a sanitary manner by its owner.

SECTION 1716. SEVERABILITY

If any section, subsection or portion of this Ordinance shall be declared by any competent court to be invalid for any reason, such determination shall not be deemed to affect the validity of any other section, subsection or portion of this Ordinance.

New Chapter 17 adopted 1/10/12