

Planning Advisory Committee

Wednesday, September 9, 2015

2:30pm to 3:30pm

CCRPC Main Conference Room, 110 West Canal Street, Winooski

Agenda

2:30 Welcome and Introductions, Joss Besse

2:35 Approval of July 8, 2015 Minutes

2:40 Permit Tracking Research Update, Lee Krohn

2:50 Act 250 – Municipal Impact Fee Discussion, Regina Mahony

Brief discussion on some recent Act 250 permits that have included fair-share transportation mitigation fees to be paid to the municipality.

3:05 Essex 2015 Comprehensive Plan, Regina Mahony

- a. *Open the Hearing*
- b. *Accept Public Comment*
- c. *Close the Hearing*
- d. *Review Staff Summary*
- e. *Questions and Comments*
- f. *Recommendation to the CCRPC Board*

4:10 Regional Act 250/Section 248 Projects on the Horizon, Committee Members

4:20 Other Business

1. Next meeting is on Veteran's Day (November 11th) – reschedule?
2. Long Range Planning Committee Reconvened for ECOS Plan Updates – Need 1 or 2 PAC members. Any volunteers?

4:30 Adjourn

* = Attachment

NEXT MEETING: November 11th, 2013 at 2:30pm to 4:30pm

In accordance with provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the CCRPC will ensure public meeting sites are accessible to all people. Requests for free interpretive or translation services, assistive devices, or other requested accommodations, should be made to Emma Long, CCRPC Title VI Coordinator, at 802-846-4490 ext 21 or elong@ccrpcvt.org, no later than 3 business days prior to the meeting for which services are requested.

CHITTENDEN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE - MINUTES

DATE: Wednesday, July 8, 2015
TIME: 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
PLACE: CCRPC Offices, 110 West Canal Street, Suite 202, Winooski, VT

Members Present

Joss Besse, Bolton
Paul Conner, South Burlington
Ken Belliveau, Williston
Dana Hanley, Essex
Sarah McShane, Underhill
Jeannine McCrumb, Charlotte
Katherine Sonnick, Jericho
David White, Burlington
Jacob Hemmerick, Milton
Alex Weinhausen, Hinesburg

Melissa Manka, Westford

Dean Pierce, Shelburne

Sarah Hadd, Colchester

Staff

Regina Mahony, Planning Program Manager

Lee Krohn, Senior Planner

Emily Nosse-Leirer, Planner

Charlie Baker, Executive Director

1. Welcome and Introductions

Joss Besse called the meeting to order at 2:37 p.m.

2. Approval of March 11, 2015 Minutes

Ken Belliveau made a motion, seconded by Dean Pierce to approve the March 11, 2015 minutes. No further discussion. MOTION PASSED. Alex Weinhausen and David White abstained.

3. South Burlington Comprehensive Plan

This is an initial review, and therefore no public hearing was held. Regina explained that the format is different than what the PAC would typically see, however it is an initial review and we are expecting South Burlington to come back to the PAC for the formal review.

Emily Nosse-Leirer conducted the CCRPC Staff review and described her recommendations. She explained that the flood resiliency section could be strengthened combining the emergency management and blue infrastructure sections. There were a few other suggestions that could be improved: housing and income; unclear on education capacity, etc. Paul Conner thanked Emily for the thorough comments and explained that they wanted to come here early for input prior to finalizing the Plan. Paul Conner described a few things about the Plan including the new Future Land Use map – the planning area boundaries are purposefully fuzzy to allow for some flexibility/adjustment at the more specific zoning district level.

Alex Weinhausen reiterated a comment made by Emily Nosse-Leirer and asked about the number of strategies and how the City might prioritize them. Paul Conner explained that they moved about 70 strategies into an “ongoing” section which helped a bit. So far they’ve been encouraging the Planning Commission (PC) to establish a full list of everything that needs to be done then they will prioritize and identify a 5 year strategic work plan. Alex asked if prioritization will be the responsibility of the PC or the City Council. Paul explained that the PC’s first public outreach meeting will be to the City Council, and the Council will likely want the PC to take the first stab at strategy prioritization and the shorter term work plan. Joss Besse asked if the 5 year strategic work plan will likely be just for the PC or for the larger community; and Paul Conner indicated that they are still thinking about the specifics of the strategic work plan.

There was a discussion regarding the strategy matrix that is referenced but not yet included in the draft. Paul explained that this will be a cross matrix that describes which strategies address the City’s top ten goals, and is hoping that the strategies that address most of the goals will help them prioritize. There was some discussion regarding the typical strategy matrix in the back and the limitations on its usefulness; and the benefits (clear

1 and focused strategy for implementing the plan) and challenges (people may hold you to strategies that may
2 prove to be unrealistic; the Plan is a holistic document that should include all things that need to be
3 accomplished) associated with establishing a shorter prioritized strategy list. There was also discussion on
4 what a Plan can and can't do. For example, Dean Pierce mentioned that there is some limited benefit in tying
5 the Plan to the Capital Plan because the Planning Commission doesn't have authority over other Town
6 departments.

7
8 Dean Pierce indicated that he found the Plan to be very ambitious – he is particularly interested to see how all
9 of the housing goals will be met. In light of this, Dean Pierce asked CCRPC if they had any plans to produce
10 new housing guidelines as required in state statute. Regina Mahony explained that the ECOS Plan calls for
11 more housing at all levels everywhere – certainly less specific than the municipal housing targets previously
12 produced. Dean Pierce stated that Shelburne could use more specific targets. Regina Mahony indicated that
13 she will look into the statute requirements on this. Dean Pierce appreciated the discussion on the connections
14 with Shelburne, and indicated that there may be long-term (20 years down the road) growth pressure on
15 Shelburne but he doesn't have any concerns with the direction South Burlington is going in. Dean Pierce will
16 email Paul Conner the specific comments that he has on the Plan. Sarah Hadd was surprised to see how brief
17 the compatibility with other municipalities is because this is the section that can be used if a potential land use
18 on in a neighboring municipality is unwelcome. Sarah Hadd also suggested the addition of visuals to
19 geographically describe the neighborhood locations. Alex Weinhausen asked about the existing school
20 capacity. Paul Conner stated that they are not at capacity and don't expect to be. The school district is looking
21 at potentially closing 2 of the 3 elementary schools, building a new one and shifting other classes. Sarah Hadd
22 added that Colchester is also looking to consolidate two K-2 schools.

23
24 David White suggested a joint Burlington/South Burlington planning project to look at increased pedestrian
25 crossings on Shelburne Road, and mixed use infill. Joss suggested this as a potential UPWP project as multi-
26 municipal projects are ideal for the RPC's workplan. Paul Conner suggested other joint projects with
27 Williston as well. Ken Belliveau mentioned Muddy Brook and its potential to be listed as an impaired stream,
28 and whether their two municipalities should ensure collaborative protection measures on both sides. Paul
29 Conner indicated that it is impaired for turbidity already. So. Burlington has been pretty active on conserving
30 land along the brook. Williston has a 150' buffer; and So. Burlington has a 100' buffer.

31
32 Paul Conner indicated that they will likely come back to the PAC in November-ish; and he asked folks to send
33 him good examples of any of the sections discussed. Paul Conner also indicated that So. Burlington really
34 could/should have two state designated growth areas – K-mart area being the other area and they don't have
35 the tools necessary to make that happen.

36 37 **4. Legislation & Other Updates**

- 38 a. Water Quality/TMDL bill (H.35 – Act 64): Regina Mahony first described a few Chapter 117 changes that
39 came out of this bill (attached) – namely the addition of tactical basin plans to the water quality goal
40 (§4302(6)(B)). Regina Mahony then provided an overview of a few components of the Water Quality bill
41 including: a more robust Tactical Basin Planning outreach effort (the RPC's will be contracted to work
42 with the municipalities to ensure broad participation in these Plans); ANR may use the Tactical Basin
43 Plans to establish watershed-specific priorities for stormwater management; general permit for stormwater
44 runoff from municipal roads (this is new for the non-MS4 municipalities); ANR will study and report on
45 the potential lowering of the impervious surface threshold for stormwater permits from one acre to one-
46 half acre; a revenue source of 0.2 percent surcharge on the value of the property subject to the property
47 transfer tax; and municipal wastewater treatment plants must comply with a 0.80 milligram per liter
48 phosphorus discharge standard (even if State funding is not provided to the municipality). The summary
49 of the Act can be found [here](#). Charlie Baker explained that CCRPC is considering the establishment of a
50 Water Quality Committee (similar to the current TAC and PAC) to help prioritize the stormwater projects
51 in the Tactical Basin Plans and manage other CCRPC responsibilities under the new Act. The Water
52 Quality Committee will like meet at an adjacent time slot to the TAC as some of those members will

- 1 overlap.
- 2 b. The Energy Bill (H.40 – Act 56): Regina Mahony described a few of the relevant changes within the
- 3 Energy Bill:
- 4 i. Municipal party status in Section 248a proceedings.
- 5 ii. Statewide minimum setbacks for in-ground solar facilities > 15 kW, as measured from travel ways
- 6 and property lines.
- 7 iii. Authority has been provided for municipalities to establish screening bylaws (Ch 117, new
- 8 4414(15)) for ground-mounted solar facilities >15kW only for application in Section 248—no
- 9 local permits, administration or enforcement. There was quite a bit of discussion over the details
- 10 of this legislation – particularly regarding “Screening requirements under this subdivision shall not
- 11 be more restrictive than screening requirements applied to commercial development in the
- 12 municipality...” Screening requirements may change depending on the zoning district so this is
- 13 not very clear.
- 14 c. 10 year Municipal Plan – VPA will continue to work on this in the Summer/Fall. There was some
- 15 discussion regarding concern from the other RPC’s. Sarah Hadd indicated that the bill came up relatively
- 16 quickly for some people and there was some debate over whether this change should be partnered with a
- 17 larger look at the goals and elements in Chapter 117.
- 18 d. All Hazard Mitigation Plan (AHMP) municipal meetings – Municipal outreach will begin in Sept & Oct,
- 19 with drafts of the annexes done in the winter. Still working on a schedule and will discuss more with the
- 20 AHMP Committee on Sept. 9th.
- 21

22 **5. Regional Act 250/Section 248 Projects in the Horizon**

- 23 • So. Burlington – Pillsbury manor senior housing expansion on Williston road, and an application for
- 24 BJ’s has been submitted near the Williston border on 9.82 acres (so may avoid Act 250).
- 25 • Colchester – The VT Respite House is looking to relocate to Colchester south of the village off of
- 26 Roosevelt highway on an 88 acre parcel. St. Mike’s is working on a new residential hall.
- 27 • Shelburne – nothing
- 28 • Westford – 13 lot subdivision in residential area.
- 29 • Williston – submittal by GMP to build a 5 megawatt solar array – going to be the largest in the state
- 30 on Mtn. View Road owned by GLOBALFOUNDRIES. 60 acre parcel.
- 31 • Bolton – nothing
- 32 • Jericho – market in Act 250 now and has been working with CCRPC on traffic related issues
- 33 • Hinesburg – nothing new
- 34 • Milton – nothing
- 35 • Burlington – Burlington Town Center don’t know Act 250 obligations yet; City Market just
- 36 announced purchase of property on Flynn Ave.; Burlington College still in community outreach.
- 37

38 **6. Other Business**

- 39
- 40 a. Congrats to Melissa Manka, VPA Professional Planner of the Year!
- 41 b. [Downtown and Village Tax Credit Program](#). This year, legislative changes to the program include updates
- 42 to make the tax credits more useful and effective. A new tax credit, of up to \$40,000, is now available for
- 43 affordable elevators known as LULAs (Limited Use Limited Application), and the cap for state building
- 44 code-required improvements increases from \$25,000 to \$50,000.
- 45 c. Sustainable Communities Network info - [SCLearningNetwork.org](#). Great resources from the HUD
- 46 Sustainable Communities grant program are now available to everyone.
- 47 d. APA Sign Webinar on Thursday, July 30th from 1pm to 2:30pm: This webcast will discuss what local
- 48 governments need to do to ensure that their sign codes comply with the U.S. Supreme Court’s June 2015
- 49 decision in Reed v. Town of Gilbert. This is free but if anyone wants to come here and watch it as a group
- 50 we have the Main Conference Room booked for it.
- 51 e. FEMA mitigation grant funds available for damages resulting from the severe winter storm which

- 1 occurred on Dec. 9-12, 2014. Applications can be downloaded from the DEMHS website at:
2 www.vem.vermont.gov. There is also a grant program available from the Lake Champlain Basin Program
3 that can be found here: <http://www.lcbp.org/about-us/grants-rfps/available-grants/>
4 f. Local Foods, Local Places will provide direct technical support to selected communities. A team of experts
5 will help community members develop action plans that use local foods to support healthy families and
6 communities and to drive downtown and neighborhood revitalization. The assistance process features a
7 community workshop that brings people together to develop shared goals and steps to achieve them. For
8 more information and a link to the application, visit [http://www2.epa.gov/smart-growth/local-foods-local-](http://www2.epa.gov/smart-growth/local-foods-local-places)
9 [places](http://www2.epa.gov/smart-growth/local-foods-local-places).
10 g. There is a good APA Cell Tower article which may be of interest – printed copies are available.
11 h. Regional Energy Forums - to solicit Vermonters' thoughts on how the state can meet its energy goals –
12 and energy needs – in the coming years. The input will inform the next revision of Vermont's long-range,
13 Comprehensive Energy Plan. A final plan is due to the Legislature in December. July 9th in Woodstock;
14 July 16th in Middlebury; July 20th in Manchester; and July 23rd in St. Albans.
15 i. Written comments are welcome at (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/vtcepOC> (link is
16 [external](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/vtcepOC))) by **July 24, 2015**.
17 ii. You may also provide comment in response to specific questions raised by the Department
18 at (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/vtcepFQ> (link is external)) by **July 24, 2015**. Throughout
19 the spring and summer, the PSD is particularly interested in public input on the questions
20 contained in [this document \(link is external\)](#).
21 i. Food Insecurity Fact Sheets are now available – printed copies are available.
22 j. Your next PAC and AHMP meeting is September 9th, 2015 at 2:30pm to 3:30pm. This is the same day as
23 ANR/VTrans Municipal Day. There was little familiarity in the room regarding the Municipal Day.
24 Regina Mahony will provide this information to the PAC and follow-up to determine if there is a need to
25 re-schedule the meeting.
26

27 **7. Adjourn**

28 The meeting adjourned at 4:24 p.m. The next meeting will take place on September 9th, 2015 at 2:30pm to
29 3:30pm. We will follow this with the next AHMP Committee meeting.
30

31 Respectfully submitted, Regina Mahony

The Clean Water Act (H.35) and Its Effects on 24 VSA Chapter 117

The Vermont Legislature's website states that the following statutes will be affected:

§ 4302. Purpose; goals

Goal 6, "To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, and land resources," has an added Goal B:

(B) Vermont's water quality should be maintained and improved according to the policies and actions developed in the basin plans established by the Secretary of Natural Resources under 10 V.S.A. § 1253.

§ 4413. Limitations on municipal bylaws

The section on agricultural and silvicultural practices now reads:

(d) A bylaw under this chapter shall not regulate ~~accepted~~ required agricultural ~~and silvicultural~~ practices, including the construction of farm structures, as those practices are defined by the ~~secretary of agriculture, food and markets~~ Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets or ~~the commissioner of forests, parks and recreation, respectively,~~ under 10 V.S.A. ~~§§ 1021(f) and 1259(f) and 6 V.S.A. § 4810~~ accepted silvicultural practices, as defined by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation, including practices which are in compliance with the Acceptable Management Practices for Maintaining Water Quality on Logging Jobs in Vermont, as adopted by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks and Recreation.

§ 4348. Adoption and amendment of regional plan

§4348(c) is amended to add the Agency of Natural Resources and the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets to the list of parties to which a plan must be distributed 30 days before a hearing.

§ 4348a. Elements of a regional plan

A regional plan must now include "A statement of policies on the...(B) protection and improvement of the quality of waters of the State to be used in the development and furtherance of the applicable basin plans established by the Secretary of Natural Resources under 10 V.S.A. § 1253"

CCRPC Formal Staff & PAC Review – 2016 Essex Town Plan
September 9, 2015 PAC Meeting

Staff Review of the 2016 Essex Town Plan

Emily Nosse-Leirer, CCRPC Planner

August 26, 2015

The Town of Essex has requested, per 24 V.S.A §4350, that the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (1) approve its 2016 Town Plan; and (2) confirm its planning process.

This draft 2016 Town Plan is a major rewrite of the 2011 Essex Town Plan. CCRPC reviewed the 2011 plan in 2013 as part of an Enhanced Consultation process. The 2016 Essex Town Plan has only one new element, which addresses flood resilience. The addition of this section ensures that the plan meets statutory guidelines. However, the layout of the Essex Town Plan has changed significantly since 2011. Almost 100 pages of extraneous or redundant information have been eliminated, and the resulting document has been arranged in an innovative and engaging way. The first chapter is now called “The Action Plan,” and the rest of the document acts as supporting material for a clear list of goals, policies and actions. The incorporation of the “Heart and Soul of Essex” planning process demonstrates a comprehensive community engagement effort, the graphic design of the plan is engaging, and the elements themselves are easy to understand.

CCRPC staff completed a formal review of the 2016 Essex Town Plan in advance of the Essex Planning Commission’s public hearing on it, which was warned and held on August 12, 2015. At that meeting, the Essex Planning Commission voted to refer the plan to the Essex Selectboard.

Following the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission’s (CCRPC’s) *Guidelines and Standards for Confirmation of Municipal Planning Processes and Approval of Municipal Plans (2013)* and the statutory requirements of 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, I have reviewed the draft 2016 Essex Town Plan to determine whether it is:

- Consistent with the general goals of §4302;
- Consistent with the specific goals of §4302;
- Contains the required elements of §4382;
- Compatible with the 2013 Chittenden County Regional Plan, entitled the *2013 Chittenden County ECOS Plan* (per §4350); and
- Compatible with approved plans of other municipalities (per §4350).

Additionally, I have reviewed the planning process requirements of §4350.

Staff Review Findings and Comments

1. The 2016 Essex Town Plan is consistent with all of the general goals of §4302. See the attached Appendix A submittal that describes how the Plan is consistent with these goals.
2. The 2016 Essex Town Plan is consistent with the specific goals of §4302. See the attached Appendix A submittal that describes how the Plan is consistent with these goals.
3. The 2016 Essex Town Plan contains the required elements of §4382. See the attached Appendix A submittal that describes compliance with these required elements.
 - a. In Appendix A, the Town stated that there is no housing element included in the plan, because a housing study is needed in the town. CCRPC appreciates that the Town recognizes the need for a future housing study and plans to complete one. However, it is our view that the 2016 Essex

CCRPC Formal Staff & PAC Review – 2016 Essex Town Plan
September 9, 2015 PAC Meeting

Town Plan does contain an adequate housing element as required by §4382. Comments from the Town staff can be found in the related sections of Appendix A.

4. The 2016 Essex Town Plan is generally compatible with the planning areas, goals and strategies of the 2013 Chittenden County Regional Plan, entitled the *2013 Chittenden County ECOS Plan*.
5. The 2016 Essex Town Plan is compatible with the municipal plans for Jericho, Essex Junction, Williston, Colchester and South Burlington.
6. Essex has a planning process in place that is sufficient for an approved plan. In addition Essex has provided information about their planning budget and CCRPC finds that Essex is maintaining its efforts to provide local funds for municipal and regional planning.

Additional Comments/Questions:

There were several recommendations CCRPC Staff provided to the Essex Planning Commission for their public hearing. The recommendations were addressed as described below.

1. Suggestion: As of July 2015, all plans must reference the Basin Plans established by the Secretary of Natural Resources under 10 V.S.A. § 1253.
 - a. Response: A reference was added to the Basin Plans associated with the Town.
2. Suggestion: In the discussion of affordable housing, the income range for which housing units in Essex would be considered “affordable” wasn’t clear.
 - a. Response: With staff assistance, clarifying language was added.
3. Suggestion: The addition of unemployment data was encouraged, especially to help bolster the discussion regarding the need to diversify employment opportunities.
 - a. Response: With staff assistance, more unemployment data were added.
4. In addition, several typos and formatting issues were addressed.

CCRPC Staff have no other recommendations, however we would like to commend the Town on this Plan for the following reasons:

1. The reorganization of the plan into just four chapters made it readable, easy to understand and engaging. Naming the first chapter “The Action Plan” clearly shows that this is a plan focused on specific and achievable tasks for bettering the town.
2. The mock-up of the graphic design shows that the plan will be visually engaging.
3. The incorporation of the “Heart and Soul of Essex” process is extremely interesting and provides great insight into the wishes of community members. This plan clearly demonstrates how valuable a process it was for the town.
4. Having certain actions drafted by the relevant groups is a good way to coordinate the different projects taking place around town, as is assigning people or groups to actions.

Proposed Motion & Next Steps:

PROPOSED MOTION: The PAC finds that the draft 2016 Essex Town Plan, as submitted, meets all statutory requirements for CCRPC approval, and that the municipality's planning process meets all statutory requirements for CCRPC confirmation.

Upon notification that the Plan has been adopted by the municipality, CCRPC staff will review the plan, and any information relevant to the confirmation process, for changes. If staff determines that changes are substantive, those changes will be forwarded to the PAC for review. Otherwise the PAC recommends that the Plan, and the municipal planning process, should be forwarded to the CCRPC Board for approval.



MEMORANDUM

TO: Essex Planning Commission Members

FROM: Regina Mahony, CCRPC

DATE: June 28, 2013 – **Updated August 26, 2015**

RE: Informal Town Plan comments

When I met with you back on March 28th I indicated that I would be following up with comments on your Town Plan. Here are the comments:

1. Excellent and thorough Economic Development chapter. I'd recommend that the Essex Economic Development Committee take a look at the Bristol Downtown Community Partnership and some of the private community investment tools that they've been able to help organize. Carol Wells is the Executive Director and would be a great resource.
2. The Natural Resources & Recreation chapters are excellent – the Town has done a great deal of inventory work, and has prioritized the significant resources to protect. Has the Town been able to implement some of the regulatory goals called for in this section?
3. The entire plan is consistent in its goal of concentrating growth inside the sewer service area – almost every chapter reinforces this policy and this makes the Plan particularly effective in meeting state goal §4302 (1). Especially strong is the Town's Residential Development Phasing Policy that attempts to achieve 80% of growth in the sewer service area.
4. There are helpful cross references throughout every chapter of the Plan, making the Plan truly comprehensive.
5. The Energy chapter is a great first step in energy planning. In addition, the energy goals in the Transportation, Housing and Natural Resource chapters make it clear that the Town is working towards a cross-sector energy planning approach. In developing the Energy Plan, and updates to the Town Plan, consider including Greenhouse Gas Inventory data (available at the Town level from CCRPC), and refer to the Climate Action Plan's municipal guide appendix for specific energy actions (in draft form at the moment but we can get it to you when you are ready for it). **Specific energy actions have been added, but not Greenhouse Gas Inventory Data.**
6. While the protection of agricultural land is a strong policy throughout many chapters of the plan, the plan could be strengthened by having specific goals, objectives and strategies to support and encourage the industry itself (beyond just land protection) as described in the sub-goals of §4302 (9). Specifically, the plan could be strengthened by drawing a connection to the health benefits of local food production and specific ways to help encourage these industries – including processing and distribution infrastructure. **Done**
7. The wealth of data contained in the Plan is impressive and helps explain what is happening in the Town. Because the Plan was written before the 2010 Census data was available, updating the data where appropriate would help strengthen the Plan. **Done**
8. The transportation chapter is quite extensive and comprehensive, though some information could be updated. There are numerous references to the CIRC Highway, and we suggest that these statements be reconsidered in light of the CIRC Alternatives projects. In addition, the "conflicts in functional

classification” section is quite thorough, however it could be strengthened by including a discussion on how TDM and other measures can to some degree address current traffic issues in addition to simply trying to reduce congestion (because reducing congestion can in turn attract motorists back to the system, which then creates more congestion). TDM won’t solve the issues, but it can be one part of the solution. More specific transportation chapter recommendations include: **The transportation section and associated goals and policies of the plan has been updated in a comprehensive way.**

- Consider adding “transit service” to item number 1 at the top of page 8-1.
- Has the Highway Transportation Management Plan been updated?
- There is a lot of gray area in functional classes – it may help to include a chart to help explain this concept to the reader. Two options are included below.
- It may be helpful to explain or define what access management is in the first paragraph on page 8-3.
- Consider adding “unpaved” to the last sentence within “Minor (Local) Roads” on page 8-6 to describe the 7.4 miles of road.
- Consider adding that the intersection improvement for VT Route 117/Sand Hill Road referenced on page 8-7 is underway.
- Would it be possible to identify the segments identified in #1 on the top of page 8-8?
- Consider indicating that the projects referenced in the second bullet in the middle of page 8-8 (Rte 117 bypass lane and new traffic signal at Rte 15/Sand Hill) are underway; and the Gentes Road Bridge is complete (we think it might be).
- The Plan includes a great transit narrative – but it could use some updating. Consider updating the CCTA ridership data on page 8-8 (and check map reference – it appears that the title may not be correct), as well as the route information (for example the Jeffersonville Commuter bus will soon be started).
- Consider revising the Greyhound section on page 8-10 to say: “Lines connect from Montreal, via Burlington to Boston, Massachusetts. Megabus connects Burlington to both Boston and New York City.”
- The map referenced under Section 8.2 appears to be Map 6 on the website.
- Consider updating Table 8-9 as needed – use inflation factor to revise cost estimates.
- Consider setting a firmer goal rather than “regularly” update the Highway Transportation Management Plan in Objective 8.2.2 – perhaps every 5 years?
- Consider adding the following to Objective 8.2.3: “and CCRPC’s 2008 Route 15 Corridor Study”.
- Consider adding to the end of Objective 8.2.4 “...and expand as appropriate.”
- References to the MPO in Strategy 8.3.1.1 (and .2) should be changed to CCRPC and the Metropolitan Transportation Plan should be changed to the ECOS Plan – in addition to reconsidering the CIRC Highway objective (also Objective 8.4.2). Also change MPO to CCRPC in Strategy 8.3.3.1 and Goal 8.7.
- Consider adding carshare as another option under Strategy 8.3.3.2.
- Strategy 8.3.3.4 - Change Transportation “Enhancement” to Transportation “Alternatives”; and add “CCRPC sidewalk program” as a funding option.
- Strategy 8.3.4.2 – replace “CCMPO (Pedestrian Policy and Sidewalk Plan), CCRPC” with “CCRPC Regional Ped/Bike Plan”.

- Consider adding “i.e. Complete streets” to Strategy 8.4.3.3.
9. Statutory changes made in the 2013 Legislative session include two flood resiliency requirements, one goal and one element. These requirements become effective July 1, 2014 – so depending on your timeframe you’ll want to include these. A number of organizations are working on guidance for this so stay tuned for more information. In the meantime, the All Hazard Mitigation Plan (County wide plan with an Annex for Essex), and additional FEH language can be used to help meet these requirements. Dan Albrecht provided the Town with proposed FEH language in August, 2012. I’ve included the language below. **A flood resiliency section and goals have been included.**
10. Is the Town going to review whether the population growth rate of 205 persons per year is still the appropriate cap? **This is still the targeted growth rate.**
11. The water supply section in Chapter 6 refers to “static pressure” and high pressure and low pressure zones. If this level of information is going to be included in the plan, I’d suggest a quick sentence explaining why this information matters to the reader. For example, which is preferable - low pressure or high pressure? Does one of the other indicate that an improvement is needed in the water supply system to improve or relieve the static pressure? **This has not been added.**

I hope you will find these comments to be helpful as you update your Town Plan. Please let me know if you have any questions, or would like any further information.



TOWN OF ESSEX VERMONT

81 MAIN STREET, ESSEX JUNCTION, VERMONT 05452
Fax: 878-1353 • E-mail: manager@essex.org • Website: www.essex.org

August 21, 2015

Charles Baker, Executive Director
Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
110 West Canal Street, Suite 202
Winooski, VT 05404

Dear Charlie:

Please consider this letter, along with the accompanying materials, to be a request by the Town of Essex for the CCRPC to consider confirmation of its planning process and to approve the draft 2016 Essex Town Plan pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4350. After its public hearing on August 13, 2015, the Planning Commission voted to refer it to the Essex Selectboard.

Enclosed you will find:

- Appendix A: a summary referencing the locations of sections within the Plan relating to: 1) consistency with the goals of 24 V.S.A. § 4302; 2) compatibility with the 2013 Chittenden County ECOS Plan; 3) compatibility with the approved plans of adjacent municipalities; and 4) inclusion of the 12 required elements of 24 V.S.A. § 4382(a).
- CCRPC Review of Municipal Development Plan and Planning Process;
- One hard copy (to be delivered) and one PDF version of the Plan (including maps).

The draft 2016 Essex Town Plan involves four main changes:

- A complete data update;
- A flood resilience element;
- A significant re-formatting and graphic design (only a mock-up design of the first several pages has been done to date);
- Incorporation of the results of the Heart & Soul of Essex process.

The maps will be made more readable as part of the graphic design process.

CCRPC staff planner Emily Nosse-Leirer provided helpful comments prior to the Planning Commission hearing in a memorandum dated August 5, 2015. In response to the memorandum, we have made the following changes to the draft 2016 Essex Town Plan:

- Reference is made on page 67 to the Tactical Basins of which the Browns River, Abbey Brook, Alder Brook and Sunderland Brook are a part. There is now a live link to the

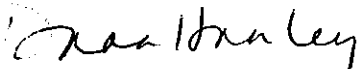
TOWN MANAGER	PARKS AND RECREATION	COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT	PUBLIC WORKS	ASSESSOR	FINANCE	TOWN CLERK	LIBRARY	POLICE
878-1341	878-1342	878-1343	878-1344	878-1345	878-1359	879-0413	879-0313	878-8331

Agency of Natural Resources Tactical Basin Plans in the draft 2016 Essex Town Plan;

- Page 80 shows a revised zoning map with the extension of road and some natural features into adjoining towns. Suggested revisions to the Future Land Use Map have been made and need to be plugged in.
- Page 31 includes unemployment data suggested by Emily Nosse-Leirer in an email communication dated August 14, 2015.
- Page 53 includes an addition related to affordable housing by recommended by Melanie Needle in an email communication dated August 17, 2015.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 878-1343, or at ghanley@essex.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Dana Hanley
Community Development Director

cc: Greg Duggan
Sharon Kelley
Regina Mahony
Emily Nosse-Leirer
Patrick Scheidel

CCRPC Review of Municipal Development Plan and Planning Process

Consistency with the general goals of 24 V.S.A § 4302(b):

(1) Are municipal decisions guided by a coordinated, comprehensive planning process?

Yes. Essex maintains a five-person Community Development Department with a director, planner, zoning administrator, GIS specialist, and administrative assistant. Typically, the Town Plan is updated by the Planning Commission every five years, with a more comprehensive update done every ten years. Zoning and subdivision regulations are amended every 1-2 years.

The Community Development Department works closely with the Public Works Department, the Police Department, the Fire Department, and the Parks and Recreation Department to ensure a coordinated approach to town planning. Essex has a range of citizen-led committees that also collaborate with the department. These include an Energy Committee, an Economic Development Commission, a Trails Committee and a Conservation Committee. The Planning Commission amends the Town Plan and bylaws, as needed, to stay current with good planning principles.

In the past several years, these efforts have included updates to the Open Space Plan, a comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment, a comprehensive Economic Development Plan, a Residential Phasing policy, a Scenic Highway Protection Plan, Telecommunications regulations, incorporation of FEMA requirements into the regulations, a Bike/Ped Plan with the Village of Essex Junction, and Conservation Design Subdivision regulations (pending).

(2) Is citizen participation encouraged at all levels of the planning process?

Yes. Encouraging public participation in the planning process is an Essex strong suit. Planning in Essex emphasizes work sessions, open meetings, and numerous public hearings. The Planning Commission rarely deliberates on development review cases in private. At the beginning of every Planning Commission meeting, public participants are asked if they have anything in general to discuss with the Planning Commission.

With regard to the proposed 2016 Town Plan, ten months of public work sessions preceded the official Planning Commission public hearing. Staff and the Planning Commission made specific efforts at community outreach, including a table at the Five Corners Farmers Market, a work session at the Essex Free Library, and a table at the 2015 Essex Town Meeting. We post a notice of our meetings on Front Porch Forum.

(3) Is consideration being given to the use of resources and consequences of growth?

Yes. The Town Plan and bylaws always, as well as studies, devote considerable attention to these issues. The wise use of resources was the motivating factor behind updating the Open Space Plan and developing Conservation Subdivision Regulations (pending). The consequences of growth are felt in Essex as our growth areas are becoming increasingly built-out under current zoning regulations. As mentioned above, we implement a Residential Phasing policy. The impacts of growth on our transportation network are routinely assessed by our Public Works Department. Essex maintains an ironclad sewer core area which has acted as a de facto urban growth boundary line for many years. Priority Action Items in the 2016 Town Plan include implementing a Scenic Highway Overlay District, undertaking a Housing Study, updating the 1991 Village Center Master Plan, updating design guidelines in the Business Design Control Overlay Districts and several transportation initiatives.

(4) Whenever appropriate, is the municipality working with other municipalities to develop and implement plans?

Yes. Essex collaborated for two years with the Village of Essex Junction on an Orton Family Foundation-funded project called *Heart & Soul of Essex*. This project touched on many aspects of community planning. The Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction also collaborated on a Bike/Ped Plan. Essex partnered with Jericho on a scenic highway protection plan.

2013 Chittenden County ECOS Plan: Section 4.1.3 Statement of Compatibility and Consistency

Future Land Use Map:

Under the ECOS Future Land Use Map, Essex has elements of the Metro Planning Area, the Suburban Planning Area, the Enterprise Planning Area and the Rural Planning Area. The draft 2016 Essex Town Plan does not propose changes which will affect the planning areas depicted on the Town of Essex Future Land Use Map, all of which are consistent with the ECOS Future Land Use Map.

The priority Action Items in the draft 2016 Essex Town Plan that are specifically consistent with ECOS Plan are the following:

Chapter 2 (ECOS Plan)

2.2 Natural Systems

The draft 2016 Essex Town Plan has provided updated information in narrative form on Natural Systems and has identified these priority Action Items, among others;

- Starting a Conservation Fund;
- Starting an Invasive Species Management Program;
- Implementing a Scenic Highway Overlay District;
- Continuing work on pending Conservation Subdivision regulations;
- Developing a Forest Management Plan for Indian Brook and Mathieu Town Forest;
- Remaining enrolled in Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program;
- Implementing Impaired Streams Flow Restoration Plans involving construction of new stormwater treatment facilities in the Indian and Sunderland Brook watersheds;
- Developing and implementing strategies to become an "Electric Vehicle-Ready Town";
- Revising the zoning regulations to incent and/or require residential and commercial energy standards that exceed the Vermont energy building codes.

2.3 Social Community

The draft 2016 Essex Town Plan has provided updated information in narrative form on Social Community and has identified these priority Action Items, among others;

- Undertaking a comprehensive Housing Study
- Developing intergenerational programming through the Essex Free Library;
- Increasing community participation in problem solving to reduce crime and its consequences;
- Enhancing trail maintenance, especially Indian Brook and the Mathieu Town Forest;
- Conducting a Community Aquatics Center Feasibility Study;
- Documenting and enhancing trails at Saxon Hill;
- Developing an effective school governance model;
- Developing an inclusive model of education that directs resources to students who are at most risk of not succeeding.

2.4 Built Environment

The draft 2016 Essex Town Plan has provided updated information in narrative form on the Built Environment and has identified these priority Action Items which affect the Built Environment, among others;

- Updating the 1991 Town Center Master Plan;
- Updating regulations in the Business Design Control Overlay Districts;
- Creating an Affordable Housing Task Force;
- Creating renewable energy generation siting standards;
- Encouraging entrepreneurship by promoting innovation, maker spaces, and partnerships with neighboring communities;
- Assessing uses at Fort Ethan Allen and considering zoning changes;

- Designing and constructing pedestrian/bike paths on VT Route 2A, Pinecrest Drive and Towers Road;
- Constructing a new multi-use path from Susie Wilson Road to the City of Winooski.

Appendix B - ECOS Criteria:

The draft 2016 Essex Town Plan respects all/most of the ECOS criteria in Appendix B.

Compatibility with plans in other municipalities, Chapter 117, Sec 4350(b)(1)(c)

The Town of Essex is bordered by Westford to the north, Colchester to the west, Jericho to the east, and the Village of Essex Junction, South Burlington, and Williston to the south. These communities have comprehensive plans that are generally consistent with the Essex Town Plan.

Colchester – The Colchester-Essex border has a variety of planning areas. The Colchester side of the border has Commercial/Industrial, Rural, Suburban Residential, and Village districts. Similarly, Essex has Agricultural, Conservation, Industrial and Open Recreation planning areas. The undeveloped park areas of Indian Brook Reservoir and the nearby Colchester Pond Natural Area are surrounded by Low Density Residential areas. The Parade Grounds in Fort Ethan Allen span both towns, and the uses in Fort Ethan Allen are compatible between the two towns.

Essex Junction – Planning areas along the border between the Village of Essex Junction and the Town of Essex are consistent, although the Town side contains more business activities in the planning areas, including small portions of Industrial and larger portions of Mixed Use.

Jericho – The border that Essex shares with Jericho is largely characterized by agricultural and conservation districts, along with low-density residential development. Along VT Route 15, Jericho's Village district begins at the border between the towns. One portion of Essex's Industrial planning area extends to the Jericho border. Jericho does not permit access to this area from Skunk Hollow Road.

South Burlington – The short border that Essex shares with South Burlington is Floodplain on both sides.

Westford – In Westford, the border is characterized by Agricultural, Floodplain, Forestry, and Low Density Residential planning areas. Land in Essex contains Agricultural, Conservation, Floodplain, and Low Density Residential planning areas.

Williston – The Winooski River Floodplain serves as the immediate border between Essex and Williston. In Essex, areas just beyond the floodplain feature a combination of Agricultural, Industrial, and Low and Medium Density Residential planning areas. Williston has largely the same planning areas just past the floodplain, with no significant inconsistencies.

Confirmed Planning Process, Chapter 117, Sec 4350(a)

(1) Continuing planning process resulting in approved plan

Essex has a continuing planning process. The last Town Plan was adopted in 2011. A history of planning in Essex is found in the Introduction.

(2) Maintain efforts to provide local funds for municipal and regional planning

	Local	Regional	Total
FY 2016	445,588	23,556	469,114
FY 2015	436,609	23,662	460,271
FY 2014	427,565	22,780	450,345
FY 2013	395,216	22,960	418,176
FY 2012	373,522	23,313	396, 835
FY 2011	386,436	15, 371	401,807
FY 2010	383,046	23,022	406,068
FY 2009	367,298	24,382	391,680

Appendix A, CCRPC Guidelines and Standards for Confirmation of the Municipal Planning Processes and Approval of Municipal Plans

	Requirement	Guideline Questions	Yes/No	Location	Comments
	Consistent with General Goals in Sec. 4302(b)				
1	(1) To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework to guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and state agencies.	<i>Are municipal decisions guided by a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework?</i>	Yes	Introduction, Memo to CCRPC	
2	(2) To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact.	<i>Is citizen participation encouraged at all levels of the planning process?</i>	Yes	Introduction, Memo to CCRPC	
3	(3) To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development for the region and the state, as well as the community in which it takes place.	<i>Is consideration being given to the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development?</i>	Yes	Memo to CCRPC; All chapters	
4	(4) To encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together to implement and develop plans.	<i>Is the municipality working creatively together with other municipalities to develop and implement plans?</i>	Yes	Introduction.	Recent projects include the Scenic Protection Plan with Jericho and the Bike/Ped Plan with the Village of Essex Junction.
	Requirement	Guideline Questions	Yes/No	Location	Comments
	Consistent with Specific Goals in Sec. 4302(c)				
5	1. To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.	<i>Do the land use patterns proposed in the Land Use chapter of the Plan support this goal? If so, are proposed densities higher within or adjacent to village/downtown/growth areas?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
6	A. Intensive residential development should be encouraged primarily in areas related to community centers, and strip development along highways should be discouraged.	<i>Does the plan ensure that intensive residential development is encouraged primarily in areas related to village/downtown/growth areas?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		<i>Does the plan allow for auto-centered commercial uses outside of designated village/downtown/growth areas?</i>	No	Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		<i>If so, are these areas that already have historic strip-type development? Is the town making an effort to incorporate more multi modal land uses?</i>	N/A		
		<i>If so, is strip development limited to areas that are already developed as strip developments or is the community encouraging new strip development?</i>	N/A		

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7	B. Economic growth should be encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and urban centers, or both.	<i>Is economic growth encouraged in locally designated growth areas, or employed to revitalize existing village and town urban centers, or both?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Economic Development); Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss where economic growth is to be located?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, Economic Development, Chapter 3, Land Use & Development	
		<i>Are the types of uses described of a scale and type that they will have little or no impact on the rural countryside? (such as home businesses)</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Economic Development), Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss the need to locate most municipal or public buildings within the economic core of the community?</i>	Yes	Chapter 4, (Serving the Community)	
		<i>Does the proposed transportation system encourage economic development in existing village centers/growth areas/downtowns?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
8	C. Public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, should reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area.	<i>Are public investments, including the construction or expansion of infrastructure, planned to reinforce the general character and planned growth patterns of the area?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 2 (Transportation); Chapter 4; Serving the Community	
		<i>Does the plan effectively discuss future infrastructure needs?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 2, (Transportation); Chapter 4 (Serving the Community)	
		<i>Does the plan effectively discuss where future infrastructure will be needed?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
		<i>If no planned infrastructure investments are planned, does the plan make this clear?</i>	N/A		
		<i>Are the development patterns proposed in the land use chapter likely to lead to forced infrastructure improvements and increased services due to increases in density? (such as high density development on rural roads)</i>	No		
9	2. To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes	<i>Does the plan have an economic development chapter?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Economic Development)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss its position in terms of regional employment? (i.e. is it an employment center, is it a bedroom community, etc.)</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Economic Development)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss unemployment or lack thereof?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Economic Development)	

		Does the plan discuss the balance of improving the economy and maintaining environmental standards?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Economic Development)	
10	3. To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.	Does the plan discuss adult education?	No		
		Does the plan discuss where educational opportunities are and might be found?	Yes	Chapter 3, (Education)	
		Is the town working with the local school district or the community to provide educational opportunities in schools and in other community settings?	Yes	Chapter 4, Serving the Community	
11	4. To provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.	Is the proposed land use plan coordinated with the transportation network? Does it discuss the connection between land use and transportation efficiency? The following ought to be considered:	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation); Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		o Access management	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
		o Discouraging new roads in outlying areas	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
		Does the Transportation chapter discuss and encourage multi-modal transportation?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
		Does the Transportation chapter discuss and encourage public transit?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
12	(A) Highways, air, rail and other means of transportation should be mutually supportive, balanced and integrated.	Does the Plan discuss development of transportation connections between smaller towns and centers of employment?	No		
		In the development of the transportation system, does the plan use good resource management and minimize or reduce negative impacts to the natural environment?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation);	
		Does the community consider other modes of transportation when discussing expansion of transportation infrastructure?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
13	5. To identify, protect and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape, including:				
		Does the plan identify significant natural and fragile areas? (Note to planners: does the plan include criteria for what makes an area "significant"? Towns should be encouraged to move in this direction so that the maps and future regulations are legally defensible).	Yes	Chapter 3, (Natural Resources)	Room for improvement

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14	(A) significant natural and fragile areas;	<i>If identified, does the plan clearly (not vaguely) discuss how they should be preserved?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Natural Resources)	Room for improvement
		<i>If identified, is land use proposed in such a fashion that these areas will be protected?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss alternative (non-regulatory) ways to protect these areas (other than through land use regulations)?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
15	(B) outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands.	<i>Does the plan identify outstanding water resources, including lakes, rivers, aquifers, shorelands and wetlands? (Note to planners: does the plan include criteria for what makes a resource “outstanding”? Towns should be encouraged to move in this direction so that the maps and future regulations are legally defensible)</i>	Yes/No	Chapter 3, (Natural Resources)	Room for improvement
		<i>If identified, does the plan clearly (not vaguely) discuss how they should be preserved?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Natural Resources)	Room for improvement
		<i>If identified, is land use proposed in such a fashion that these areas will be protected?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Natural Resources); (Land Use & Development)	Room for improvement
		<i>Does the plan discuss alternative (non-regulatory) ways to protect these areas (other than through land use regulations)?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Natural Resources)	
16	(C) significant scenic roads, waterways and views;	<i>Does the plan identify scenic roads, waterways and views? (Note to planners: does the plan include criteria for what makes a scenic resource “significant”? Towns should be encouraged to move in this direction so that the maps and future regulations are legally defensible)</i>	Yes/No	Chapter 3, (Aesthetics), (Natural Resources)	
		<i>If identified, does the plan clearly (not vaguely) discuss how they should be preserved?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3 (Aesthetics)	
		<i>If identified, is land use proposed in such a fashion that these areas will be protected?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3 (Aesthetics)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss alternative (non-regulatory) ways to protect these areas (other than through land use regulations)?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Aesthetics)	

17	(D) important historic structures sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archeologically sensitive areas.	<i>Does the plan identify historic structures, sites, or districts, archaeological sites and archaeologically sensitive areas? (Note to planners: does the plan include criteria for what makes a site “important”?</i> <i>Towns should be encouraged to move in this direction so that the maps and future regulations are legally defensible)</i>	Yes/No	Chapter 3, (Cultural/Historical and Archeological Resources)	Room for improvement
		<i>If identified, does the plan clearly (not vaguely) discuss how they should be preserved?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Cultural/Historical and Archeological Resources)	Room for improvement
		<i>If identified, is land use proposed in such a fashion that these areas will be protected?</i>	Yes		Room for improvement
		<i>Does the plan discuss alternative (non-regulatory) ways to protect these areas (other than through land use regulations)?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Cultural/Historical and Archeological Resources)	
18	6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources.				
19	(A) Vermont’s air, water, wildlife, mineral and land resources should be planned for use and development according to the principles set forth in 10 V.S.A 6086(a).	<i>Is there a complete inventory/map of existing water resources, wildlife habitat, mineral resources and other land resources?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, Essex's Sense of Place	
		<i>Does the plan discuss air quality? If so, does it describe measures to maintain and improve its quality?</i>	No		
		<i>Does the plan discuss water quality? If so, does it describe measures to maintain and improve its quality? Recommendation: Include watersheds - could be a good way to present/organize this information</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Water Resources)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss wildlife resources? If so, does the plan describe measures to maintain and improve its quality?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Wildlife Habitat)	
		<i>Does the plan discuss floodplain protection? If so, does the plan describe measures to maintain and improve its quality? Recommendation: Also include Fluvial Erosion Hazard maps and information.</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Flood Resilience)	
		<i>Does the proposed land use pattern maintain or improve the quality of the resources listed above?</i>	Yes		

		<i>Recommendation: Include reference to the All Hazards Mitigation Plan & Emergency Operation Plans. Do these plans call for any changes that should be addressed in the Town Plan?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Flood Resilience)	
20	7. To encourage the efficient use of energy and the development of renewable energy resources.	<i>Does the town recognize the connection between energy, transportation and land use?</i>	Yes		
		<i>Does the energy chapter of the plan discuss energy efficiency and renewable energy? Recommendation: Reference the VT State Residential Building Energy Code & the Commercial Building Energy Standards.</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Energy)	
		<i>Does the plan contain policies and recommendations that encourage energy efficiency?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Energy)	
		<i>Does the plan contain policies and recommendations that encourage the development of renewable energy resources?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Energy)	
		<i>Does the pattern of land use proposed in the community appear to encourage the efficient use of energy either through the proposed location of development in relation to community services, or in terms of lot layout and design?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation), Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
21	8. To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.	<i>Does the plan discuss recreation and identify important recreational areas?</i>	Yes	Chapter 4, (Parks & Recreation)	
		<i>Does the land use plan encourage development that protects or harms access to or the availability of recreational activities?</i>	Yes/No	Chapter 4, (Parks & Recreation)	
22	(A) Growth should not significantly diminish the value and availability of outdoor recreational activities.		Yes	Chapter 4,(Parks & Recreation)	
23	(B) Public access to noncommercial outdoor recreational opportunities, such as lakes and hiking trails, should be identified, provided, and protected wherever appropriate.		Yes	Chapter 4, (Parks & Recreation)	
24	9. To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.	<i>Does the plan discuss agriculture and forestry?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Forest Lands); Agricultural Lands	
25	(A) Strategies to protect long-term viability of agricultural and forest lands should be encouraged and should include	<i>Does the plan discuss the protection of agriculture and silviculture? If not, does it legitimately discuss why it does or cannot?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Forest Lands); Agricultural Lands	

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25	Forest lands should be encouraged and should include maintaining low overall density.	<i>Do proposed densities of development appear to negatively impact the availability of workable land?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation), Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
26	(B) The manufacture and marketing of value-added agricultural and forest products should be encouraged.	<i>Does the plan discuss the economic value of agriculture and forestry?</i>	No		
			N/A		
27	(C) The use of locally grown food products should be encouraged.	<i>Is the availability of locally produced food encouraged in the plan?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Agricultural Lands)	
28	(D) Sound forest and agricultural management practices should be encouraged.	<i>Does the plan discuss methods of agriculture/silviculture and their potential impact on the environment?</i>	No		
29	(E) Public investment should be planned so as to minimize development pressure on agriculture and forest land	<i>Does the plan direct public investments such as roads and sewer systems and other infrastructure away from agricultural and forest land?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
30	10. To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.	<i>Does the plan adequately discuss the extraction of earth resources?</i>	No		
31	11. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.	<i>Does the plan inventory the types and costs of housing in the community?</i>	Yes		Housing study is a priority Action Item, Chapter 1
		<i>Do the proposed land use patterns or public investments in the plan support the resident's ability to have safe and affordable housing?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		<i>Does the plan adequately discuss housing and housing density throughout the community?</i>	No		Housing Study is a priority Action Item, Chapter 1
32	(A) Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly for those citizens of low and moderate income.	<i>Does the plan have a housing section that encourages low income housing and housing for the elderly?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Housing)	
33	(B) New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers, and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.		Yes	Chapter 2, (Housing)	
34	(C) Sites for multi-family and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single-family conventional dwellings.		Yes	Chapter 2, (Housing); Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
	(D) Accessory apartments within or attached to single family	<i>Does the plan discuss accessory apartments?</i>	No		Housing Study is a priority Action Item, Chapter 1

35	residences which provide affordable housing in close proximity to cost-effective care and supervision for relatives or disabled or elderly persons should be allowed.	Does the plan discuss the availability of health care and elderly services?	No		
36	12. To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.	Does the plan discuss future public facility investments, or at least acknowledge that none are needed?	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 2 (Transportation) 4, Serving the Community	
		If so, does the plan discuss how these projects will be financed and how they will meet the needs of the public?	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 4, Serving the Community	
		Does the plan discuss how it provides services to the community and whether or not they are meeting the community's needs?	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 4, Serving the Community	
		Does the town have a Capital Improvement Plan and Budget outlining timing and funding for necessary public investments to ensure efficiency and coordination in their provision?	Yes		Will be incorporated by reference
37	(A) Public facilities and services should include fire and police protection, emergency medical services, schools, water supply and sewage and solid waste disposal.	Are fire, police, emergency medical services, schools, water supply, sewage and solid waste disposal discussed adequately in the plan? Recommendation: Identify how stormwater is being managed in the municipality as well, use of low impact development practices, etc.	Yes	Chapter 2, Serving the Community	
38	(B) The rate of growth should not exceed the ability of the community and the area to provide facilities and services.	Does the plan ensure that high density development occurs only where urban public facilities and services exist or can be reasonably made available?	Yes	Chapter 3, Land Use & Development	
		Does the plan discuss growth in relation to the provision of services and facilities adequately?	Yes	Chapter 3, Land Use & Development	
		Does the plan speak clearly about how growth might impact these services and facilities?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation); Chapter 4, Serving the Community	
		Does the plan discuss how they will control growth in a manner that allows them to phase upgrades in facilities and the expansion of services at a rate that is sustainable?	Yes	Chapter 4, Serving the Community	
39	13. To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.	Within the childcare element of the plan, is there a discussion about the availability of childcare related to the needs of the community? Note: Child Care Resource can be a good source of data.	Yes	Chapter 2, (Childcare)	
		Does the plan discuss how the town can make childcare more available?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Childcare)	

40	14. To encourage flood resilient communities. Note: this will take effect on July 1, 2014.				
41	(A) New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided. If new development is to be built in such areas, it should not exacerbate flooding and fluvial erosion.	<i>Is new development discouraged in these areas?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Flood Resilience)	
42	(B) The protection and restoration of floodplains and upland forested areas that attenuate and moderate flooding and fluvial erosion should be encouraged.	<i>Is protection and restoration of these areas encouraged?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 2 (Flood Resilience)	
43	(C) Flood emergency preparedness and response planning should be encouraged.	<i>Is flood emergency preparedness and response planning encouraged?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 2, (Flood Resilience)	
	Requirement	Guideline Questions	Yes/No	Location	Comments
	Contains 11 Required Elements in Sec. 4382(a)		Yes	Chapters 1-4	
44	1. A statement of objectives, policies and programs of the municipality, to guide the future growth and development of land, public services and facilities, and to protect the environment.				
45	2. A LAND USE PLAN, consisting of a MAP and statement present and prospective land use, indicating those areas proposed for forests, recreation, agriculture, (using 6 VSA Section 8), residence, commerce, industry, public and semi-public uses and open spaces reserved for flood plain, wetland protection, or other conservation purposes; and setting forth the present and prospective location, amount, intensity and character of such land uses and the appropriate timing or sequence of land development activities in relation to the provision of necessary community facilities and services.	<i>Does the plan include future and prospective land uses - both descriptions and locations on a map?</i>	Yes	Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
		<i>Does the plan collectively indicate appropriate timing or sequence of land development in relation to facilities and services?</i>	No		
46	3. A TRANSPORTATION PLAN, consisting of a MAP and a statement of present and prospective transportation and circulation facilities showing existing and proposed highways and streets by type and character of improvement, and where pertinent, parking facilities, transit routes, terminals, bicycle paths and trails, scenic roads, airports, railroads and port facilities, and other similar facilities or uses, with indications of priority of need.	<i>Does the plan include an inventory of existing roads and other transportation facilities?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2,(Transportation)	
		<i>If relevant, does the plan indicate the transportation problems in the community and the relative seriousness of those problems?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Transportation)	
		<i>If relevant, does the plan include possible solutions that the community can work toward, as specified by this element?</i>	Yes	Chapter 1, Action Plan; Chapter 2, Transportation	
		<i>Is the plan consistent with the currently adopted Metropolitan Transportation Plan?</i>	Yes		

47	4. A UTILITY AND FACILITY PLAN, consisting of a MAP and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities showing existing and proposed educational, recreational and other public sites, buildings and facilities, including hospitals, libraries, power generating plants and transmission lines, water supply, sewage disposal, refuse disposal, storm drainage and other similar facilities and activities, and recommendations to meet future needs for community facilities and services, with indications of priority of need, costs and methods of financing.	Does the plan indicate the location, character, and capacity of existing community facilities and public utilities as referenced in this element?	Yes	Chapter 4, Serving the Community	
		Does the plan describe how changes in population will affect the need for services and facilities, indicating the priority of need?	Yes	Chapter 4, Serving the Community	
		Does the plan indicate the recommended prospective facilities to meet future needs, indicating their estimated costs and methods of financing?	Yes		Capital Plan will be incorporated by reference
48	5. A statement of policies on the PRESERVATION of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic FEATURES AND RESOURCES.	Does the plan include one or more policy statements that document the community's commitment to take steps to ensure the preservation of the rare and irreplaceable features and resources in keeping with the goals of 24 VSA 4302? Recommendation: Include features from surrounding municipalities on your natural resource maps (and other maps if it makes sense to)?	Yes	Chapter 3, Essex's Sense of Place	
49	6. An EDUCATION FACILITIES PLAN consisting of a MAP and a statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.	Does the plan include statements and maps that collectively indicate the location, character and capacity of existing and prospective educational facilities?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Education)	
		Does the plan describe the ability of the local public school systems to meet the needs of children and adults, with specific reference to attendance trends, school facilities, and future needs?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Education)	Adult education not as well
		While not required, it is encouraged that this element be written in conjunction with local school boards.	Yes	Chapter 2, Education	It was written in conjunction with school and school district staff.
50	7. A recommended program for the IMPLEMENTATION of the objectives of the development plan.	Does the plan include statements that identify programs the municipality expects to use to address the objectives in the plan?	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan	
		When known funding, timeframe and responsible party can be helpful within the implementation element.	Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan	

51	8. A statement indicating how the plan relates to development trends and plans for ADJACENT MUNICIPALITIES, areas and the REGION developed under Title 24.	Does the plan include statements that collectively indicate that the municipality examined and considered development trends for the municipality, adjacent municipalities and the region?	Yes	Introduction	
52	9. An ENERGY PLAN, including an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality, a statement of policy on the conservation of energy, including programs, such as thermal integrity standards for buildings, to implement that policy, a statement of policy on the development of renewable energy resources, a statement of policy on patterns and densities of land use likely to result in conservation of energy	Does the plan include an analysis of energy resources, needs, scarcities, costs and problems within the municipality?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Energy)	
		Does the plan include an energy conservation policy and programs to implement that policy?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Energy)	
		Does the plan include a policy on the development and use of renewable energy resources?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Energy), Chapter 3, Aesthetics	
		Does the plan include a policy on how future development in the municipality can support energy conservation — both in terms of individual buildings and general land use patterns?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Energy)	
53	10. A HOUSING ELEMENT that shall include a recommended program for addressing low and moderate income persons' housing needs as identified by the regional planning commission pursuant to Section 4348a (a) (9) of Title 24.	Does the plan include an inventory of the existing housing stock that identifies the number of housing units in each major type of housing in the community based on recent data?	No		A housing study is a priority Action Item.
		Does the plan compare the existing housing stock with recent population trends (such as changes in total population, households, and household size)?	No		A housing study is a priority Action Item
		Does the plan assess the ability of municipal residents to reasonably afford safe, well-constructed, and efficient housing?	No		A housing study is a priority Action Item
		Does the plan identify progress and/or implementation steps toward Regional Plan strategies and actions regarding housing? (NOTE: this will not come into effect until the new Regional Plan (aka ECOS Plan) is adopted)	No		A housing study is a priority Action Item
54	11. An ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT that describes present economic conditions and the location, type and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth.	Does the plan identify present economic conditions and the location, type and scale of desired economic development, and identifies policies, projects, and programs necessary to foster economic growth?	Yes	Chapter 2, (Economic Development)	
55	(12)(A) A flood resilience plan that: Note: this will take effect on July 1, 2014.		Yes	Chapter 1, The Action Plan; Chapter 2, (Flood Resilience)	

As approved by CCRPC Board on May 22, 2013

56	(i) identifies flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 1428(a) or maps recommended by the Secretary, and designates those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property; and	<i>Does the plan identify flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, and designate these areas to be protected (including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests) for the purposes of reducing the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2 (Flood Resilience)	
57	(ii) recommends policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated under subdivision (12)(A)(i) of this subsection and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.	<i>Does the plan recommend policies to protect these areas and mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures and municipal investments?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Flood Resilience)	
58	(B) A flood resilience plan may reference an existing local hazard mitigation plan approved under 44 C.F.R. § 201.6.	<i>Does the municipality have an existing local hazard mitigation plan approved under 44 C.F.R. § 201.6, and if so is it referenced in the Plan?</i>	Yes	Chapter 2, (Flood Resilience)	
	Requirement	Guideline Questions	Yes/No	Location	Comments
	Compatible with the Current Regional Plan, Chap 117, Sec 4350(b)(1)(B)				
59	Planning areas		Yes	Introduction, Memo to CCRPC	
60	Goals and strategies		Yes	Memo to CCRPC; Chapter 3, (Land Use & Development)	
	Requirement	Guideline Questions	Yes/No	Location	Comments
	Compatible with Plans in other municipalities, Chap 117, Sec 4350(b)(1)(C)				
61	Land use		Yes	Introduction, Memo to CCRPC	
62	Goals and objectives		Yes	Introduction, Memo to CCRPC	
	Requirement	Guideline Questions	Yes/No	Location	Comments
	Confirm planning process, Chap 117, Sec 4350(a)				
63	1. Continuing planning process resulting in approved plan		Yes	Introduction, Memo to CCRPC	
64	2. Maintaining efforts to provide local funds for municipal & regional planning		Yes	Mmeo to CCRPC	

2016 Essex Town Plan

Planning Commission Public
Hearing Draft 8/14/15

(Cover image will be the winning photo, to
be submitted by July 1, 2015)

logo

2016 Essex Town Plan

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 22

Introduction

The Town of Essex is located in northwestern Vermont in the geographical center of Chittenden County, the state's most populous county. Essex lies within easy access of the social, recreational and cultural amenities of Burlington and the Champlain Valley as well as the spectacular wilderness and recreational opportunities offered by close proximity to the Green Mountain range.

Essex is bounded to the west by Colchester, to the north by Westford and to the east by Jericho. To the south, the Winooski River runs the length of Essex and separates it from South Burlington and Williston. The Village of Essex Junction lies within the Town's boundaries and is located in the southwestern.



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Essex is bounded to the west by Colchester, to the north by Westford and to the east by Jericho. To the south, the Winooski River runs the length of Essex and separates it from South Burlington and Williston.

Essex Town Plan Updates

- 1967 - "Comprehensive Plan, Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction, Vermont"
- 1970 - "Updating of a Comprehensive Planning Program" – Supplement to the 1967 Comprehensive Plan
- 1974 - "Land Use Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction; Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan for Essex" – Updates to the 1967 Plan to included portions of a study regarding recreation areas, trail system, and natural resource conservation.
- 1977 - "Land Use Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction, Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan for Essex" – Town Plan updates included portions of a study regarding recreation areas, trail system, and natural resource conservation. Zoning in the Saxon Hill Forest changed from Open Recreation to Resource Preservation District – Industrial.
- 1984 - Interim plan
- 1986 - "Municipal Development Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction"
- 1987 - "Municipal Development Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction" – The amended plan established design control districts in Essex Center and Fort Ethan Allen.
- 1991 - "Town Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction" – Incorporated several studies undertaken between 1988 and 1991.
- 1993 - 1991 Town Plan, as amended by voters in 1993
- 1996 - "Town Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction" – Update of 1991 Town Plan and 1993 amendments, primarily related to demographic and other statistical updates. Zoning in the area immediately north of the Town Center was revised to allow commercial and medium density residential uses.
- 2001 - "2001 Town Plan"
- 2006
- 2011 - "2011 Town Plan"

A thriving regional employment center, Essex has opportunities for commercial, residential and industrial development. The community also has a strong desire to retain a rural character in the areas not designated for growth.

Purpose of a Town Plan

Town plans express a shared community vision vivid enough to guide public and private initiatives and investment related to future growth and development. A plan should clearly express objectives related to transportation, infrastructure, conservation, education, energy use, resiliency, and fiscal management. A community's authority to create a town plan, which can also be referred to as a comprehensive plan, comes from Vermont Statutes Annotated (VSA) Title 24, Chapter 117. If implemented, town plans provide a template for civic health by accomplishing several objectives:

- Identifying relevant historical and current conditions;
- Providing a source of information for investors, local boards and commissions, residents and businesses, and the regional planning commission;
- Recommending further studies to address specific goals;
- Providing a standard of review for the Act 250, Act 248, and other state regulatory processes;
- Helping to guide the development of inter-municipal, regional, regional and state agency plans and programs;
- Serving as a guide for the Planning Commission and other Town commissions and committees when reviewing development proposals;

The art of a Town Plan is to balance varying community interests in such a way that a great place is made.



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Town plans are implemented through the zoning regulations and capital improvements, as well as through the initiatives of the individual town departments, committees and commissions. Municipalities must have comprehensive plans to adopt zoning regulations, institute a capital improvement program, and collect impact fees. Plans also make municipalities eligible for various state grant programs.

Planning History in Essex

The Town of Essex has a long and progressive history of planning. In 1965 the Town, including the Village of Essex Junction, secured the services of professional planning consultants, Hans Klunder Associates of Hanover, New Hampshire. By working with the Town and Village Planning Commissions, the firm developed a comprehensive plan for the community; voters adopted the plan in 1968. The same year, the state instituted the Vermont Planning and Development Act (Title 24, Chapter 117), encouraging municipalities to prepare a plan and stipulating certain requirements for their zoning regulations.

The so-called “Klunder Plan” provided an excellent foundation for the Town’s ongoing planning efforts. A significant comprehensive update did not happen until

the late 1980s. To prepare for the 1991 amendment, the Town conducted a series of studies and needs assessments. The 1991 Town Plan incorporated the Town Center Master Plan. The objectives of many of those studies and assessments have been accomplished and several are out of date. In 1992, Essex modified its town plan adoption process so that residents adopted updated plans by Australian ballot.

Recent planning projects include the following:

- 2008 Open Space Plan
www.providelink.org
- 2008 Route 15 Corridor Plan
www.providelink.org
- 2009 Transportation Management Plan
www.providelink.org
- 2010 Economic Development Plan
www.providelink.org
- 2011 Essex and Village of Essex Junction Flood Hazard Mitigation Plan
www.providelink.org
- 2011 Views to the Mountains: A Scenic Protection Plan
www.providelink.org
- 2014 Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction Bike/Pedestrian Plan
[provide www.providelink.org](http://www.providelink.org)

Process for the 2016 Town Plan

The development of the 2016 Town Plan did not include major changes to the vision of the Town as expressed in the 2011 Town Plan, but involved a significant reduction of outdated content and included professional graphic design to make the document more readable and interesting. A flood resilience element was added, as required by statute, and statistics were updated.

The extensive community outreach efforts done by Heart & Soul of Essex during late 2012 and early 2013 have been incorporated into the 2016 Town Plan. Essex and Essex Junction received a \$50,000 grant from the Orton Family Foundation to organize Heart and Soul of Essex, a two-year project that DID WHAT. It did the following: Heart & Soul held 43 neighborhood conversations in living rooms, libraries and businesses, engaging nearly 350 people in Essex and the Village of Essex Junction. Another 540 people completed a survey about the community's most important values. In total, approximately 1,000 people participated in the effort, which ended in winter 2014. Heart & Soul identified six core values for Essex: Community Connections, Education, Health and Recreation, Local Economy, Safety, and Thoughtful Growth. Thoughtful Growth emerged as the most pressing concept in the community.



The six values reinforced the vision and goals of the 2011 Town Plan, allowing the Planning Commission to focus the 2016 update on format. The Planning Commission still sought public input for the 2016 Town Plan. Community Development staff set up a table at the Five Corners Farmers' Market in 2014, and staff and commissioners hosted an event with food and beverages at the Essex Free Library one evening in 2014. An informational table was set up at the 2015 Town Meeting. Residents that signed up for an email list received regular updates about progress, and Town staff used Front Porch Forum to announce work sessions and public hearings. The Planning Commission and Selectboard held approximately 15 work sessions and public hearings prior to the 2016 Town Meeting.

Consistency with Adjoining Town Plans

The Town of Essex borders Westford to the north, Colchester to the west, Jericho to the east, and the Village of Essex Junction, South Burlington, and Williston to the south. These communities have comprehensive plans that are generally consistent with the Essex Town Plan.

Colchester - The Colchester –Essex border has a variety of planning areas. The Colchester side of the border has Rural, Village, Suburban Residential and Commercial/Industrial districts. Similarly, Essex has Conservation, Agricultural, Industrial and Open Recreation planning areas. The undeveloped park areas of Indian Brook Reservoir and the nearby Colchester Pond Natural Area are surrounded by low density residential areas. The Parade Grounds in Fort Ethan Allen span both towns, and the uses in Fort Ethan Allen are compatible between the two towns.

Essex Junction - Planning areas along the border between the Village of Essex Junction and the Town of Essex are consistent, although the Essex side contains more business activities in the planning areas, including small portions of Industrial and larger portions of Mixed Use.

Jericho - The border that Essex shares with Jericho is largely characterized by agricultural and conservation

districts, along with low-density residential development. Along Route 15, Jericho's Village district begins at the border between the towns. One portion of Essex's Industrial planning area extends to the Jericho border. Jericho does not permit access to this area from Skunk Hollow Road.

South Burlington - The short border that Essex shares with South Burlington is Floodplain on both sides.

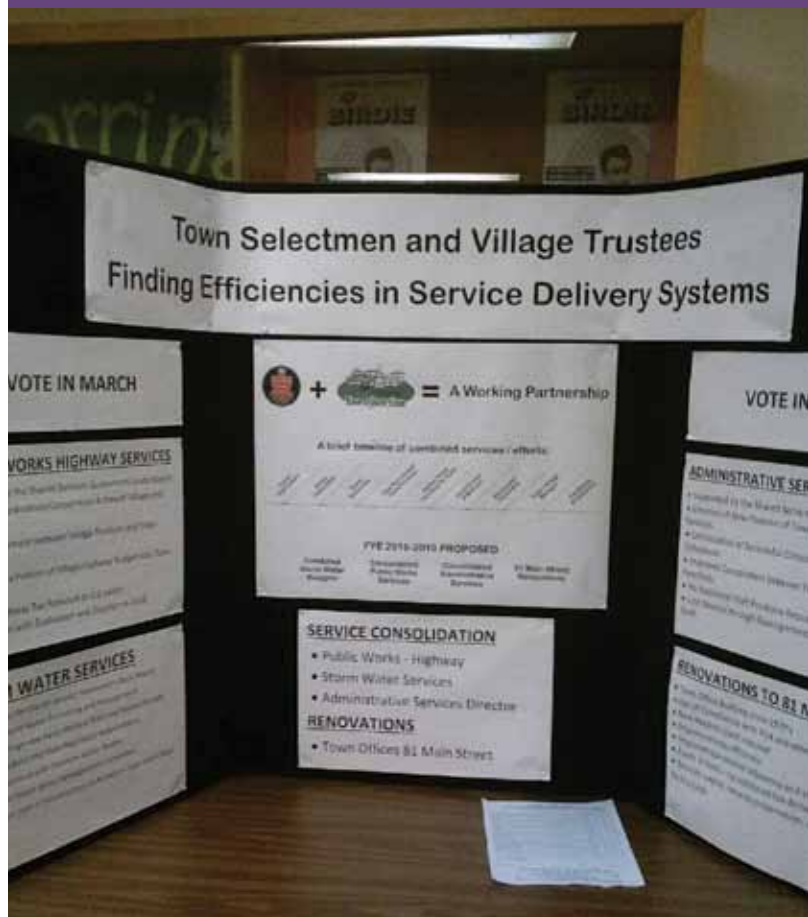
Westford – The border between Essex and Westford is consistently planned on both sides. In Westford, the border is characterized by Floodplain, Agricultural, Forestry, and low density Residential planning areas. Land in Essex contains Conservation, Agricultural, low density Residential, and Floodplain planning areas.

Williston - The Winooski River Floodplain serves as the immediate border between Essex and Williston. In Essex, areas just beyond the floodplain feature a combination of Low and Medium Density Residential, Agricultural, and Industrial planning areas. Williston has largely the same planning areas just past the floodplain, with no significant inconsistencies.

Consistency with the 2013 Chittenden ECOS Plan

The 2016 Essex Town Plan is generally consistent with the 2013 Chittenden ECOS Plan, a regional plan that designates Essex as an area primed for growth in Metro, Suburban, and Enterprise planning areas. The Town's emphasis on concentrating development in the Town Center, Saxon Hill and the Susie Wilson Road Corridor is consistent with the ECOS plan's land use goal to "encourage future growth in the Center, Metro, Enterprise, Suburban and Village Planning Areas to maintain Vermont's historic settlement pattern and respect working and natural landscapes."

The 2016 Essex Town Plan is also consistent with the ECOS Plan's goals for transportation, water quality, education, social community, and economic development. How so? How long do we want this plan to be?



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The 2016 Essex Town Plan is generally consistent with the 2013 Chittenden ECOS Plan, a regional plan that designates Essex as an area primed for growth in Metro, Suburban, and Enterprise planning areas.



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Regulatory Use of the Town Plan Act 250

Development projects meeting Act 250 jurisdictional thresholds in Essex must obtain a land use permit from the Vermont Natural Resource Board's District #4 Environmental Commission. As part of that review process, projects need to meet 10 criteria defined under 10 V.S.A. § 6086. Act 250's Criterion 10 requires proposed projects to be "in conformance with any duly adopted local or regional plan or capital program."

Provisions of a town plan apply if they articulate a specific policy that is relevant to the area of town in which the project is proposed. Mandatory and specific towns plan policies guide the District Environmental Commission's decision. For example, use of the word "shall" is mandatory, whereas "should" is advisory. If the language in a town plan is ambiguous, case law instructs district environmental commissions to examine the relevant zoning regulations in an effort to resolve the ambiguity.

The 2016 Essex Town Plan has goals and general policies in Chapter One and specific policies in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

Section 248

Certain utility facilities, including _____, are required to obtain a Certificate of Public Good from the Vermont Public Service Board to establish that the facility will meet

criteria defined under 30 V.S.A. § 248. One of the Section 248 criteria is that the proposed facility will "not interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions."

Utility facilities, such as renewable energy installations, are statutorily exempt from local regulation. Therefore, unlike Act 250, the Vermont Public Service Board does not consider zoning regulations when interpreting comprehensive plan policies. The exemption also applies to wireless telecommunications facilities reviewed under 30 V.S.A. § 248(a).

The Vermont Public Service Board often deems comprehensive plan policies to be too vague to apply to a specific project or parcel of land. Accordingly, municipalities have worked to include clear, written community standards in their comprehensive plan to assist the Vermont Public Service Board in its review. The Board, however, has also ruled that specific standards can effectively act as *de facto* zoning bylaws that then circumvent the statutory exemption found in 24 V.S.A. § 4413(b).

Municipalities are looking to the state to provide guidance on writing community standards that will be given serious consideration in comprehensive plans.

Chapter 1: The Action Plan

Introduction

Planning priorities for years have been placed in this chapter so that residents, landowners, developers and investors can easily grasp the Town's direction in the next several years. The areas in Town designated for growth and the areas designated for lower levels of development and open space are specified on the Future Land Use Map (below). The narrative, which provides the data and basis for the Action Items, follows in Chapters 2-4. Maps are integrated into the chapters rather than being bundled at the end. References to supportive resources are included within the chapters and the digital version of the Plan will include hyperlinks to supportive town studies and plans. Implementation guidelines are included with the Action Items to more effectively encourage the Planning Commission, Selectboard, staff, and committees to take ownership of the Plan. The Action Plan items have been selected as being achievable within the next five-ten years, budgets and resources allowing.

Vision Statement

Essex is a thriving community with ongoing economic and residential growth. As noted in the Introduction, in 2012 Essex, including the Village of Essex Junction, was awarded a planning grant from the Orton Family Foundation to engage in a conversation about the future of Essex. A non-profit organization, Heart & Soul of Essex, was formed to carry out the project.



The summation of the two-year effort is contained in the 2014 final report's executive summary. [\[Link\]](#). A vision statement (right) for the entire community emerged as part of the process

Vision Statement

"We learned that despite a wide variety of opinions and ideas, there are a few key things that matter most. We value our connections with each other. Our neighborly traditions keep us safe, sustain us during challenging times and bring us together for celebration and fun. We see ourselves as a community that values education and learning. We want to be a welcoming place and aspire to become more culturally aware as our community becomes more diverse. We take pride in many community assets, including our highly regarded schools, libraries and recreation departments. We want to see these institutions continue to improve. We value the urban and rural mix that make up Essex. We want to see balanced future growth, which includes a diverse mix of housing options, economic development, and conservation of open space. We hope for improved infrastructure that will ease traffic, increase our safety and connect all parts of the community together. We are especially passionate about the prospect of a well-connected system of sidewalks and bike paths throughout all of Essex."

2016 *Essex* Town Plan



Selectboard Public Hearing Draft



Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

2 The Town of Essex is located in northwestern Vermont in the geographical center of Chittenden
3 County, the state's most populous county. A thriving regional employment center, Essex has
4 opportunities for commercial, industrial, and residential development. The community also has a
5 strong desire to retain its rural character in the areas not designated for growth.

6 Essex lies within easy access of the social, recreational and cultural amenities of Burlington and the
7 Champlain Valley as well as the spectacular wilderness and recreational opportunities offered by the
8 Green Mountains.

9 Purpose of a Town Plan

10 Town plans express a shared community vision vivid enough to guide public and private initiatives
11 and investment related to future growth and development, as well as land preservation. A plan
12 should clearly express how the community intends to accomplish priority objectives related to
13 transportation, infrastructure, conservation, education, energy use, resiliency, and fiscal management.

14 "The art of a town plan is to balance varying community interests in such a way that a great place is
15 made," said Essex Community Development Director Dana Hanley.

16 A community's authority to create a town plan, which can also be referred to as a comprehensive
17 plan, comes from the [Vermont Planning and Development Act](#), Vermont Statutes Annotated (VSA)
18 Title 24, Chapter 117. The state instituted the Planning and Development Act in 1968. If
19 implemented, comprehensive plans provide a template for civic health by accomplishing several
20 objectives:

- 21 • Identifying relevant historical and current conditions;
- 22 • Providing a source of information for investors, local boards and commissions, residents and
23 businesses, and the regional planning commission;
- 24 • Recommending further studies to address specific goals;
- 25 • Providing a standard of review for [Act 250](#), [Act 248](#), and other state regulatory processes;
- 26 • Helping to guide the development of inter-municipal, regional, and state agency plans and
27 programs; and
- 28 • Serving as a guide for the Planning Commission and other Town commissions and
29 committees when they review development proposals.

30 Town plans are implemented through zoning regulations and capital improvements, as well as
31 through the initiatives of individual town departments, committees and commissions. Per state law,
32 municipalities must have comprehensive plans to adopt zoning regulations, institute a capital
33 improvement program, and collect impact fees. Plans also make municipalities eligible for various
34 state grant programs.

35 **PULL QUOTE:** *The art of a town plan is to balance varying community interests in such a way that a*
36 *great place is made.'*

37 – Dana Hanley, Essex Community Development Director

39 Planning History in Essex

The Town of Essex has a long history of planning, dating back to 1965, when the Town – including the Village of Essex Junction – hired professional planning consultants. Voters adopted the resulting comprehensive plan in 1967. Ensuing decades brought various amendments and updates, including updates every five years since 1996.

Town plans often lead to specific planning projects. The following studies have been completed in recent years:

- [Essex Open Space Plan](#) (2008)
- [Route 15 Corridor Study](#) (2008)
- [Transportation Management Plan](#) (2009)
- [Economic Development Vision and Plan](#) (2010)
- [Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction, Vermont Flood Hazard Mitigation Plan](#) (2011)
- [Views to the Mountains: A Scenic Protection Plan](#) (2011)
- [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction](#) (2014)

SIDEBAR: Essex Town Plan Updates

- 1967: *Comprehensive Plan, Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction, Vermont*
- 1970: *Updating of a Comprehensive Planning Program* – Supplement to the 1967 Comprehensive Plan
- 1974: *Land Use Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction; Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan for Essex* – Updates to the 1967 Plan included portions of a study regarding recreation areas, trail system, and natural resource conservation.
- 1977: *Land Use Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction, Amendment to the Comprehensive Plan for Essex* – Town Plan updates included portions of a study regarding recreation areas, trail system, and natural resource conservation. Zoning in the Saxon Hill Forest changed from Open Recreation to Resource Preservation District – Industrial.
- 1984: Interim plan
- 1986: *Municipal Development Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction*
- 1987: *Municipal Development Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction* – The amended plan established design control districts in Essex Center and Fort Ethan Allen.
- 1991: *Town Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction* – Incorporated several studies undertaken between 1988 and 1991.
- 1993: 1991 Town Plan, as amended by voters in 1993
- 1996: “*Town Plan for the Town of Essex Outside the Village of Essex Junction*” – Update of 1991 Town Plan and 1993 amendments, primarily related to demographic and other statistical updates. Zoning in the area immediately north of the Town Center was revised to allow commercial and medium density residential uses.
- 2001: Interim plan
- 2006: *2006 Town Plan* -Alterations to the locations and densities of several properties ended up requiring a change to the Future Land Use Map and to the MXD-PUD zoning district.
- 2011: *2011 Town Plan* – Primarily a statistical update, incorporated the statutorily required economic development and day care components.

- 2014: *2014 Town Plan* – An effort to change certain designations within the Saxon Hill/RPD-I district, to allow for the creation a public park, residential uses, land limited gravel extraction, among other feature. It failed at the polls.

Process for the 2016 Town Plan

The 2016 Town Plan does not include major changes to the vision of the Town as expressed in the 2011 Town Plan. Revisions involved statistical updates, a reduction of outdated content, and a graphic redesign to make the document more readable and visually appealing. A flood resilience element was added, as required by statute.

The extensive community outreach efforts done by [Heart & Soul of Essex](#) from 2012 to 2014 have been incorporated into the 2016 Town Plan. Essex and Essex Junction received a \$100,000 grant from the [Orton Family Foundation](#) to organize Heart & Soul, a two-year project that engaged Essex residents inside and outside the Village and identified a shared set of values and vision for the future of the community. Nearly 350 people participated in 43 neighborhood conversations in living rooms, libraries and businesses. Another 540 people completed a survey about the community's most important values. Participants represented broad, diverse sections of the community, including students, young parents, the business community, new Americans, and LGBTQ residents, to name a few. In total, approximately 1,000 people participated in the effort.



Heart & Soul identified six core [values](#) for Essex: [Community Connections](#), [Education](#), [Health and Recreation](#), [Local Economy](#), [Safety](#), and [Thoughtful Growth](#). Thoughtful Growth emerged as the most pressing issue in the community.

The six values reinforced the vision and goals of the 2011 Town Plan, allowing the Planning Commission to primarily focus the 2016 amendment on updating and format.

For community outreach efforts, Community Development staff set up a table at the Five Corners Farmers' Market in 2014, and staff and commissioners hosted an evening event with food and beverages at the Essex Free Library in the fall of 2014. An informational table was set up at the 2015 Town Meeting. Residents who signed up for an email list received regular updates about progress, and Town staff used Front Porch Forum to announce work sessions and public hearings. The entire draft of the 2016 Town Plan remained on the Town's webpage as a work-in-progress and was updated regularly. The Planning Commission and Selectboard held numerous work sessions and public hearings prior to the 2016 Town Meeting.

IMAGE: Town Plan workshop at library

Consistency with adjoining Town Plans

The Town of Essex is bordered by Westford to the north, Colchester to the west, Jericho to the east, and the Village of Essex Junction, South Burlington, and Williston to the south. These communities have comprehensive plans that are generally consistent with the Essex Town Plan.

Colchester – The Colchester-Essex border has a variety of planning areas. The Colchester side of the border has Commercial/Industrial, Rural, Suburban Residential, and Village districts. Similarly, Essex has Agricultural, Conservation, Industrial and Open Recreation planning areas. The undeveloped park areas of Indian Brook Reservoir and the nearby Colchester Pond Natural Area are surrounded by Low Density Residential areas. The Parade Grounds in Fort Ethan Allen span both towns, and the uses in Fort Ethan Allen are compatible between the two towns.

Essex Junction – Planning areas along the border between the Village of Essex Junction and the Town of Essex are consistent, although the Town side contains more business activities in the planning areas, including small portions of Industrial and larger portions of Mixed Use.

Jericho – The border that Essex shares with Jericho is largely characterized by agricultural and conservation districts, along with low-density residential development. Along VT Route 15, Jericho's Village district begins at the border between the towns. One portion of Essex's Industrial planning area extends to the Jericho border. Jericho does not permit access to this area from Skunk Hollow Road.

South Burlington – The short border that Essex shares with South Burlington is Floodplain on both sides.

Westford – In Westford, the border is characterized by Agricultural, Floodplain, Forestry, and Low Density Residential planning areas. Land in Essex contains Agricultural, Conservation, Floodplain, and Low Density Residential planning areas.

Williston – The Winooski River Floodplain serves as the immediate border between Essex and Williston. In Essex, areas just beyond the floodplain feature a combination of Agricultural, Industrial, and Low and Medium Density Residential planning areas. Williston has largely the same planning areas just past the floodplain, with no significant inconsistencies.

Consistency with the 2013 Chittenden County ECOS Plan

The 2013 [*Chittenden County ECOS Plan*](#) designates Essex as an area primed for growth in Metro, Suburban, and Enterprise planning areas – those areas that have higher density, mixed use development. The Town's emphasis on concentrating development in the Town Center, Saxon Hill and the Susie Wilson Road Corridor is consistent with the ECOS plan's land use goal to "encourage future growth in the Center, Metro, Enterprise, Suburban and Village Planning Areas to maintain Vermont's historic settlement pattern and respect working and natural landscapes."

The 2016 Essex Town Plan is also consistent with the ECOS Plan's goals for transportation, water quality, education, social community, and economic development.

Regulatory Use of the Town Plan

Act 250

[Act 250](#) is a Vermont law that was passed in 1970 to give the state a measure of control over larger development projects. The [Vermont Natural Resources Board](#) oversees Act 250. As the NRB website says, “The Act 250 program provides a public, quasi-judicial process for reviewing and managing the environmental, social and fiscal consequences of major subdivisions and developments in Vermont.”

Development projects that require Act 250 review in Essex must obtain a land use permit from the NRB’s District #4 Environmental Commission. As part of the review process, projects need to meet the 10 criteria defined under [10 V.S.A. § 6086](#). Act 250’s Criterion 10 requires proposed projects to be “in conformance with any duly adopted local or regional plan or capital program.”

Provisions of a town plan apply if they evince a specific policy that pertains to the area of town in which the project is proposed. Mandatory and specific town plan provisions guide the District Environmental Commission’s decision. For example, use of the word “shall” is mandatory, whereas “should” is advisory. If the language in a town plan is ambiguous, case law instructs District Environmental Commissions to examine the relevant zoning regulations in an effort to resolve the ambiguity. *In re Molgano*, 163 Vt. 25 (1994).

For Act 250 jurisdictional purposes, the Town has zoning and subdivision bylaws and is therefore considered a “ten acre town,” meaning jurisdiction is triggered only for commercial projects on more than 10 acres of land. Jurisdiction is also triggered by a number of other factors, including subdivisions exceeding 10 or more lots and development above 2,500 feet in elevation.

Section 248

Certain utility facilities, including electric transmission facilities, electric generation facilities, and some gas pipelines, are required to obtain a Certificate of Public Good from the [Vermont Public Service Board](#). The Certificate of Public Good has to establish that the facility will meet criteria defined under [30 V.S.A. § 248](#), including that the proposed facility will not interfere with the orderly development of the region with due consideration having been given to the recommendations of the municipal and regional planning commissions, as well as to those of the Selectboard and in the Town Plan.

Utility facilities are statutorily exempt from local regulation. Therefore, unlike Act 250, the Vermont Public Service Board does not consider zoning regulations when interpreting Town Plan provisions but it does give ‘due consideration’ to the recommendations of local planning commissions. The exemption also applies to wireless telecommunications facilities reviewed under 30 V.S.A. § 248a.

The Vermont Public Service Board often deems town plan provisions to be too vague to apply to a specific project or parcel of land. Accordingly, municipalities have worked to include clear, written community standards in their town plans to assist the Vermont Public Service Board in its review. A community standard with respect to commercial scale (500KW and greater) ground-mounted solar electric generation facilities is located in Chapter 3 under the *Aesthetic Resources* section.

Chapter 1: The Action Plan

Introduction

The Action Plan that appears in this chapter identifies the Town's priority action items for the next decade, so that residents, landowners, staff, developers, Selectboard members, Planning Commissioners, and investors can easily grasp the Town's direction over the next 10 years. Implementation tasks appear as part of the Action Plan.

Essex has designated certain parts of town for growth and other areas for lower levels of development or the protection of open space. Those areas are specified on the Future Land Use Map.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of the Town Plan provide the data and basis for the Action Plan. References to supportive resources are included within the chapters; the digital version of the Town Plan includes hyperlinks to these resources.

Vision Statement

Essex is a thriving community with ongoing economic and residential growth. As noted in the Introduction, in 2012 the Orton Family Foundation awarded Essex, including the Village of Essex Junction, a planning grant to engage the community in a conversation about the future of the town. A non-profit organization, Heart & Soul of Essex, was formed to carry out the project. The group's 2014 **final report** contains an executive summary of the effort, and the entire process resulted in a vision statement for the entire community:

We learned that despite a wide variety of opinions and ideas, there are a few key things that matter most. We value our connections with each other. Our neighborly traditions keep us safe, sustain us during challenging times and bring us together for celebration and fun. We see ourselves as a community that values education and learning. We want to be a welcoming place and aspire to become more culturally aware as our community becomes more diverse. We take pride in many community assets, including our highly regarded schools, libraries and recreation departments. We want to see these institutions continue to improve.

We value the urban and rural mix that make up Essex. We want to see balanced future growth, which includes a diverse mix of housing options, economic development, and conservation of open space. We hope for improved infrastructure that will ease traffic, increase our safety and connect all parts of the community together. We are especially passionate about the prospect of a well-connected system of sidewalks and bike paths throughout all of Essex.

Format

Each section of the Town Plan's Action Plan leads with one or more goals, followed by a general policy. Actions, which represent the priority items to be accomplished within the next 10 years, appear under the policies.

Goals are long-range aspirations that serve to establish the Town's future direction. Each goal describes the end condition sought by the Town.

Policies are courses of action adopted and followed by a government, institution, body, or individual to attain the desired objectives.

Actions are short-, medium-, and long-term steps toward achieving the goals to be taken by the appropriate boards, commissions, committees, staff members, and community volunteers.

Implementation

State statute, 24 V.S.A. § 4382(a)(7), requires “a recommended program for the implementation of the development plan.” The program should identify the action, the entity responsible for carrying out the action, the potential manner of funding, and the time frame.

For purposes of the Town Plan, **short term** is one to three years, **medium term** is four to five years, and **long term** is five to 10 years. **Ongoing** means that a continuing action does not have a particular timeframe for completion.

Important Caveat

The priority Action Items were generated from several sources: residents participating in Town Plan work sessions and hearings; individual Town departments; and Town boards, commissions, and advisory committees.

Implementation may take several forms:

- Planning and studies;
- Land use regulation amendments;
- Changes in sewer allocation policies;
- Capital expenditures for Town facilities, and/or use of personnel;
- Changes in Town tax policy;
- Communication, including encouragement of various actions, coordination with other public and private entities, and education.

Town plans are meant to be aspirational, visionary documents. Not all of the proposed Action Items may be accomplished by 2026. Some of the Action Items may prove to be politically or financially infeasible. When an Action Item identifies the Operating Budget, Capital Fund, or bond authorization as a potential funding source, it does not mean the item has been vetted by the Selectboard or approved by voters. In forwarding the 2016 Town Plan to the voters for approval, the Selectboard did not necessarily agree to fund any of the Action Items.

The Action Items identify a particular party as the having the “lead responsibility,” but the responsibility may shift with changes in staffing, finances, politics, or partnering conditions.

Despite the above-mentioned caveats, the Action Plan does provide a roadmap to be used by town government for the purposes of community planning.

The Action Plan

1. Land Use and Development

Goals

- 1a.** Essex West is developed as a sub-regional growth center that provides employment opportunities, a diversity of housing opportunities, and retail and personal services.

- 1b. The historic, cultural, and visual qualities of Fort Ethan Allen are preserved.
- 1c. The Town Center is a focus of concentrated growth and community life.
- 1d. A human scale of development that fosters a sense of community in the Neighborhood Growth Centers.
- 1e. The Town's natural resources, water quality and scenic views are protected.
- 1f. Economic development is carried out in the Saxon Hill Industrial Park with consideration and respect for the natural surroundings.

MAP: Future Land Use Map, including the Village

General Policy

1(G): Development shall occur in areas suitable for growth in a compact manner as opposed to scattered development throughout Town.

Actions

Developed by the Planning Commission and the Community Development Department.

- **Action 1.1:** Update the 1991 Town Center Master Plan; amend zoning and subdivision regulations, as needed, following the update.
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department staff, Planning Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time frame: Short term to medium term
- **Action 1.2:** Re-examine the draft Conservation Subdivision Regulations
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department staff, Planning Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term to medium term
- **Action 1.3:** Create renewable energy siting standards
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department staff, Planning Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 1.4:** Update the regulations in the Business Design Control Overlay Districts
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department staff, Planning Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time frame: Medium term

2. Economic Development

Goals

- 2a. The Essex tax base is increased and diversified by an economic development climate that is friendly to a large variety of businesses, including start-ups.
- 2b. A culture of innovation and job creation is fostered.
- 2c. Infrastructure, in the form of roads, bridges, trails, and sewer and water lines, is maintained and improved.

- 2d. The attraction and retention of employers, and employees, is supported by the availability of affordable housing.

General Policy

2(G): Economic growth shall be diversified, with development occurring in and around the Town Center, the Susie Wilson Road Corridor, and the Saxon Hill/RPD-I district.

Actions

Developed by the Economic Development Commission in conjunction with the Community Development Department.

- **Action 2.1:** Expand economic development staffing
Lead responsibility: Selectboard, Economic Development Commission
Potential funding: Operating budget
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 2.2:** Improve land use regulations to prevent impediments to economic development
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department, Economic Development Commission, Planning Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 2.3:** Advocate for upgrades to VT Route 117
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission
Potential funding: N/A
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 2.4:** Encourage entrepreneurship in Essex by promoting innovation, maker spaces, and partnerships with neighboring communities
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission
Funding: N/A
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 2.5:** Encourage the creation of a Development Review Board through the Thoughtful Growth in Action (TGIA) initiative.
Lead responsibility: Selectboard, Community Development Department, Economic Development Commission
Potential funding: N/A
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 2.6:** Develop and market the “Essex Brand”
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission, Community Development Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 2.7:** Assess uses at Fort Ethan Allen and consider changes to the zoning regulations
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department, Economic Development Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time frame: Medium term

3. Transportation

Goals

- 3a.** A transportation system that provides the quick, energy-efficient, and safe movement of people, goods and services within Essex and between neighboring towns.
- 3b.** Transportation system improvements that favor and strengthen the community and support regional economic opportunities for Vermont employers and employees.
- 3c.** A community that is served by varied modes of transportation with automobile use balanced by increased availability of public transit, sidewalks and multi-use trails.

General Policy

3(G): Transportation systems shall be integrated with land use policy in such a way that improvements are compatible with the overarching settlement pattern of compact settlement surrounded by rural countryside.

Actions

Developed by the Public Works Department.

- **Action 3.1:** Consolidate the Town Public Works Department and Village Highway Department into a single entity.
Lead responsibility: Town Public Works Department, Village Highway Department, Municipal Manager, Town Selectboard, Village Trustees.
Potential Funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 3.2:** Design and construct pedestrian bike paths on VT Route 2A, Pinecrest Drive and Towers Road
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department and Community Development Department
Potential funding: State/federal grants and Capital Budget
Time frame: Short to medium term
- **Action 3.3:** Design and construct a new signalized intersection at Sand Hill Road and VT Route 15
Lead responsibility: VTRANS and Public Works Department
Potential funding: VTRANS and federal funds
Time Frame: Medium term

- **Action 3.4:** Design and construct improved signals at VT Route 2A/Susie Wilson Bypass and the Circumferential Highway off-ramp
Lead responsibility: VTRANS, Public Works Department
Potential funding: VTRANS and federal funds
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 3.5:** Develop new Public Works Specifications
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, consulting engineers
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 3.6:** Construct a new multi-use path from Susie Wilson Road to the City of Winooski
Lead responsibility: VTRANS and affected communities
Potential funding: VTRANS and Federal funds
Time Frame: Long term

4. Housing

Goals

- 4a. The housing needs of Essex's projected resident population are met, particularly for low- and moderate-income residents.
- 4b. A diversity of housing types, including microhousing, and choices between rental and ownership, are provided.
- 4c. Housing is located in areas convenient to employment centers, shopping facilities, schools and public transportation.

General Policy

4(G): Diverse housing opportunities shall be sought with a large majority of them being located in the areas in Town identified as appropriate for growth: the Town Center, the Susie Wilson Road Corridor, and a portion of Essex Center.

Actions

Developed by the Planning Commission and the Community Development Department.

- **Action 4.1:** Undertake a comprehensive housing study, including recommendations for regulatory and non-regulatory methods of increasing the stock of affordable housing
Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, Community Development Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 4.2:** Develop regulations to promote and remove the barriers to affordable housing, if this initiative is recommended in the comprehensive housing study
Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Community Development Department
Potential funding: Operating budget, grants
Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 4.3:** Create an Affordable Housing Trust Fund
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department, Selectboard
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 4.4:** Build affordable housing alliances with the Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity, Cathedral Square, and the Champlain Valley Housing Trust
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department
Potential funding: N/A
Time frame: Short term to medium term

5. Energy

Goal

5a. The Town is taking actions and developing policy in accordance with the State of Vermont 2011 Comprehensive Energy Plan, or as amended, in the commercial, residential and transportation sectors.

General Policy

5(G): Energy conservation, energy efficiency, and finding ways to generate renewable energy shall be taken into consideration during development review and when creating Town policies and initiatives.

Actions

Developed by the Energy Committee.

- **Action 5.1:** Fund an Energy Coordinator position to develop energy implementation plans, coordinate efforts with other governmental agencies, and encourage residential and commercial energy conservation.
Lead responsibility: Selectboard, Energy Committee
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 5.2:** Continue to explore energy efficiency and renewable energy options for all town-owned facilities, from buildings to street lighting. Findings and recommendations should be based on an audit of all town-owned buildings and a subsequent cost-benefit analysis for upgrading or replacement.
Lead responsibility: Selectboard, Energy Committee, Finance Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 5.3:** Revise the zoning regulations to incent and/or require residential and commercial energy standards that exceed Vermont energy building codes.
Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Community Development Department, Energy Committee and other partners
Potential funding: Operating budget, grants

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 5.4:** Develop education programs and participate in Efficiency Vermont programs to encourage energy efficiency in existing residential and commercial buildings.

Lead responsibility: Energy Committee and other partners

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 5.5:** Promote community solar net metering and develop a study for the former Town dump as a potential future site.

Lead responsibility: Energy Committee, Selectboard

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants

Time frame: Long term

- **Action 5.6:** Develop and implement strategies to become an “Electric Vehicle-Ready Town”

Lead responsibility: Energy Committee and Community Development Department

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Short term

6. Flood Resilience

Goals

6a. New development in floodplains, fluvial erosion hazard areas, and land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests is avoided.

6b. Exacerbation of flooding and fluvial erosion is reduced. These areas are protected and restored.

6c. Flood emergency preparedness and response is achieved.

General Policy

6(G): Land shall be conserved, and development avoided, in particularly vulnerable areas such as floodplains and river corridors.

Actions

Developed by the Community Development Department and the Public Works Department, in conjunction with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

- **Action 6.1:** Adopt updated Public Works Specifications

Lead responsibility: Town Public Works Director/Engineer

Potential funding: Operating budget

Time Frame: Short term

- **Action 6.2:** Construct flow restoration improvements within the water quality-impaired watersheds of Indian Brook and Sunderland Brook.

Lead responsibility: Town Public Works Director/Town Engineer, Stormwater Coordinator

Potential funding: [Capital Plan](#), state and federal grants

Time Frame: Medium term to long term

- **Action 6.3:** Reduce erosion from existing road and development sources in the Alder Brook watershed between VT Route 15 and VT Route 117

Lead responsibility: Town Public Works Director/Engineer, Stormwater Coordinator

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Short term to long term

- **Action 6.4:** Evaluate standards in planning and zoning documents for steep slopes, wetlands, and highly erodible areas

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department staff and Community Development staff

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Medium term

- **Action 6.5:** Stream bank stabilization/ buffer plantings/ channel and road ditch protection in critical fluvial areas

Lead responsibility: Town Public Works Department, Conservation Committee

Potential funding: Operating budget, [Capital Plan](#), State and Federal Grants

Time frame: Short term to long term

- **Action 6.6:** Re-evaluate elements of the draft Conservation Subdivision Regulations

Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Community Development Department staff, Public Works Department

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Short term

7. Resource Protection: Natural, Scenic, Historic and Archeological Goals

7a. The Town's significant natural, scenic, historic and archeological resources are protected from development.

General Policy

7(G): It shall be recognized that standards for resource protection may be more relaxed inside the sewer service area, where higher concentrations of development are desirable, and may be more restrictive outside the sewer service area, where lower concentrations of development are appropriate.

Actions

Developed by the Conservation Committee and the Community Development Department.

- **Action 7.1:** Start a Conservation Fund

Lead responsibility: Conservation Committee, Selectboard
Potential funding: Operating Budget, donations, special fund
Time frame: Short term

- **Action 7.2:** Start an invasive species management program

Lead responsibility: Conservation Committee
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term

- **Action 7.3:** Update the Street Tree Survey

Lead responsibility: Conservation Committee/ Essex Junction Tree Advisory Committee
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Short term

- **Action 7.4:** Public education and outreach

Lead responsibility: Conservation Committee
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Ongoing

- **Action 7.5:** Continue to improve stormwater quality in accordance with the mandated state and federal permits

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department and other partners
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants, bond authorization
Time frame: Ongoing

- **Action 7.6:** Implement a Scenic Highway Overlay District in the zoning regulations

Lead responsibility: Planning Commission and Community Development Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term

8. Agriculture & Forestry

Goal

8a. Important agricultural and forest lands are protected from development

General Policy

8(G): To support large contiguous blocks and connectivity for wildlife, agricultural and forest lands shall be protected from fragmentation by subdivisions.

Actions

Developed by the Conservation Committee and the Community Development Department

- **Action 8.1:** Develop Forest Management Plans for Indian Brook and the Mathieu Town Forest

Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, Community Development Department

Potential Funding: Operating Budget, grants

Time Frame: Short term to medium term

- **Action 8.2:** Remain enrolled in Vermont's Use Value Appraisal Program

Lead responsibility: Assessor, Selectboard

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Ongoing

- **Action 8.3:** Start a Conservation Fund

Lead responsibility: Conservation Committee, Selectboard

Potential funding: Operating Budget, donations, special fund

Time frame: Short term

9. Local Government Services

Goals

9a. A quality level of municipal services and facilities is maintained without an undue tax burden on the Town.

9b. Good working relationships are maintained between municipal administrators, elected and appointed officials, and Essex's residents and business owners.

9c. Technology is used, when practicable, to save money and time, as well as to improve the flow of communication.

General Policy

9(G): Day-to-day administrative tasks shall be carried out with attention to the provision of excellent customer service for the Town's residents, businesses and visitors.

Town Clerk's Office

Actions

Developed by the Town Clerk.

- **Action 9.1:** Scan daily land records and Property Transfer Tax Returns

Lead responsibility: Town Clerk's Office

Funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Ongoing

- **Action 9.2** Scan and index old land records Volumes 1-495. Index Volumes 496-862

Lead responsibility: Town Clerk's Office

Funding: Records Preservation Funds

Time Frame: Long term

- **Action 9.3:** Scan and Index Property Transfer Tax Returns

676 **Lead responsibility:** Town Clerk's office
677 **Funding:** Operating Budget
678 **Time Frame:** Long term
679
680 • **Action 9.4:** Index old court attachment documents
681 **Lead responsibility:** Town Clerk's Office
682 **Funding:** Operating Budget
683 **Time Frame:** Long Term
684

685 **Essex Free Library**

686 **Actions**

687 *Developed by the Town Librarian*

- 688 • **Action 9.5:** Build partnerships with the Essex Historical Society, the Essex Parks and
689 Recreation Department, and the Brownell Library in order to promote Essex Center as a
690 cultural center
691 **Lead Responsibility:** Essex Free Library, Essex Historical Society
692 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
693 **Time Frame:** Ongoing
694
695 • **Action 9.6:** Fuel Essex's passion for reading, personal growth, and learning by providing
696 crucial early learning experiences
697 **Lead Responsibility:** Essex Free Library
698 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, grants
699 **Time Frame:** Short term
700
701 • **Action 9.7:** Develop intergenerational programming
702 **Lead Responsibility:** Essex Free Library
703 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, grants
704 **Time frame:** Short term
705
706 • **Action 9.8:** Create a life-long learning space
707 **Lead Responsibility:** Essex Free Library
708 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, grants
709 **Time frame:** Short term
710
711 • **Action 9.9:** Ensure that teachers and school administrators are aware of the offerings of the
712 Essex Free Library
713 **Lead Responsibility:** Essex Free Library
714 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, grants
715 **Time frame:** Short term
716
717 • **Action 9.10:** Create a conference area
718 **Lead Responsibility:** Essex Free Library
719 **Potential funding:** Capital Expenditure, fundraising
720 **Time frame:** Long Term

Police

Actions

Developed by the Police Department.

- **Action 9.11:** Increase electronic capability to manage records and enhance emergency communications
Lead Responsibility: Police Chief, IT Manager
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time Frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.12:** Increase staffing to address the crime rate and the increase in traffic
Lead Responsibility: Police Chief
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Long term
- **Action 9.13:** Increase community participation in problem solving to reduce crime and its consequences
Lead Responsibility: Police Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 9.14:** Increase community awareness of the impact of illicit drugs in the region and of the need to formulate a multi-faceted approach to addressing the problem
Lead Responsibility: Police Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term

Fire

Actions

Developed by the Fire Department.

- **Action 9.15:** Increase roster of paid on-call firefighters
Lead responsibility: Fire Chief
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.16:** Add paid staff for weekday coverage and meetings
Lead responsibility: Fire Chief
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.17:** Replace tanker trucks with larger capacity pumper/tanker
Lead responsibility: Fire Department
Potential funding: Capital Budget

Time frame: Short term

- **Action 9.18:** Replace AWD Reel Truck with AWD Engine for rural residences

Lead responsibility: Fire Department

Potential funding: Capital Budget

Time frame: Short term

- **Action 9.19:** Add aerial truck to fleet to meet needs of the community

Lead responsibility: Fire Department

Potential funding: Capital Budget

Time frame: Short term

- **Action 9.20:** Integrate both fire budgets into one Town-wide operating budget

Lead responsibility: Fire Chief

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 9.21:** Update ISO review for Town

Lead responsibility: Fire Department

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 9.22:** Renovate Fire Station to current NFPA standards

Lead responsibility: Fire Department

Potential funding: Bond authorization

Time frame: Medium term

Community Development Department

Actions

Developed by the Community Development Department

- **Action 9.23:** Finish creating a GIS database of all Town-owned land, easements, and rights-of-way

Lead responsibility: Community Development Department

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Short term to medium term

- **Action 9.24:** Finish scanning all permits/approvals in to the NMREC program

Lead responsibility: Community Development Department

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 9.25:** Revise all application forms

Lead responsibility: Community Development Department

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Medium term to long term

Parks & Recreation

Actions

Developed by the Parks and Recreation Department and the Trails Committee.

- **Action 9.26:** Re-establish overall, enhanced trail maintenance (specifically Indian Brook Reservoir and Mathieu Town Forest)
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, Trails Committee and other partners
Potential funding: Capital Fund and Operating Budget
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 9.27:** Re-design and update Trail Map pamphlet
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department
Potential funding: Capital Fund and Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.28:** Complete a Carrying Capacity Study for Indian Brook Reservoir
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, University of Vermont
Potential funding: Capital Fund
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.29:** Develop adult athletic leagues/pick-up games in the seasonal program line-up
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department
Potential funding: Program Fund
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.30:** Undertake a Recreation Impact Fee Study
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.31:** Conduct a Community/Aquatics Center Feasibility Study
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, consultant
Potential funding: Capital Fund and Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.32:** Discuss new options for Pioneer Park with the neighborhood
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.33:** Update Recreation Needs Assessment
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department
Potential funding: Capital Fund

Time frame: Long term

- **Action 9.34:** Develop and improve trails off Freeman Woods Road and west of I-289
Lead responsibility: Trails Committee and other partners
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.35:** Document and enhance trails at Saxon Hill (school parcel)
Lead responsibility: Trails Committee and other partners
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.36:** Expand Volunteer Trail Keepers program
Lead responsibility: Trails Committee and other partners
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.37:** Improve public engagement in trail use, benefits and education
Lead responsibility: Trails Committee and other partners
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.38:** Collaborate with nearby trails committees
Lead responsibility: Trails Committee
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Short term

Municipal Utilities

Sewage Disposal and Water Supply Actions

Developed by the Public Works Department.

- **Action 9.39:** Update water flow and pressure model for the Essex High service area – VT Route 117 to VT Route 15 east of the Village
Lead responsibility: Public Works Director/Engineer, consultants
Potential funding: Water/Sewer Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 9.40:** Prepare final design plans and specifications and fund water line improvements in the Susie Wilson Road Corridor and Fort Ethan Allen area to increase fire flow and pressure
Lead responsibility: Public Works Director/ Town Engineer, consultants
Potential funding: [Capital Plan](#), state and federal grants, bond authorization
Time frame: Medium term to long term

- **Action 9.41:** Complete system-wide installation of new water meters.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Director/Town Engineer, consultants
Potential funding: Water/Sewer Budget
Time frame: Short term to medium term
- **Action 9.42:** Prepare final design plans and specifications and fund water line improvements in the High Service area to reduce pressure in the VT Route 117 area.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Director/ Town Engineer, consultants
Potential funding: Capital Budget, state and federal grants, bond authorization
Time frame: Medium term to long term
- **Action 9.43:** Monitor wastewater flows to the Lang Farm Pump Station for potential future capacity increase
Lead responsibility: Town Engineer/ Utilities Director
Potential Funding: Wastewater Funds/System Initiation fees
Time frame: Medium term to long term

Stormwater

Actions

Developed by the Public Works Department

- **Action 9.45:** Implement Impaired Streams Flow Restoration Plans involving construction of new stormwater treatment facilities
Lead responsibility: Town/Village Stormwater Coordinating Committee, Public Works Department, Selectboard, Village Trustees
Potential funding: Capital funds, bond authorization
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.46:** Resolution of all expired stormwater permits in the Town's impaired watersheds
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, Selectboard
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term

10. Education

Goals

- 10a.** A world class curriculum provides authentic, student-centered learning opportunities as a means to college and career-readiness and citizenship.
- 10b.** Investments are made in school building projects that promote safety, learning, community usage and energy efficiency.
- 10c.** An inclusive model of education directs resources to families and students who are at a higher risk of not succeeding due to cultural, financial and learning barriers.
- 10d.** A universally-accessible school nutrition program for students, families and community members is developed with a focus on the use of local-grown foods, culturally diverse menus, student choice, economical sustainability and student wellness.

General Policy

10(G): Consistent provision of educational services shall be facilitated by avoiding rapid change in student population.

Actions

Developed by the Essex Community Educational Center.

- **Action 10.1:** Move toward use of the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards
Lead responsibility: Principal, Superintendent
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term to long term
- **Action 10.2:** Replace roof at the Educational Center
Lead responsibility: U #46 School Board, CCSU administration
Potential funding: Bond authorization
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 10.3:** Develop Personalized Learning Plans for students based on the grade
Lead responsibility: Principal, Superintendent
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 10.4:** Conduct Educational Center entrance renovations
Lead responsibility: U #46 School Board, CCSU administration
Potential funding: Capital funds and possible bond authorization
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 10.5:** Educational Center/ Center for Technology building renovations
Lead responsibility: U #46 School Board, CCSU administration
Potential funding: Bond authorization
Time frame: Long term

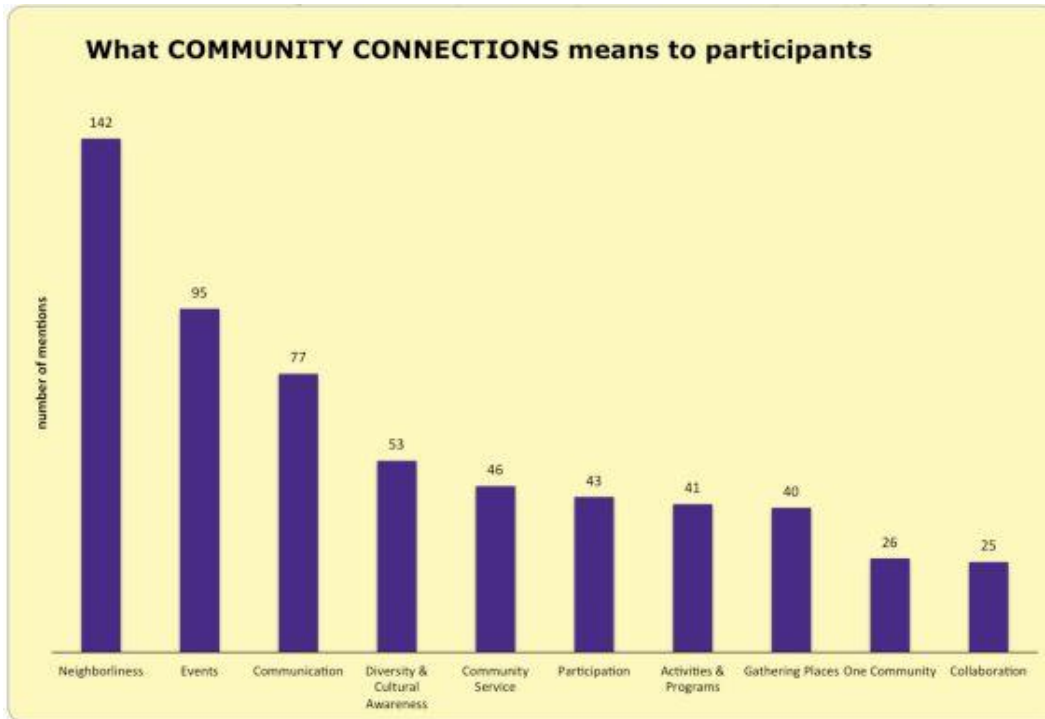
Developed by the Essex Town School District

- **Action 10.6:** Develop an effective school governance model
Lead responsibility: ETSD School Board, Superintendent
Potential funding: General Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term to medium term
- **Action 10.7:** Invest in ongoing procurement and utilization of world class technology
Lead responsibility: ETSD School Board, Superintendent, ETSD Leadership Team
Potential funding: General Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term

- 992 • **Action 10.8:** Continue to develop an inclusive model of education that directs resources to
993 students who are at a higher risk of not succeeding
994 **Lead responsibility:** Superintendent, ETSD Leadership Team, ETSD educators, Parent
995 Advisory Group, grants.
996 **Potential funding:** General Operating Budget
997 **Time frame:** Ongoing
998
- 999 • **Action 10.9:** Work with local and state leaders to help influence and shape educational
1000 policies that advance Vermont's World Class Education Agenda
1001 **Lead responsibility:** Vermont Superintendent Association, Legislative partners, ETSD
1002 School Board, Superintendent, Parent Advisory Group
1003 **Potential funding:** General Operating Budget
1004 **Time frame:** Ongoing
1005
- 1006 • **Action 10.10:** Develop a universally accessible school nutrition program
1007 **Lead responsibility:** Superintendent, ETSD Leadership Team, Child Nutrition Team,
1008 Parent Advisory Group
1009 **Potential funding:** General Operating Budget
1010 **Time frame:** Short term to Medium Term
1011
- 1012 • **Action 10.11:** Invest in school building projects that promote student safety and learning,
1013 community usage, and energy efficiency
1014 **Lead responsibility:** ETSD School Board, Superintendent, ETSD Leadership Team, Parent
1015 Advisory Group
1016 **Potential funding:** Capital Reserve fund, bond authorization, energy efficiency grants,
1017 General Operating Budget
1018 **Time frame:** Ongoing

Chapter 2: Essex's Sense of Community

Essex derives its community identity from its various neighborhoods, its strong schools, its blend of businesses, its network of streets and trails, and – most of all – its people. As [Heart & Soul of Essex](#) describes in its [Community Connections](#) value, “Our deep connections with each other make Essex special. Neighbors help each other during good times and bad. We value diversity and welcome everyone. We build our sense of community at local events such as the Memorial Day Parade, Five Corners Farmers Market, and Winter Carnival. Our local newspapers and online forums give us plenty of ways to stay in touch. Residents participate in local government and volunteer.” The town also protects its identity by finding ways to insulate against future energy costs and by preparing for future disasters such as flooding.



BOX: Heart & Soul describes Community Connections

Heart & Soul participants described the Community Connections value in the following ways:

- Neighbors and community members treating each other with kindness and respect, helping each other through good times and bad;
- Formal and informal opportunities to be together at community gatherings and events
- Communications and engagement through Front Porch Forum, local newspaper, community directories, maps, and community conversations;
- Acceptance, inclusion, and respect for all people across race, ethnicity, gender, and age, and increased knowledge of and responsiveness to volunteer and engage in community;
- Participation in many facets of the community's life including Town Meeting, committees, community discussions, faith community, and events;
- The presence of gathering places, such as a coffee shop or community center; and
- Shared services and unified planning between town and village governments and collaboration among government, education, business and residents.

While Essex has a strong sense of community within its borders, the town also serves as a transportation hub and an important sub-regional retail and service center for the more rural communities in Chittenden County. Surrounding towns use the Essex Community Educational Center, as well as recreational facilities including the [Champlain Valley Exposition](#), the Educational Center's indoor skating rink, Saxon Hill trails, and the Winooski River and Browns River.

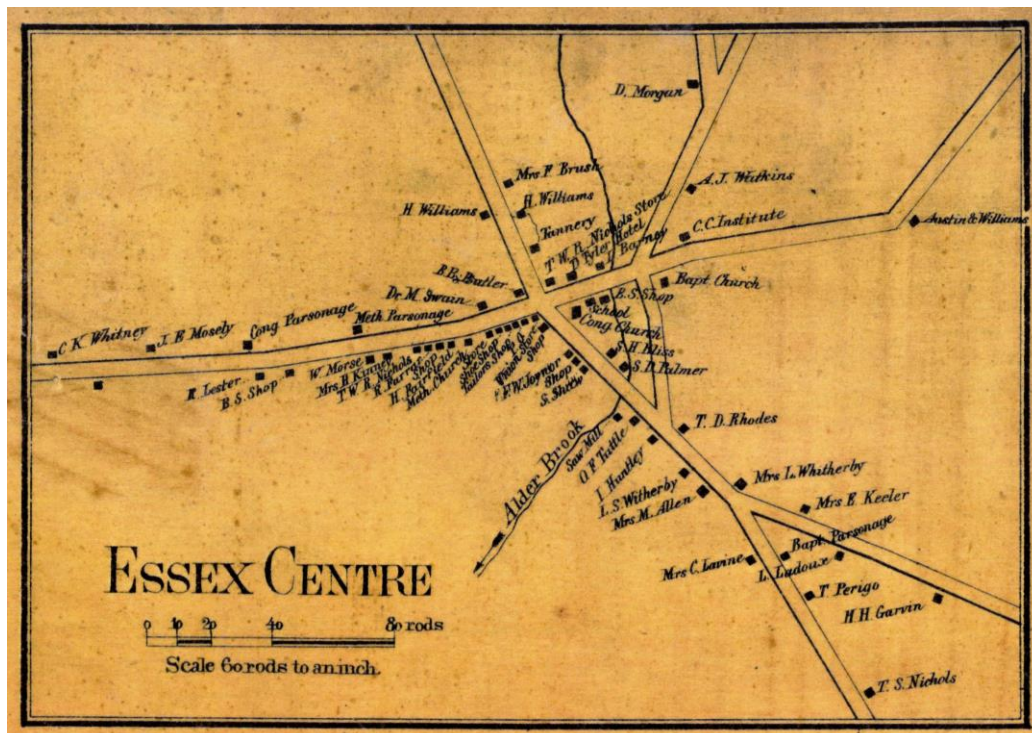
Historic background

Essex was established by charter on June 7, 1763, as part of the New Hampshire grants, by authority of King George III of England. Essex is one of the few Vermont towns whose boundaries have never changed.

The first steps toward modern-day settlement began in 1773, when several men, including Ira and Ethan Allen, formed the Onion River Company to survey, purchase and promote settlement. Permanent settlement began in 1783, when six settlers located their homes on Browns River Road between Weed Road and Westford. Residents held the first Town Meeting in 1786, levying taxes for the maintenance of roads.

Until 1820 the hub of town activities centered on Page's Corners, which was located at the junction of Colonel Page Road and Old Stage Road. At the time, Old Stage Road was the main route north to St. Albans. In its prime, Page's Corners consisted of four taverns, two stores, a post office, a potash factory, a sawmill on Alder Brook, an iron works on Colonel Page Road, and a wheelwright shop.

Essex Center began to develop between 1805 and 1813. Frank Bent, in *The History of Essex* (1963), describes how Essex Center eventually became designated as the "center" for the Town. Various sources indicate that the center of Town even moved briefly to Butlers Corners – the intersection of Old Stage Road and Center Road – from 1822 to 1826. A post office was established at Butlers Corners in 1825.



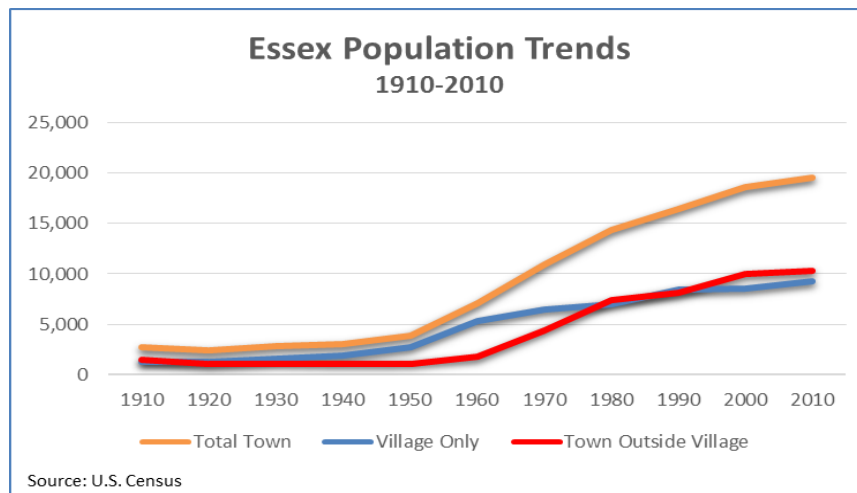
Meanwhile, business and industry in the southern part of town grew around a succession of dams and mills built across the Winooski River. The area was called Hubbel's Falls, and the first mill was constructed for Ira Allen by Abram Stevens. Stevens also built a tavern in 1820, which is now known as Lincoln Hall and serves as the Village Offices. Hubbel's Falls was renamed Painesville in 1850, after Gov. Charles Paine, who brought the railroad through Essex.

By 1862 the railroad station and surrounding area were commonly referred to as Essex Junction. In its heyday, six rail lines converged as 35 passenger trains passed through daily, with the railroad bringing increasing business to Essex Junction. The population grew as well, and in 1892 the Vermont General Assembly approved the incorporation of the Village of Essex Junction within the Town of Essex. The 3.8-square-mile Village had approximately 1,130 inhabitants; another 1,062 people lived in the remaining 32 square miles of town.

Demographic Profile

By 2013, Essex had a population of 20,526. The population, based on estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, included 9,695 residents living in the Village and 10,831 living outside the Village. Statewide, only Burlington has a larger population than Essex's total.

The Essex population has increased steadily, although the rate of increase has diminished since its peak in the middle of the 20th century. During the 1940s the Town grew by an average of 87 persons per year. In the 1950s growth increased to 316 persons per year. The growth rate peaked in the 1960s, with an average increase of 386 persons per year. In the 1970s population growth fell to 344 persons per year before leveling off to just more than 210 persons per year in the '80s and '90s. Between 2000 and 2010 the Town added an average of just 96 persons per year. The growth rate increased between 2010 and 2013, however, with an annual average of 313 new persons.



Population growth in Essex mirrored that of Chittenden County and the state between 2000 and 2013. Essex and the state added population at an annual rate of 0.75 percent; Chittenden County did so at 0.65 percent.

Essex comprises nearly 13 percent of the population of Chittenden County. Prior to 1950 the town contained approximately 6 percent of the county's population. The ratio then increased rapidly until it hit 12.46 percent in 1980, and has remained at approximately that level in the ensuing decades.

Even when growth takes a community like Essex beyond a small town size, thoughtful neighborhood and village planning can retain the fraternity of small town life. The concept of

community is linked to social cohesiveness, and the essence of a town the size of Essex lies in neighbors knowing one another, as well as their teachers, local shop owners, and community leaders. American sociologist Lewis Mumford has praised New England communities for refusing “to grow beyond the possibility of socializing and assimilating its members.” Planning experts contend that populations of 8,000 to 10,000 need to be served by village centers providing a diversity of services. Within Essex, the Village, the Susie Wilson corridor, and the Town Center provide the diversity of services necessary to maintain the town’s strong community bonds as the population increases.

The town’s steady population growth will lead to continued residential development. The existing sense of community derives, in part, from Essex’s balance of rural and urban areas. Although the Town outside the Village has largely retained its rural character, incremental residential development in the countryside threatens the town’s open space. Chapter 3 will take a closer look at development patterns and goals, but Essex can protect its rural-urban balance by continuing to concentrate development in growth areas loosely centered around the Susie Wilson Road corridor, the Town Center at Butler’s Corners, and the industrial portions of the Saxon Hill area.

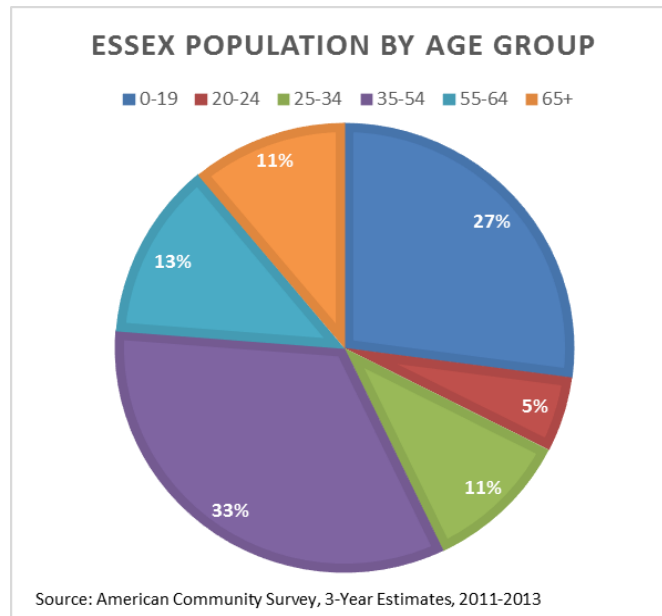
The Town outside of the Village manages population growth through the use of a residential phasing policy, which allows the Town to develop in accordance with its ability to provide services and facilities. The first residential phasing policy was adopted in 1986. All new residential projects were phased to ensure that the annual increase in population did not exceed 226 persons per year, a rate of 3 percent of the 1985 population of 7,537. The phasing policy proved effective, with population rising from 7,537 persons in 1985 to 10,035 persons in 2000. The overall increase of 2.2 percent, or 167 persons per year, was well below the growth ceiling of 226 persons per year.

The Town adopted a new residential phasing policy in 2008 to maintain a population growth rate between 184 and 226 persons per year, with a targeted annual rate of 205 persons per year.

Looking beyond sheer volume and digging deeper into population data can reveal more about how Essex is growing. Age distribution, for example, provides insight for economic development and housing purposes.

“Employers are generally more interested in areas with growth in residents in their working years – typically 20 to 55,” the 2010 [*Economic Development Vision and Plan*](#) says. “However, growth of non-working residents (children and teenagers, retirees and seniors) may be important to service and retail businesses that cater to specific demographics (such as health care providers).”

A third of Essex’s population is between the ages of 35 and 54, according to estimates from the American Community Survey, which looked at the community’s age demographics from 2011 to 2013. Residents 19 and younger made up the second largest segment of the local population, at 27 percent. Overall, however, the population in Essex is aging. The aging trend is consistent with the rest of Vermont, and presents issues for how the labor force will be sustained in the future and how residents will age in place.



Economic Development

BOX: Specific economic development policies:

2(S).1: Infill development within existing industrial and commercial zoning districts shall be promoted.

2(S).2: The retention and expansion of businesses at existing industrial and commercial sites shall be supported, specifically the Champlain Valley Technology and Innovation Park(CVTIP), the North 60 at CVTIP, Forestdale Industrial Park, Gauthier Industrial Park and others.

2(S).3: Upgrades to the major arteries in and out of Essex shall be encouraged, specifically VT Route 15 and VT Route 117.

2(S).4: State and regional efforts to develop transportation links in and out of Essex shall be supported, including rail service, alternative transit systems, and regional multi-modal transportation options.

2(S).5: The development of affordable housing and high quality day care in Essex shall be supported through regulatory and non-regulatory options.

2(S).6: An entrepreneurial environment in Essex shall be fostered by encouraging co-working spaces, maker spaces, and partnerships with neighboring communities.

2(S).7: Economic development shall occur in balance with environmental standards.

Essex has long had a diverse economy, albeit one dominated by the presence of IBM since the late 1950s. The 2014 announcement that IBM's Essex plant would transfer ownership to the semiconductor manufacturer GLOBALFOUNDRIES Inc. therefore marked a significant change for the local economy.

"It's excellent news that GLOBALFOUNDRIES intends to keep the plant open," Village President George Tyler said a press conference on October 20, 2014. "Nevertheless, it is a seismic shift for our community. We have been an IBM community for half a century. ... Although it is sad to see IBM leave, we look forward to the opportunity being presented to us by GLOBALFOUNDRIES."

While Essex remains optimistic that GLOBALFOUNDRIES will become a long-term presence in the community, the Town will continue to support a growing number of other businesses. The commitment to a more diversified economy gained traction in the early 2000s, when employment levels began to fall at IBM's semiconductor manufacturing plant.

IBM opened its doors with 500 employees in 1957. The company grew to an employment peak of 8,500 in 2001, but gradually reduced its workforce over the next decade.

Employment across all of Essex also peaked in 2001, with 16,100 workers. Employment levels in the town have fluctuated in recent decades, from 10,719 in 1980 to 13,295 in 1990. After the 2001 peak, employment dropped to 13,269 in 2003. By 2013, 728 establishments in Essex employed 11,944 workers, according to the Vermont Department of Labor. In 2014 approximately half of the employees – 5,911 – worked at 12 companies. The federal government and local schools also account for a large number of employees.

SIDEBAR: Top Essex employers (2014)

<u>Company</u>	<u>Employees (full-time)</u>
1. IBM Microelectronics	4,000
2. Keurig Green Mountain	800
3. USCIS – Dept. Homeland Security	700
4. Essex schools	672
5. Autumn Harp	199
6. Revision Military	170
7. Food Science Corporation	155
8. Lowe's Home Improvement	140
9. Reinhart Food Service	110
10. The Essex Resort & Spa	100
11. Flex-a-Seal	87
12. Catamount Color	85
13. Vermont Systems Inc.	85
14. Harmony Information Systems	80

SOURCES: Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Employment Database, Essex Economic Development Commission, Vermont Business Magazine

In addition to its large employers, Essex has seen an influx of smaller, entrepreneurial ventures. Trends in the growth of establishments and employment speak to the transformation of the local economy. Establishments in Essex grew by an average of 8 percent between 2010 and 2013, from 671 businesses in 2010 to 728 in 2013. The rate was slightly higher than Chittenden County's 6 percent and much faster than the 1 percent across all of Vermont.

Employment increased over the same time period, although by a lower rate of 4 percent. Chittenden County and Vermont saw employment rates increase by 6 percent and 3 percent, respectively.

Though seemingly counterintuitive, the trends make sense when seen in light of the shift in Essex from an economy with a few large employers to one with more businesses that employ fewer people per firm. This latter type of economy is more characteristic of the "new economy" often cited as the next frontier in economic development – an economy that relies more on small entrepreneurial activity than large, single employers.

Essex's employers now include a mix of large manufacturers and smaller firms, in a variety of industries. The top manufacturers in Essex in 2014 were involved in everything from electronic equipment to industrial machinery to defense equipment.

Although employment numbers have fluctuated in town, the unemployment rate among Essex residents has remained relatively steady over the past ten years. Unemployment ranged from a low of 2.8% in 2005 to a high of 5.2% in 2009. Currently the unemployment rate in Essex is 3.1%, compared to 3.1% in Chittenden County and 4.1% in Vermont.

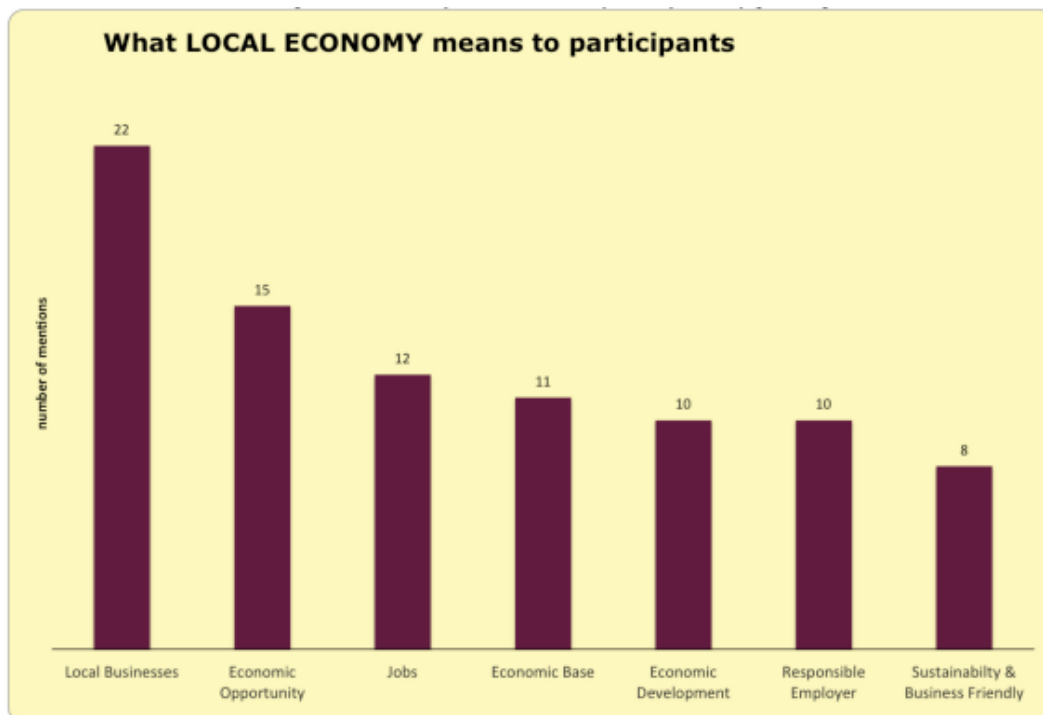
A plan for a diverse economy

With the 2006 Town Plan, Essex acknowledged that local employment had long been dominated by a few selected industries. In response, the Town sought an economic plan that would envision a more diversified economy and lead to sustainable, balanced economic development and job creation for the entire community.

“The Town boasts an excellent school system, a highly-educated population, a high quality of life, and an economy that includes both large well-known employers and thriving smaller businesses,” the 2010 [Economic Development Vision and Plan](#) notes. “Although Essex has begun to diversify its employment base, it remains heavily reliant on selected large employers. Given the ... uncertainty regarding the future of such employers, it is critically important to investigate how Essex may further diversify its local economy.”

The *Economic Development and Vision Plan* considered input from local businesses, local governments, developers, and realtors. A community visioning workshop attracted 75 residents and business people, and an online survey solicited additional input. Concern for economic development remains strong well after the release of the *Economic Development and Vision Plan*, as demonstrated when Heart & Soul named [Local Economy](#) one of the community’s six core values.

“Our residents contribute to a vibrant economy by working for and patronizing a diverse mix of businesses, from small, locally owned enterprises to international corporations,” Heart & Soul noted. “We are committed to fostering an environment that produces a world-class workforce and a strong economy for years to come.”

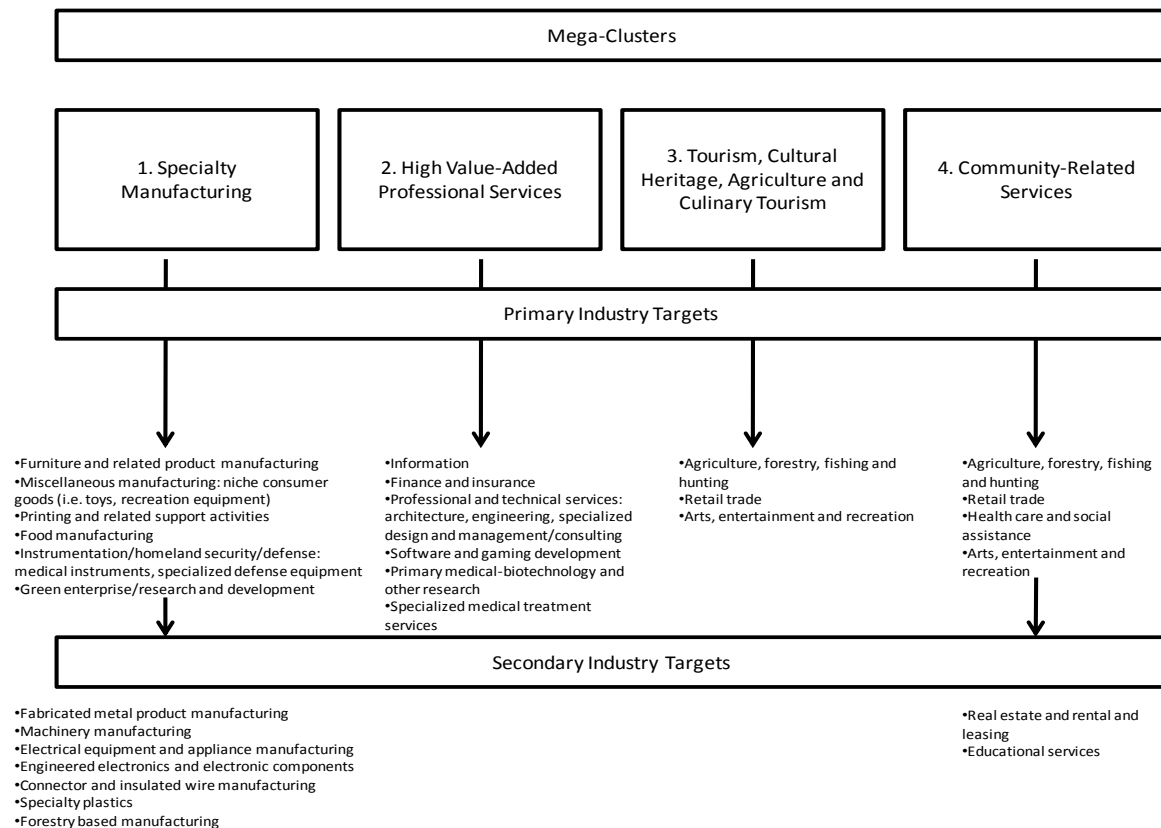


BOX: Heart & Soul describes Local Economy

Heart & Soul participants described the Local Economy value in the following ways:

- The presence of a variety of small, local, “family” businesses
- Economic opportunity that is supported by local government as well as a strong, skilled, well-educated workforce
- Diverse, high quality jobs at a range of businesses, from small, locally-owned companies to large businesses such as IBM
- Support for creative businesses and incubator space
- Employers who are responsible to their employees and engage with the community

A healthy business environment does more than just provide jobs. It can reduce the municipal property tax burden for residents. Government financing will be covered in Chapter 4 of the Town Plan, but suffice to say that property taxes pay for services provided by the municipal government.



Residential properties make up approximately 80 percent of the Town’s real estate value. By welcoming new businesses to town, Essex can diversify its grand list and lessen the proportion of municipal taxes paid by residents. School taxes, which comprise approximately 75 percent of the annual tax bill, are influenced in large part by a statewide education funding system.

The *Economic Development and Vision Plan* used community input and research done by consultants, BBP & Associates, LLC and VHB Pioneer, to identify target industries for Essex. The industries fell into four mega-clusters: specialty manufacturers; high value-added professional services; tourism, cultural heritage, agriculture and leisure; and community-related services. Industries in each mega-cluster were ranked as primary or secondary targets.

Specialty manufacturers include a variety of light manufacturers that span many fields, from niche consumer goods to those for business and for defense. Green enterprise and wood-product manufacturing are included in this category.

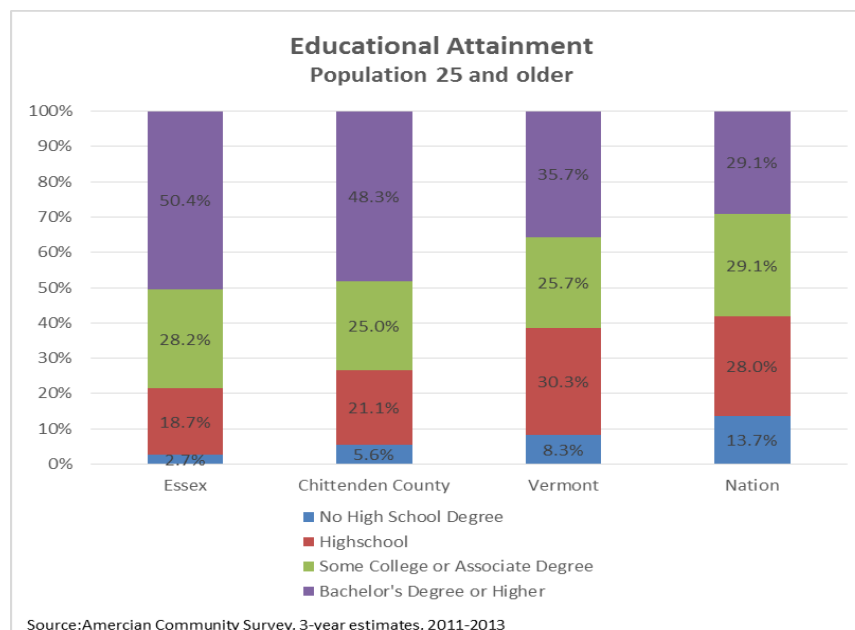
High value-added professional services include services that cater to a customer base beyond Essex and Chittenden County, and are therefore dollar-importing industries. This category includes many knowledge-based and design-oriented fields.

Tourism, cultural heritage, agriculture and leisure encompass industries that could draw travelers to the community, including agricultural resources, retailers and restaurants, and arts/entertainment/recreational amenities.

Community-related services support the local population and add to the area's overall livability. These industries may not necessarily have the dollar-importing characteristics of high value-added professional services, but provide services that enhance the quality of life in Essex. They also overlap in some cases with tourism and professional service industries, with a distinction that some businesses within an industry serve more local customers and clients – and therefore community-related services – while others serve clients and customers from outside Essex.

Essex has a combination of strengths to attract and retain the targeted industries, although challenges also exist. With a high **quality of life**, Essex is a desirable place to live, particularly for families. The Town boasts an excellent school system, including a county-wide vocational/technical center. Recreational opportunities abound. The community is socio-economically diverse and civic-minded.

Human capital also stands out as a top asset. Essex residents are generally more educated than other residents in Chittenden County, Vermont and the nation. More than half of Essex residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, based on estimates from the American Community Survey.



The Town also has **name recognition of existing employers**. The presence of IBM and GLOBALFOUNDRIES gives Essex a certain cachet that enforces the perception that Essex can be home to a major employer. It also hints at the tremendous human capital available in Essex in terms of educated and innovative residents. Essex also features thriving smaller businesses, particularly in the growth areas along VT Route 15 and Susie Wilson Road.

Compared to surrounding communities, Essex has a significant **capacity of sewer and water systems** and **available commercial space**. These advantages will become more apparent as other communities approach build-out limits.

1290 In terms of economic challenges, Essex's **transportation network** puts the Town at a disadvantage
1291 to neighboring communities that have quicker and easier access to major highways such as Interstate
1292 89. The Circumferential Highway, which was partially constructed but never completed, would have
1293 improved access to Interstate 89 from Essex. Gov. Peter Shumlin announced in 2011 that the Circ
1294 would never be finished as originally conceived. In response, Essex, Essex Junction, Colchester and
1295 Williston have worked with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and the
1296 Vermont Agency of Transportation to develop [Circ Alternatives](#), a series of transportation upgrades
1297 intended to improve transportation networks in the three towns.

1298 As a **high-cost area**, Essex has relatively high property and business taxes and power costs.

1299 An **aging population** has many residents approaching retirement age. The replacement of workers
1300 to sustain the local labor force could be cause for concern for prospective employers.

1301 Lastly, Essex has historically had **limited economic development organization and resources**.
1302 The Town's [Economic Development Commission](#) has taken a more active role in recent years, and
1303 in 2015 the Town formed a Business Liaison Group to better interact with the business community.
1304 Despite those steps, the state lacks financial resources and incentive programs, and Chittenden
1305 County has not been unified in local efforts for economic development.

1306 Essex should also strive to make permitting and zoning as easy and efficient as possible.

1307 **BOX: Working for economic development**

1308 The 2010 *Economic Development and Vision Plan* noted that the Essex community –
1309 including key stakeholders in government, the private sector, and nonprofits – will
1310 ultimately be responsible for facilitating economic development. Essex has several entities
1311 working on economic development issues affecting the community, including the following:

- 1312 • [Essex](#) and [Essex Junction](#) municipal staffs and legislative bodies
- 1313 • Essex Business Liaison Group
- 1314 • [Essex Economic Development Commission](#)
- 1315 • [Essex Energy Committee](#)
- 1316 • [Champlain Valley Exposition Board of Directors](#)
- 1317 • [Community Capital of Vermont's Partnership Fund](#)
- 1318 • [Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation](#)
- 1319 • [Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce](#)
- 1320 • Tree Farm Management Group
- 1321 • [Vermont Convention Bureau](#)

1322 **Attracting the target industries**

1323 By recognizing the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the community, Essex can take steps to
1324 encourage economic development. The Economic Development Vision and Plan laid out a set of
1325 high-priority strategies meant to support the development, growth, and retention of the target
1326 industries. The strategies were grouped into four categories: Business Retention, Expansion and
1327 Attraction; Land Use and Regulations; Sites and Buildings for Economic Development; and
1328 Transportation Investments. Specific details about success measures and benchmarks, milestones
1329 and deadlines, costs of implementation, potential funding sources, and implementing entities can be
1330 found in the [Economic Development Vision and Plan](#).

1331 The Economic Development Commission has further refined priorities for the Essex economy. The
1332 EDC organized economic development priorities under four goals: increase and diversify the tax

base, improve and invest in infrastructure, foster enterprises that create jobs, and expand communications and outreach.

- **Increase and diversify the tax base**

- **Industrial and commercial zoning:** Promoting and supporting development within existing industrial and commercial zoning areas will reduce the percentage of municipal taxes paid by residential taxpayers and provide adequate income to maintain the current level of municipal services.
- **Commercial and industrial facilities:** The Town should establish and maintain policies and resources to support the retention, expansion and attraction of businesses using or seeking to use land designated for commercial and industrial uses. A focus should be given to the Champlain Valley Technology & Park (CVTIP), the North 60 at CVTIP, Forestdale Industrial Park in the Saxon Hill area, Gauthier Industrial Park, and others.
- **Infill development:** Establishing flexible policies and administrative processes to encourage infill commercial development within designated commercial and industrial areas will diversify or add to the Town's tax base.

- **Improve and invest in infrastructure**

- **Improvements to major roadways:** Supporting upgrades to VT Route 15, VT Route 117 and other major arteries will ensure that routes in and out of Essex are adequate to attract and retain new businesses and residents. Particular attention should be focused on major upgrades to VT Route 117 between Essex Junction and Interstate 89 in Richmond.
- **Other transportation issues:** Participating in state and regional efforts to develop transportation links in and out of Essex, including upgrades to rail service, alternative transit systems, and regional multi-modal transportation options, will improve transportation options for residents, business, and industry. Essex should also support efforts to establish international connections to Quebec and Montreal.
- **Other infrastructure issues:** A better public understanding of infrastructure needs, including water, waste water, broadband, and permitting, will improve support for projects approved by the Community Development department.

- **Foster enterprises that create jobs**

- **Entrepreneurship in Essex:** The Town should establish and maintain resources and programs to encourage entrepreneurs to live and work in Essex.
- **Public and private sector employers:** To operate in a healthy local business environment, public and private sector employers need to recruit and retain talented workforces. The Town can help in that effort by working with other Vermont agencies, such as the [Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development](#), [Vermont Department of Labor](#), the Vermont Congressional Delegation, and the [Center for Technology – Essex](#).

- **Expand communications and outreach**

- **Develop and market the Essex brand:** Essex is a desirable place to live and work, particularly with regard to opportunities for growth for business and light industry. Refining and promoting the Essex "brand" will attract new residents and businesses.
- **Business Development:** The local government should establish, maintain, and review resources for business development in Essex, including outreach efforts to current and prospective employers. Boosting public knowledge and awareness of the business community's value to Essex and the tax base will build support for

1380 economic development and should support the expansion and/or retention of local
1381 businesses.

1382 **Knowing where to grow**

1383 Essex is primed to accommodate an increase in industrial and commercial properties, with millions
1384 of square feet of potential space approved and some of the last remaining undeveloped industrial
1385 land in Chittenden County. The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission has recognized
1386 the importance of the undeveloped industrial land, saying in its ECOS Plan, “‘shovel-ready’ sites
1387 with good access, full utilities and proper zoning will be necessary if the County is to be competitive
1388 in attracting larger projects or retaining local businesses seeking to expand.”

1389 **PULL QUOTE:** *‘Shovel-ready’ sites with good access, full utilities and proper zoning will be necessary if*
1390 *the County is to be competitive in attracting larger projects or retaining local businesses seeking to expand.*

1391 – Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

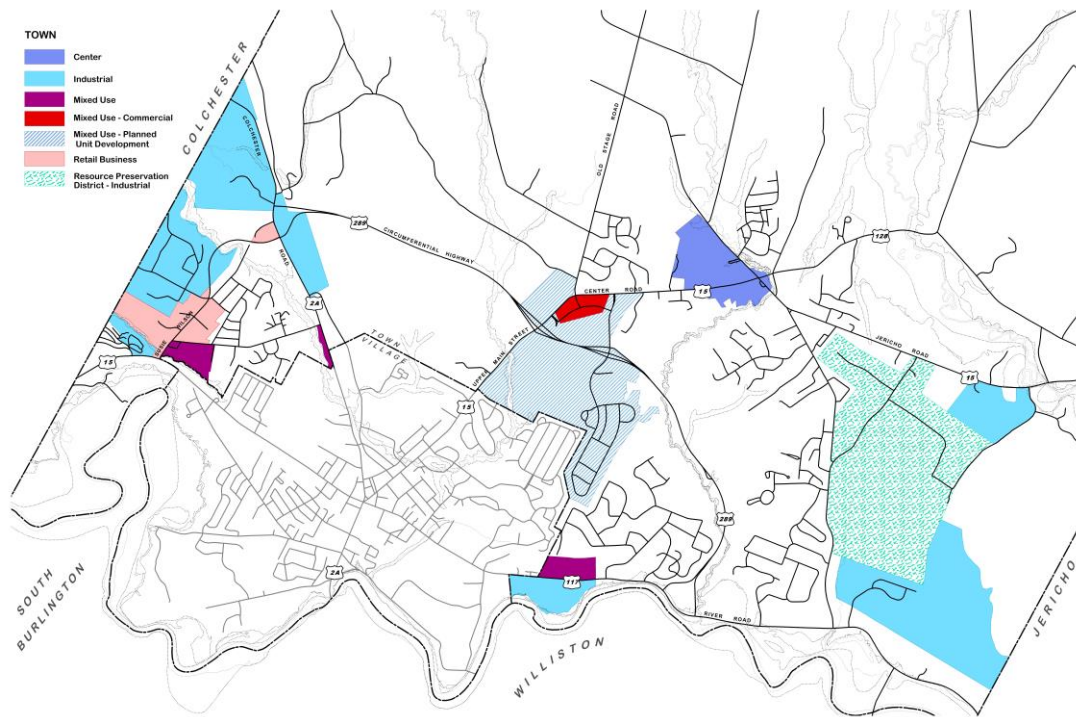
1392 More than 1.5 million square feet of commercial and industrial space in Essex had received master
1393 plan approval or permits by 2015, including the following sites:

- 1394 • **The North 60**, part of the Champlain Valley Innovation & Technology Park at the IBM site
1395 off Maple Street in Essex Junction, has 300,000 square feet available.
- 1396 • **30 & 42 Allen Martin Drive** is being developed by REM Development Co., LLC. The site
1397 is approved for three buildings and a total of 420,000 square feet, including a 180,000-
1398 square-foot building that was constructed in 2014.
- 1399 • **Forestdale Industrial Area** has more than 750,000 square feet.

1400 Beyond the permitted industrial space, Essex has hundreds of acres of undeveloped industrial land.
1401 Much of the land is located in the Saxon Hill area between VT Route 15 and VT Route 117, and on
1402 the west side of town near the Susie Wilson corridor and along VT Route 2A.

1403 The bulk of the town’s economic activity occurs in zoning districts designated for business, mixed
1404 use, and industrial development.

1405 ***MAP: Commercial and Industrial Zoning Districts***



Not all economic activity, however, is restricted to commercial and industrial enterprises. The more rural parts of Essex can and do support economic farming and forestry operations. Vermont is also seeing a rise of the recreation economy, and Essex can capitalize on the trend. The Winooski River provides fishing and paddling opportunities. Trails at Indian Brook Park, Matthieu Town Forest, and Saxon Hill support hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing, and horseback riding. VAST trails traverse the Town and allow for winter recreation opportunities.

Transportation

BOX: Specific Transportation Policies

- **2(S).7:** Multiple modes of transportation that connect residents to schools, work places, shopping centers and recreational areas shall be supported.
- **2(S).8:** New road construction shall comply with the Lake Champlain Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Plan.
- **2(S).9:** Existing transportation systems shall be appropriately maintained and managed.
- **2(S).10:** Combined use of the Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA) network, the Senior Van, school buses, and other transit services shall be supported as part of an accessible and integrated transportation system.
- **2(S).11:** New lots shall be permitted only on existing public roads or on new roads that are compatible with the Town's land use objectives for the rural areas.

The efficient and safe movement of people, goods and services is essential for maintaining the vitality of the community and ensuring continued community and regional economic prosperity. Essex has historically been a hub of transportation, as a Native American trail, a post road, a terminal freight point and a ferry crossing for the Winooski River. Presently, the town has five state

highways, rail lines, bus service and access to Interstate 89. One of the state highways, VT Route 15, is designated as federally significant because it provides a critical transportation route linking New York to Eastern Canada and Maine.

The five state highways – VT Routes 2A, 15, 117, 128, and 289 – serve regional traffic that crosses through the community. Commuters create a significant amount of traffic as they travel through Essex to Burlington, Colchester, South Burlington, Williston, and Winooski. Essex’s services and places of employment also make the town a destination for people living in more rural communities such as Cambridge, Jericho, Underhill, and Westford.

For the foreseeable future, Essex’s public roads will continue to be the primary infrastructure element serving the widest variety of transportation modes – cars, trucks, bicycles, and public transit. Yet the Town can expect to see increased use of and desire for paths, sidewalks, and trails as the population of the community ages, as more development is concentrated in areas designated for growth, and as new generations use alternative forms of transportation.

SIDEBAR: Regional Transportation Facilities

Essex residents can easily access regional transportation options, including planes, trains, ferries, and buses. As of 2015, the following entities offered regional transportation:

- [Burlington International Airport](#) is 5 miles from Essex. The airport is a U.S. Customs Port of Entry for airplanes entering the country from abroad and is also an approved foreign trade zone.
- A train station is located in the Village of Essex Junction. Daily freight and passenger service is provided by [New England Central Railroad](#), [Vermont Railway](#), and [Amtrak](#). Amtrak’s “Vermont,” which has service from St. Albans to New York City, stops twice a day in Essex Junction.
- Four Lake Champlain ports offer [ferry services](#) that carry autos and passengers between Vermont and New York.
- [Greyhound](#), [Megabus](#), and [Vermont Translines](#) operate bus lines that connect Burlington to New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Canada.

SIDEBAR: Primary challenges related to transportation

As Essex seeks to improve transportation options available to residents, it can expect to face the following challenges:

- Adequately funding the maintenance of existing roads, paths and trails;
- Reducing roadway and intersection congestion caused, to a significant degree, by the conflict between local access to and from public roadways/commercial driveways and the impact of through regional traffic;
- Increasing the availability of alternative transportation modes such as paths, sidewalks, trails and public transportation;
- Providing transportation system improvements that favor and strengthen the community and regional economic opportunities for Vermont employers and employees;
- Developing fair road and pathway impact fees for new development;
- Providing easily accessible transportation information in real time to drivers on the major congested corridors as to the availability of alternative transportation modes.

Existing Conditions

Traffic in Essex has increased incrementally. To help schedule road improvements, the Town implemented a revised [*Highway Transportation Management Plan*](#) in 2014. The plan includes a description of the function of each road in town, an inventory of road conditions, intersection issues, and recommended improvements. Improvements are made when funding allows, although it can be difficult to allocate costs because no single development or source has a major impact on the overall transportation system.

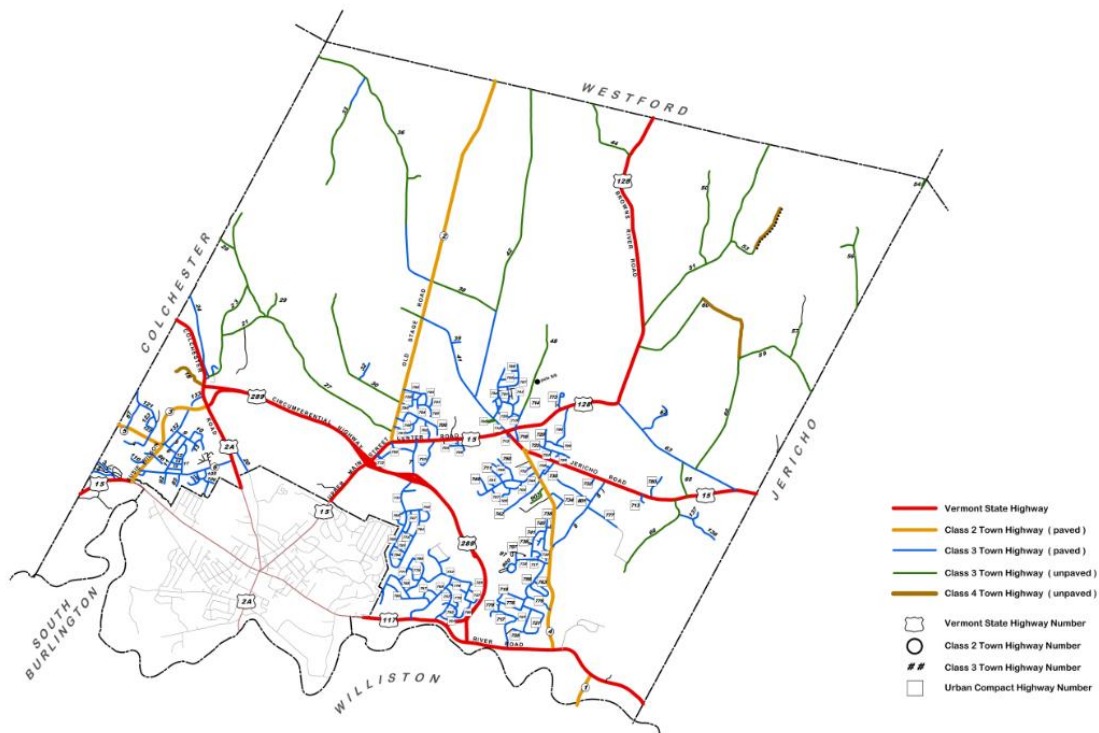
BOX: Major traffic generators

Essex has several locations that generate large amounts of traffic:

- IBM/GLOBALFOUNDRIES
- Saxon Hill Industrial Park
- Town Center and Eurowest developments/Outlets
- Essex Community Educational Center
- Essex Town School District schools
- Village Central Business District
- Keurig Green Mountain, Inc. and other businesses and industries in the Susie Wilson Road area
- Essex Square Shopping Center and Center Road businesses

The Town and Village began to jointly plan for alternative transportation options in 2014 by adopting the [*Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction*](#). The plan identifies existing bicycle paths and sidewalks, highlights locations for future bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and provides options for encouraging walkers and bicyclists.

MAP: Transportation by Classification



When deciding how to improve roads, the Town can better allocate scarce resources and provide improved road transportation services by developing and using a functional road classification

system. Each road in Essex has a dual designation – a functional class for planning and design purposes, and a state aid class for funding. The [*Highway Transportation Management Plan*](#) contains detailed descriptions of the functional classifications and roads within those classifications.

BOX: Definitions of road classes

Arterial: A major street that has a primary function of moving vehicles and a secondary function of accessing land. Arterials are characterized by higher operating speeds of 40 to 45 mph during off-peak hours, and 30 to 35 mph during peak hours.

Collector road: The primary function of a collector road is to distribute traffic between arterials and minor (local) streets. A secondary function is land access, and a tertiary function is to handle inter-neighborhood traffic.

Local street: A minor street that primarily provides access to neighboring properties, and does not support through traffic. Speed limits are usually 25 mph or less.

Conflicts and congestion occur when roads and intersections designed for one function, such as residential traffic, are used for another function, such as commercial truck traffic. Future land use and development decisions should consider the functions of nearby roads to minimize traffic problems. Conflicts within or between functional classes of roads tend to fall under one of five categories:

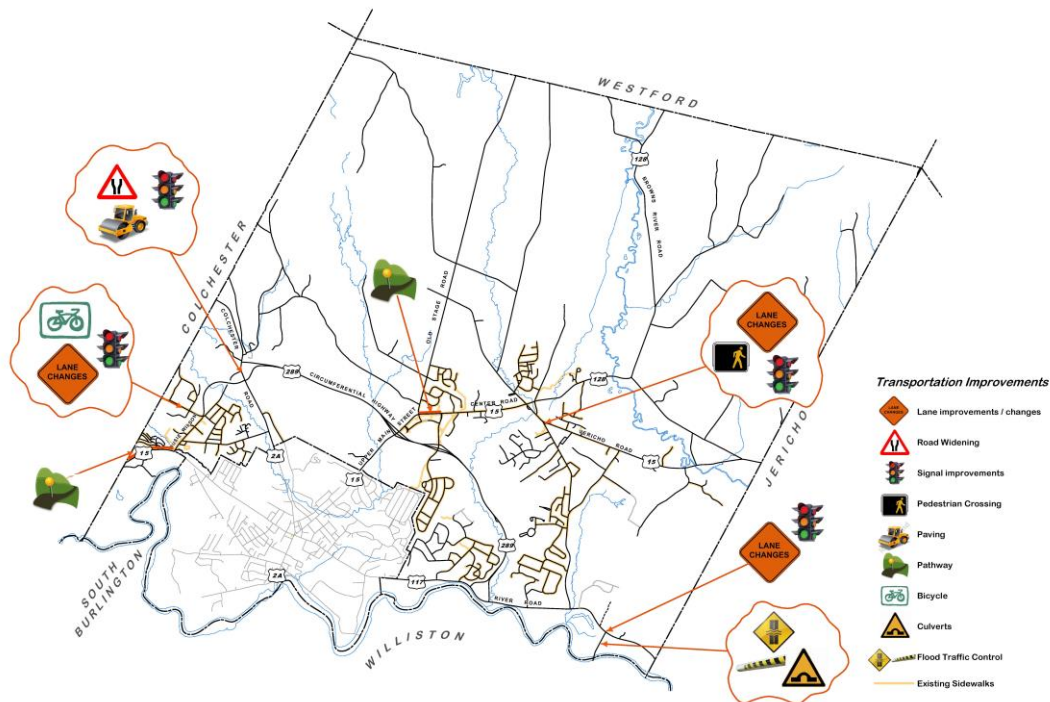
1. **An arterial being used to provide direct access to residences via driveways, numerous residential streets, or curb cuts (aka driveways) for business.** This conflict occurs along most of the Town's arterials. The exceptions are Allen Martin Drive and Essex Way, the town's most recently constructed arterials. As an example, residences and businesses along VT Route 15 in Essex Center have driveways every 75 to 100 feet. Residents and businesses have made numerous complaints about street access and the amount of traffic along VT Route 15.
2. **A collector road or local street being used by through traffic.** This conflict occurs along Brigham Hill Road, Pinecrest Drive, and Weed Road. Vehicles often use Pinecrest Drive, for instance, to avoid congestion at the Five Corners.
3. **Structurally inadequate roads being used to meet a higher functional requirement (for instance, gravel roads acting as collectors).** Local examples of streets that see more traffic than they can structurally handle include Brigham Hill, Discovery, Indian Brook, Lamore, Lost Nation, Osgood Hill, and Sand Hill roads.
4. **Existing roads that were not designed to meet functional requirements but have evolved from older routes of travel.** These roads often have sharp curves and poor sight distances. This type of problem occurs on Lamore, Lost Nation, and Old Stage roads.
5. **Intersections that have become choke points because of inadequate designs to accommodate the movement needs mandated by the functional classes of intersecting roads.** A number of intersections in Essex fail to meet movement needs of vehicles and pedestrians. Earlier transportation management plans have made progress in resolving intersection problems, but many intersections still need fixes to improve local access and more quickly move regional traffic through busy corridors during rush hours. Several of the problem intersections are being redesigned, including the following:
 - *VT Route 15/Sand Hill Road* – Under design by VTRANS (2019 construction)
 - *VT Route 2A/Circumferential Highway* – Under design by VTRANS (2016 construction)

- *VT Route 15/Susie Wilson Road and the Susie Wilson/Kellogg Road corridor* – VTRANS plans to begin design in 2018
- *North Williston Road/VT Route 2A* – VTRANS plans to begin design in 2019

Implementing solutions to traffic problems

Traffic solutions are identified and developed in scoping studies when federal or state grant funding is available. The high cost of important transportation projects almost always prevents the community from paying for improvements without state or federal assistance. The adjoining map shows improvements identified by recent transportation studies. Even though the Town knows how to resolve certain problems, solutions will not be implemented for at least 2 to 8 years. Road network conditions will continue to worsen during that time.

MAP: Transportation Improvements



Traffic improvements for Essex fall under several categories: Circumferential Highway Alternative Projects, Town Center roads, Development Connector roads, and Village Connector roads.

The [Circumferential Highway Alternative Projects](#) came about after the State of Vermont decided not to complete the Circumferential Highway. A regional task force spent two years evaluating and recommending projects to reduce traffic in Colchester, Essex, and Williston. All of the improvements will be paid for entirely with state funds, federal funds, or both. Implementation will occur over 2 to 8 years. The following list summarizes the projects approved for future construction in the Town of Essex outside the Village of Essex Junction (the [2014 Village Comprehensive Plan](#) identifies the Circ Alternative Projects within the Village of Essex Junction):

- **VT Route 2A/Circumferential Highway/Susie Wilson Road Bypass:** Signal upgrades, road widening and repaving
- **Intersection of VT Route 15 and Sand Hill Road:** Reconfiguration, signal installation, pedestrian crossing, signal integration with other signals within the corridor

- 1569 • **VT Route 15/Susie Wilson Road/Kellogg Road:** Corridor and intersection
1570 improvements to include improved bicycle access, added lanes, improved signals
- 1571 • **Intersection of VT Route 117 and North Williston Road:** Lane configuration changes
1572 and signalization
- 1573 • **VT Route 117/North Williston Road hazard mitigation:** Signage, culvert changes, better
1574 gate control for flooding, advance warning devices
- 1575 • **VT Route 15/Susie Wilson Road:** Shared-use path to Winooski, separated from the road
- 1576 • **VT Route 15/Old Stage Road to Essex Way:** Shared-use path on the north side of VT
1577 Route 15

1578 A plan for **Town Center roads** was detailed in the 1991 *Town Center Master Plan*. The proposed
1579 street network covered three areas: Butlers Corners and Lang Farm; historic Essex Center; and an
1580 area bound on three sides by Old Stage Road, Towers Road and VT Route 15. Eventually, an
1581 interconnected network of streets, sidewalks and trails will link the Town Center properties and
1582 connect to adjacent streets and walks. The proposed network of streets and sidewalks could change
1583 with an update of the *Town Center Master Plan*.

1584 Within neighborhoods and subdivisions, **Development Connector roads** epitomize the concept of
1585 transportation alternatives. Multiple accesses to and between subdivisions can improve traffic
1586 efficiency in a subdivision layout as well as the major road networks. The [Official Subdivision](#)
1587 [Regulations](#) require two access points for subdivisions with 50 or more residences, and the Planning
1588 Commission encourages multiple access points for all residential developments. When appropriate,
1589 the Planning Commission encourages developers to dedicate rights-of-way for future road
1590 connections to adjoining parcels. The town discourages dead-end roads and cul-de-sacs because of
1591 high maintenance costs and inefficient traffic movements.

1592 Better road connections between the Village and the Town outside the Village would relieve
1593 congestion on major arterials by providing alternative routes. Improvements to **Village Connector**
1594 **roads** would also improve traffic mobility, emergency vehicle response time, and maintenance
1595 efficiency. To the extent practicable, the Town and Village should work to connect their road
1596 systems where possible and where it is determined to be in the best interests of both communities.
1597 Some potential connections can also serve as Development Connector roads. Linking Countryside
1598 in the Village with the Lang Farm developments outside the Village, for instance, would increase
1599 ridership on the Chittenden County Transportation Authority's bus route to Essex Center. The
1600 route had low ridership numbers in 2015 because of the lack of population along VT Route 15.

1601 **Public Transit**

1602 The primary public transportation service in Essex is bus transit provided by the [Chittenden](#)
1603 [County Transportation Authority](#) (CCTA). The regional transit authority extends coverage to
1604 Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Washington counties. As a CCTA member
1605 community, the Town of Essex has one seat on the CCTA Board of Commissioners.

1606 **BOX: CCTA Routes & Schedules**

1607 The Chittenden County Transportation Authority maintains up-to-date route, schedule and
1608 fare information on its website, www.cctaride.org.

1609 CCTA operated four routes in Essex in 2015: the Essex Junction route, the Essex Center route, the
1610 Williston-Essex route, and the Jeffersonville Commuter. As of 2015, all of CCTA's 70 buses were
1611 wheelchair accessible and equipped with bicycle racks. Essex also receives ADA paratransit service

as part of the public transportation system, which is a CCTA program operated by the [Special Services Transportation Agency](#) (SSTA).

The Town operates the Senior Bus as a second means of public transportation. Funded through the Parks and Recreation Department budget, the Senior Bus provides free transportation to senior citizens. Essex acquired its first senior bus van in 1984, and a second van went into service in 2005. Total ridership in fiscal year 2014 was 4,926. As a popular and successful service, the Senior Bus should continue to receive support from the Town.

SIDEBAR: Transit-oriented and Pedestrian-oriented Development

Public transportation works best when origins and destinations are focused in linear corridors and in city and town centers rather than being spread out in suburban-style subdivisions and office parks. As municipalities and developers consider new construction of homes and commercial space within CCTA's member communities, communication and cooperation with CCTA and other regional organizations is essential to promote a sustainable economy.

CCTA has identified the VT Route 15 corridor between Burlington and Essex Center as a priority for transit-oriented and pedestrian-oriented development. To make best use of CCTA resources and promote future improvements in service, and thus attract more riders, future development and enhancements of the pedestrian environment should be focused along the VT Route 15 corridor – particularly in the Town Center.

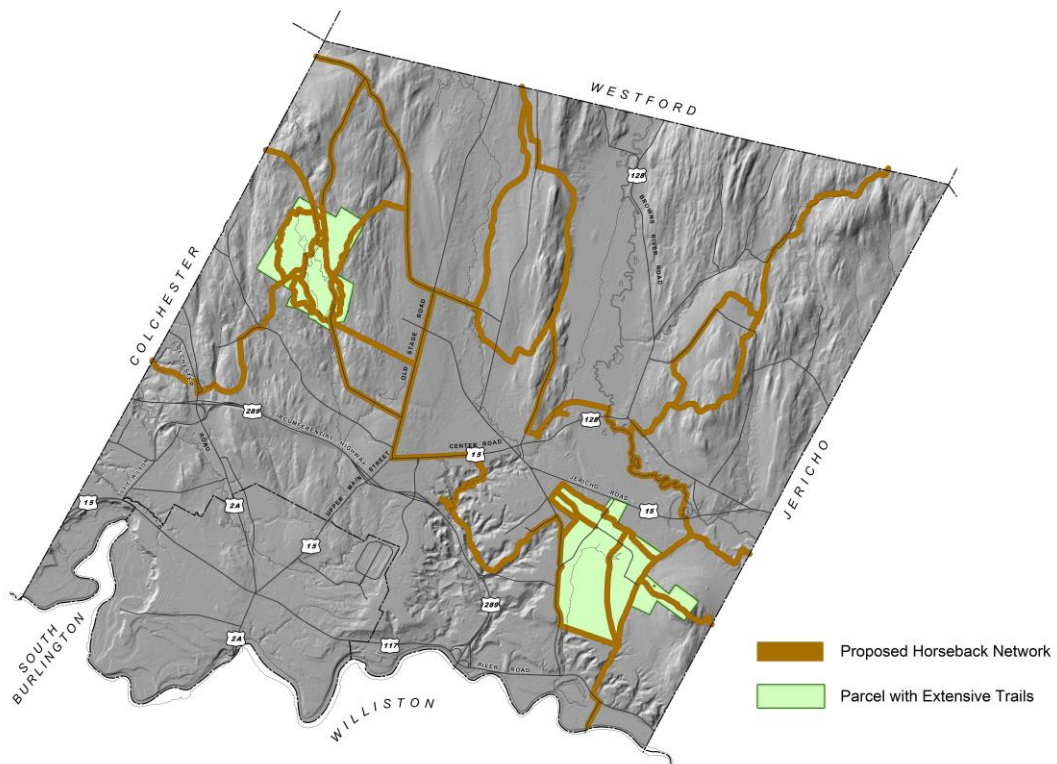
Sidewalks, Trails and Paths

Sidewalks and multi-use paths give residents a safe way to walk to and from shopping centers, jobs, parks and bus stops. Sidewalks provide safety for children as they play near their homes and as they walk to and from school bus stops and neighborhood parks. Five-foot-wide sidewalks are appropriate for pedestrian use, whereas 8- or 10-foot wide multi-use paths accommodate bicyclists as well as pedestrians.

Essex has two key resources that provide guidance for where the Town should install sidewalks, trails and paths. The 2014 [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Town and the Village of Essex Junction](#) contains detailed information on the existing paths, trails, and sidewalks, and identifies where the community needs new pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The Town needs to prioritize which projects in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan should be funded and built. Road and sidewalk construction can be incredibly expensive – a 1,550-foot-long sidewalk being installed along a portion of Pinecrest Road, for example, is expected to cost nearly \$360,000 – and the Town and Village will need to decide how to spend limited money on paths.

The Town Plan serves as the second key resource. The adjoining maps show where the Town would like to expand a public network of footpath, horseback, snowmobile, bicycle, and cross country ski trails.

MAP: Proposed Horseback Network

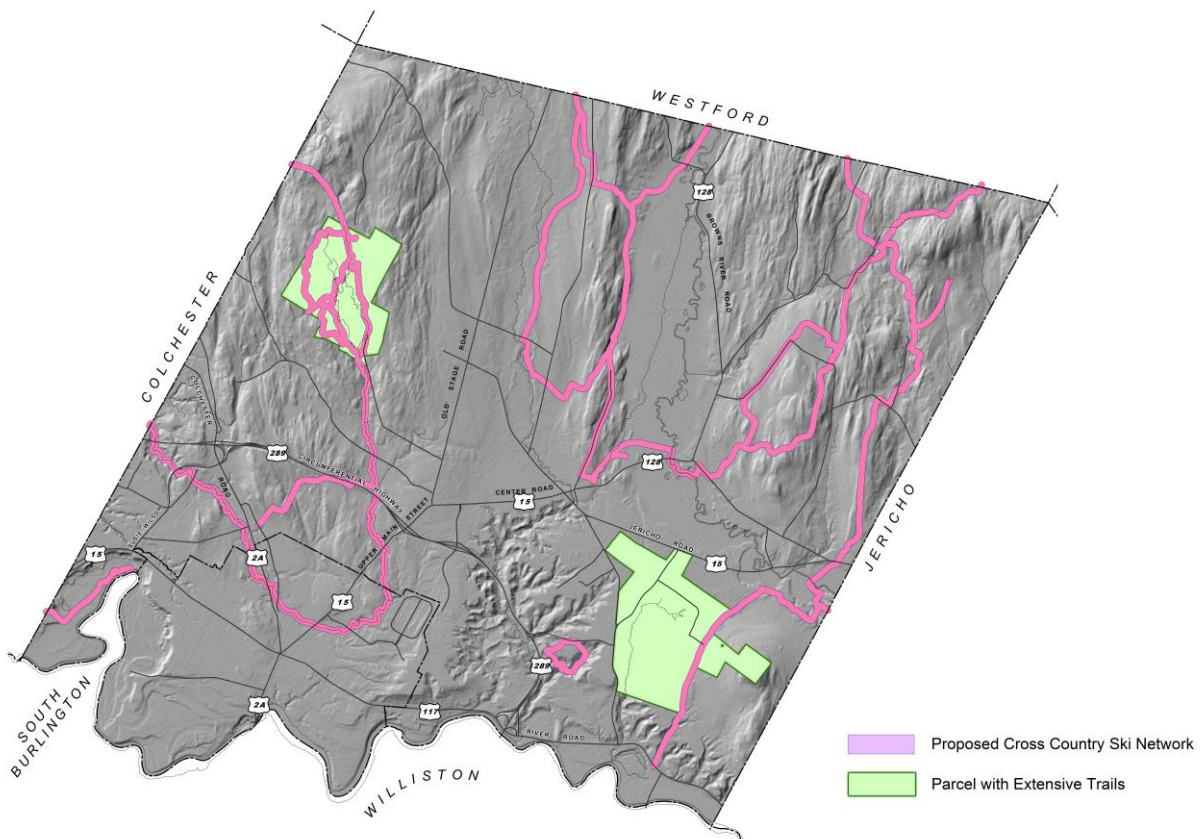


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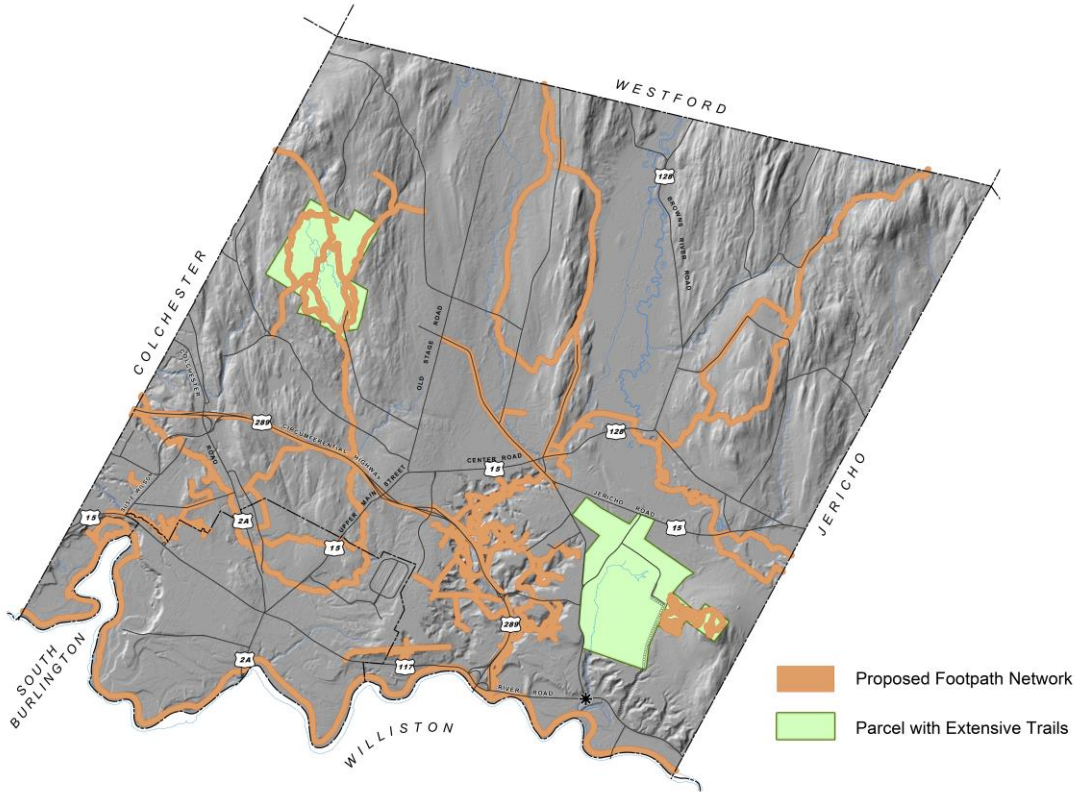
MAP: Proposed Cross Country Ski Network



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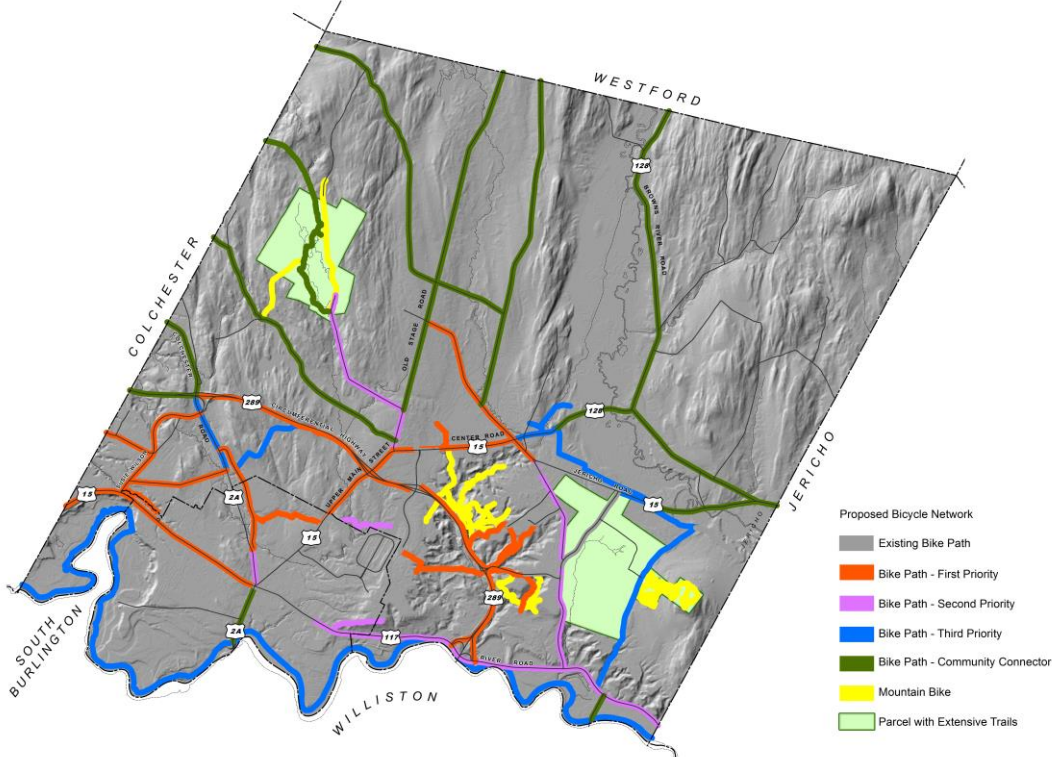
MAP: Proposed Footpath Network



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MAP: Proposed Bicycle Network

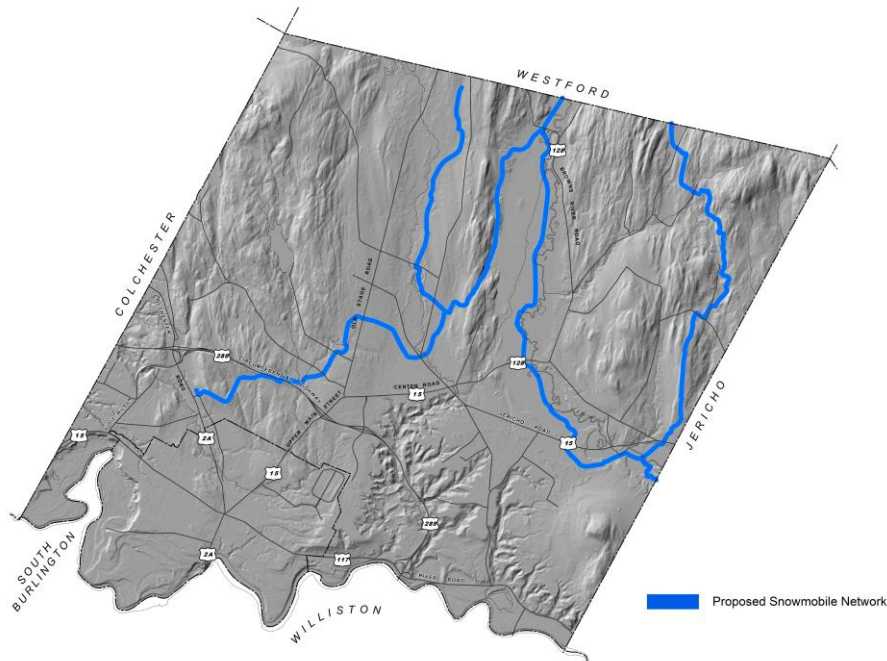


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MAP: Proposed Snowmobile Network



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1663 Developers need to install sidewalks in most new developments. To facilitate the construction of
1664 paths in appropriate locations, the Planning Commission should require that a 20-foot right-of-way
1665 along property frontages be deeded to the town as part of the subdivision and site plan approval
1666 process.

1667 If a property contains a proposed trail from the Town Plan, the Planning Commission can and
1668 should require landowners to provide trail easements when they develop or subdivide their property.
1669 Many of these easements come in the less populated areas of Essex where the town envisions future
1670 trail development.

1671 Because construction costs for sidewalks and trails can be so expensive, most projects require state
1672 or federal grants. In such instances, the town typically uses money from its capital budget to cover a
1673 portion of the project cost. Impact fees also need to be developed and implemented to help pay for
1674 the expansion of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

1675 Several path projects received state grants for design and construction in recent years, including a
1676 paved, 10-foot-wide path along VT Route 2A between Pinecrest Drive and Old Colchester Road; a
1677 5-foot-wide sidewalk on Pinecrest Drive between Suffolk Lane and VT Route 2A; and a 5-foot-wide
1678 sidewalk on Towers Road between Clover Drive and VT Route 15.

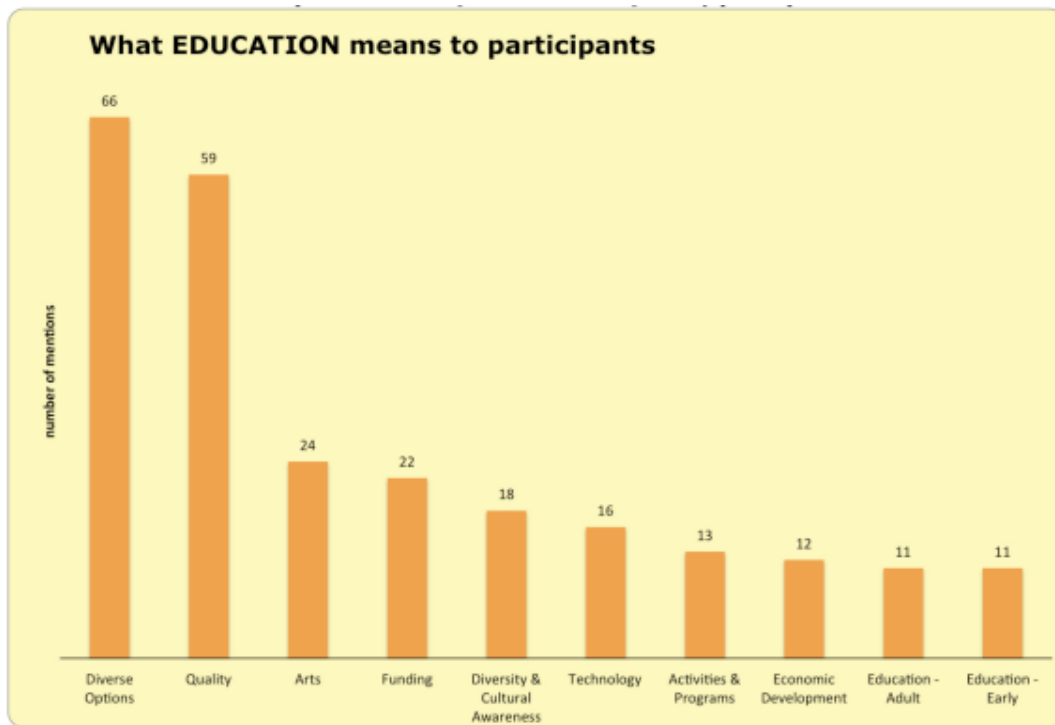
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1680 **Education**

1681 Essex takes pride in its strong school system. Heart & Soul identified [Education](#) as one of the
1682 community's top six values, also noting that education extends beyond the classroom.

1683 “Essex invests time, energy, and resources to ensure that our highly respected schools meet the
1684 needs of everyone in the community,” Heart & Soul reported. “We are proud to support learning
1685 that extends beyond the traditional classroom and includes the arts, athletics, and vocational

institutions. Community programs and libraries offer diverse and affordable opportunities that prepare residents of all ages for lifelong learning and for work in an evolving economy.”



BOX: Heart & Soul describes Education

Heart & Soul participants described the education value in the following ways:

- Diverse educational experiences for people of all ages that recognize different learning styles and includes academics, arts, culture, sports, life skills, language, and more;
- High quality public education, which features high standards and recognition and support of excellent educators;
- Community supported budgets that provide robust funding for schools, teachers and materials, and maintain property values;
- Curricula that increase awareness and knowledge of other cultures and foreign languages;
- Access to current information, media and resources: libraries, internet, technology, e-books; and
- Cooperation with the business community to foster internships and business skills development.

Essex is fortunate to be located within easy commuting distance to numerous colleges, including [Burlington College](#), [Champlain College](#), [Community College of Vermont](#), [St. Michael's College](#), the [University of Vermont](#), and [Vermont Technical College](#). Area high schools and other private entities also offer numerous and varied opportunities for adult education.

Essex Town School District

[Essex Town School District](#) (ETSD) serves students in kindergarten through eighth grade in the Town of Essex outside the Village. ETSD also provides an Early Essential Education preschool program. An elected [school board](#) composed of five members establishes policies to govern ETSD operations, prepares the annual budget, represents community interests, and maintains quality

1712 educational services. The ETSD budget is voted on annually by Australian ballot on the second
1713 Tuesday of April.

1714 ETSD had nearly 240 full-time employees in 2014, 133 of which were certified regular and
1715 specialized teachers. Many staff members have published in nationally distributed periodicals, been
1716 sought as consultants by other schools, and been called upon to give presentations at state, regional
1717 and national conventions. Many staff members also serve on state and national commissions.

1718 ETSD has three school buildings: [Essex Elementary school](#) (grades K-2), [Founders Memorial](#)
1719 [School](#) (grades 3-5), and [Essex Middle School](#) (grades 6-8).

1720 **Essex Community Education Center**

1721 Once Essex students reach high school, most attend the Essex Community Education Center Union
1722 District #46. The Community Education Center contains [Essex High School](#) and the [Center for](#)
1723 [Technology, Essex](#). The Community Education Center draws students from inside and outside the
1724 Village, as well as from nearby towns. In the 2014-15 school year, Essex students living outside the
1725 Village comprised approximately 46 percent of the Union High School's total enrollment. Out-of-
1726 town tuition students make up slightly more than 15 percent of the enrollment at the Community
1727 Education Center. Tuition students provide greater opportunities for expanded curriculum than
1728 might otherwise be possible with a smaller student body.

1729 **Paying for education**

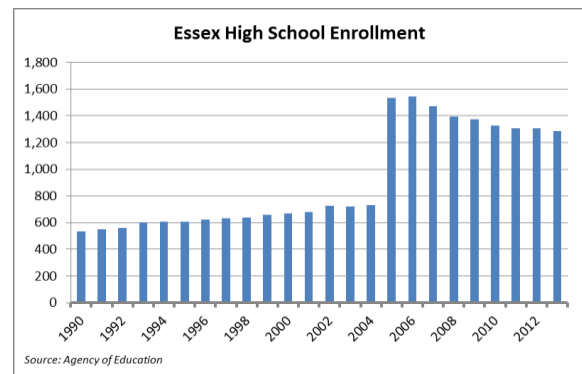
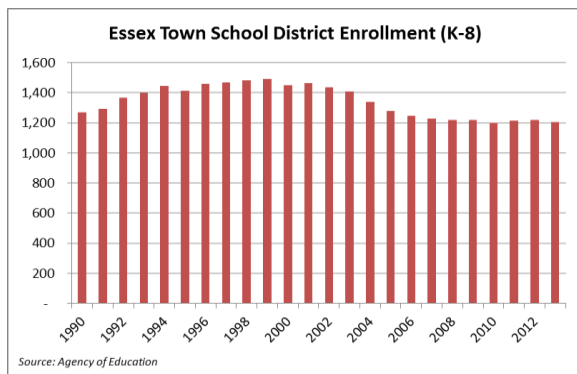
1730 School funding comes primarily through property taxes, although tuition students are generally
1731 considered to have a positive impact on school funding. A separate grade 9-12 tax rate is calculated
1732 for Essex Town and is added to the Essex Town pre-K-8 tax rate. Vermont has a statewide
1733 education funding system, Act 60, which impacts local tax rates for schools.

1734 In the 2014-2015 school year, education spending per equalized pupil was \$15,365 for all K-12
1735 students in the Town; the state average was \$14,029.

1736 **Planning for education**

1737 Planning decisions on the location, type, and amount of future growth can have significant
1738 implications for educational services. Because education represents a large portion of local
1739 expenditures – school taxes tend to account for 76 percent of property tax bills each year – the
1740 Community Development Department and Planning Commission shall continue to coordinate
1741 planning decisions with the school districts to avoid adverse fiscal impacts on the Town.

1742 Across all grades, 1,870 Essex Town students were attending Essex schools as of October 2013.
1743 School populations should remain relatively stable during the second decade of the 2010s, due to
1744 two competing factors. Declining numbers of women of child-bearing age will lower fertility rates
1745 and the resulting number of children born in Essex. In contrast, in-migration will continue to cause
1746 the number of children entering school in kindergarten and beyond to be greater than the number of
1747 Essex births.



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The Town and the school districts should continue their cooperative relationship of monitoring and mitigating the impacts of the Town's growth on the school system. Ongoing and past efforts include the following:

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- The adoption of a residential phasing policy to control the rate of growth in accordance with what the schools can accommodate.

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- Cooperation in the annual updating of a computerized enrollment and population growth projection model.

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- Acquisition of land for school facility expansion needs from the Forestdale Heights residential subdivision.

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- The adoption of school impact fees to assist in the acquisition or construction of new school facilities. The fees were phased out in 2010 because of the decline in school enrollment.

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Other planning considerations pertaining to schools include transportation, availability and location of recreational activities, and future school sites.

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SIDEBAR: Educational facilities

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A school's capacity is determined by a number of interrelated and frequently changing variables, including federal and state program mandates, teachers' union contract provisions and the School Board's own philosophy about issues such as student/teacher ratios. Based on enrollment projections as of October 2013, the Essex Town School District does not anticipate the need for additional classroom space. The need to provide more specialized and therapeutic teaching has required that all available program and classroom space in each building be used extensively throughout the school day.

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Essex Elementary School – Located on Bixby Hill Road, this 58,300-square-foot building has 30 classrooms, a gym, cafeteria and kitchen, a learning center, and two large common rooms that can be used for larger assemblies. The facility housed 488 students (pre-K – second grade) and 78 full-time staff as of October 2013. Essex Elementary School sits on 13 acres. The original building, known as the Essex Classical Institute, was torn down in 1971 because it was structurally unsound. The Institute still owns a 10-acre site on the south side of Browns River Road but allows the Town School District to use the property.

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Founders Memorial School – This 68,200-square-foot building on Founders Road was originally built in 1979, and expanded in 1990. The building has 27 classrooms, a computer lab, a gym, cafeteria and kitchen, and a learning center. Several energy efficiency upgrades have been completed since 2009, including the installation of a new roof in 2012. As of October 2013, there were 382 students (grades 3-5) and 71 full-time staff members.

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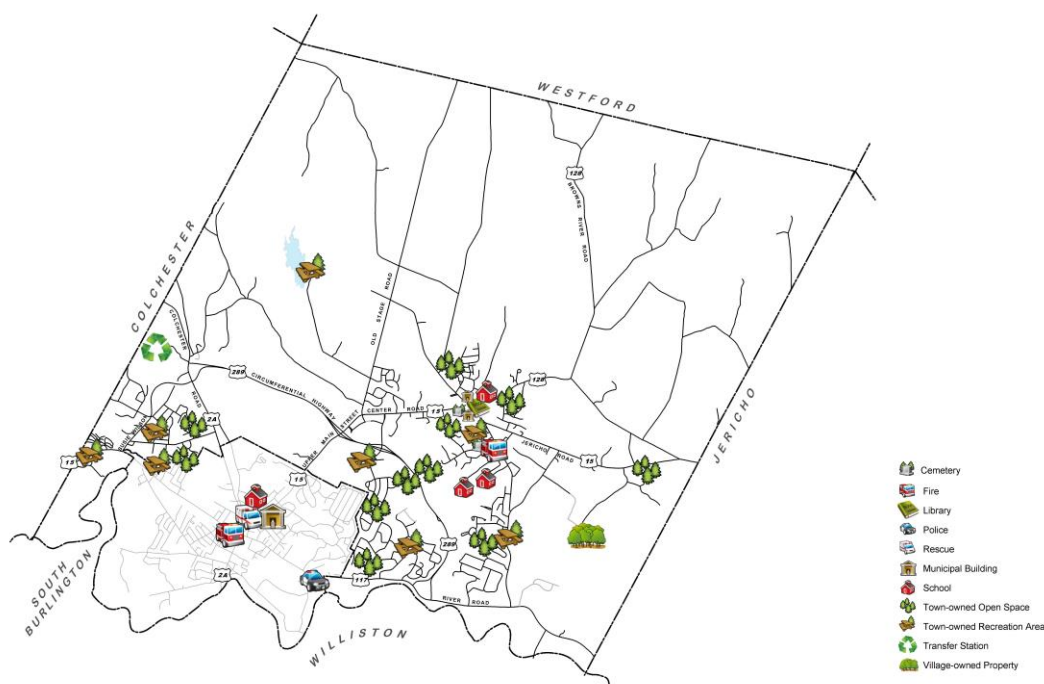
Essex Middle School – This 82,700-square-foot facility was built in 1970 off Founders Road on a 100-acre site shared with the Founders Memorial School. The middle school has 31

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classrooms, one computer lab, a gym, cafeteria and kitchen, a family consumer science lab, an industrial arts lab, and a learning center. In 1999, Essex residents approved additions, upgrades and renovations to the building. Several energy efficiency upgrades have been completed since 2009, including the installation of an 18-kilowatt solar panel array on the school's roof and a 150-kilowatt solar panel array behind the building. The middle school had 426 students (grades 6-8) and 76 full time staff as of October 2013.

Essex Community Educational Center – This complex, located on Educational Drive in the Village of Essex Junction, is home to Essex High School and the Center for Technology, Essex. The 89.2-acre site includes a 308,300-square-foot building. The original 245,000-square-foot building was constructed in 1970; an addition in 2000 brought another 24,500 square feet and included a lighted track, football field, tennis courts, indoor ice skating rink, gymnasium, 715-seat auditorium and several meeting rooms. A renovation in 2007 added 28,500 to fit up the first floor of the library and renovate the skating facility to include additional instructional space.

MAP: Community facilities



Housing

BOX: Specific Housing Policies

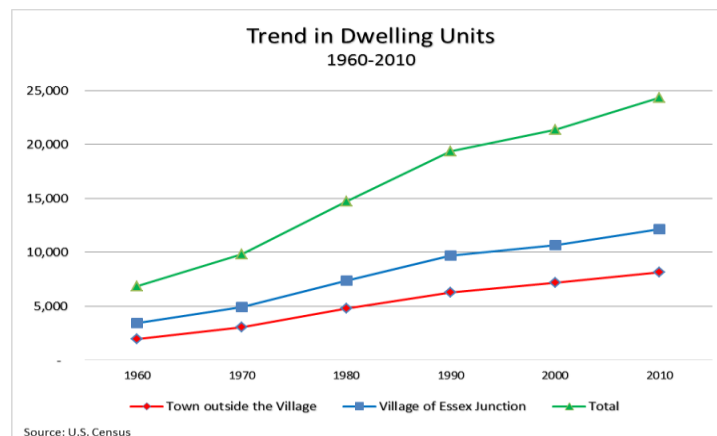
- **2(S).12:** In adherence to the federal Fair Housing Act, the Town shall not have housing policies or regulations that result in the unfair treatment of protected categories of people.
- **2(S).13:** The provision of new housing in the community shall be balanced with impacts on the environment and on public facilities and services.
- **2(S).14:** New housing shall be directed to areas identified as suitable for growth, specifically the Town Center and Susie Wilson Road corridor.
- **2(S).15:** The housing stock shall serve residents of all income levels, ages, and special needs.

Existing housing in Essex ranges from large, single-family homes to condos to large apartment buildings. The number of households has approximated the population increase, although since the mid-1900s Essex has seen a gradual decline in the number of people living in those homes. In 1960, an average of 3.65 people lived in a household; in 2010, the average Essex home had 2.48 people.

The trend reflects a shift in the types of housing being built in Essex. In 1967, single-family homes comprised 91 percent of all the dwellings built in town. Recent construction, however, has brought an influx of multifamily housing, including condominiums, townhouses, and congregate facilities. Of 170 building permits issued from 2009 through 2014 for new homes in the Town outside the Village, 56 percent were for condominiums/townhouses.

The trend toward multi-family housing will likely continue. Through its [Official Subdivision Regulations](#) and residential phasing policy, the Town directs 80 percent of its housing growth to land within the sewer core (generally speaking, the areas around the Susie Wilson Road corridor and between VT Route 15 and VT Route 117). With a limited amount of land within the sewer core, the Town can expect to see a greater number of multi-family housing buildings. Taller buildings and greater densities will help achieve a pattern of compact development within the sewer core. The more rural parts of Essex outside the sewer core can expect to see a greater proportion of single-family homes.

The expected development patterns have played out in recent housing trends. The Planning Commission gave preliminary or final phasing approval to 46 subdivisions between 2008 and 2014. Of the 20 projects inside the sewer core, all but five featured multi-family or congregate housing. Outside the sewer core, only one of 26 projects included multi-family dwellings; the rest of the subdivisions were for single-family homes.

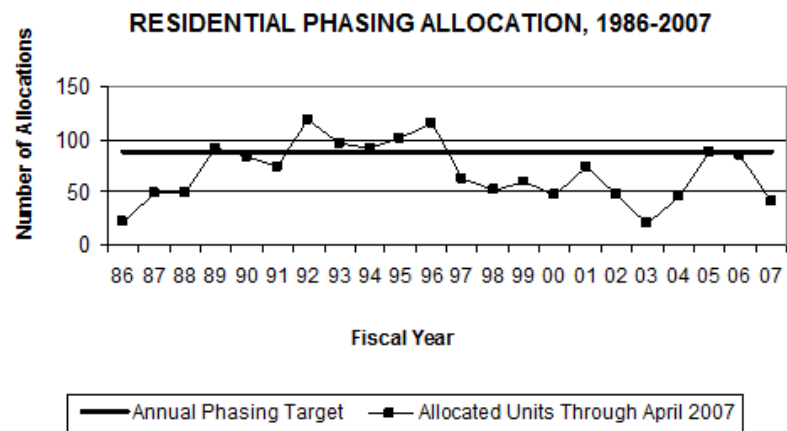


The total number of housing units in Essex increased from 7,170 in 2000 to 8,146 in 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The average annual growth rate of 1.28 percent lagged behind Chittenden County (1.53 percent) and the rest of the state (2.97 percent). The annual rate of housing increases exceeded annual local, county, and state population increases of 0.5 percent, 0.66 percent, and 0.5 percent, respectively, for the same time period.

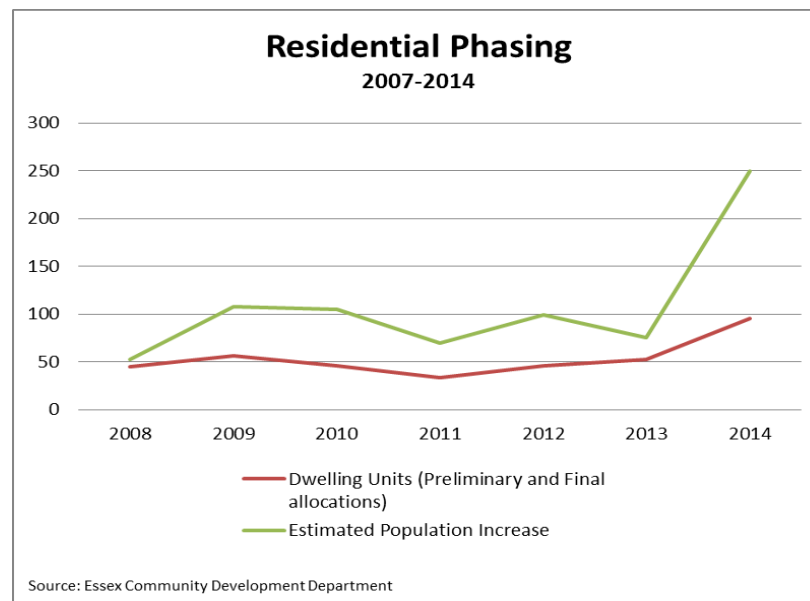
Regionally, housing in the Town outside the Village has increased from 8.7 percent of the county stock in 1960 to 12.4 percent in 2010. The ratio has hovered at approximately 12 percent since 1980. Including the Village, Essex had 18.5 percent of the housing stock in Chittenden County in 2010.

To ensure population growth does not strain Town services and schools, Essex has a residential phasing policy that caps the number of homes that can be built each year. The limit is based on population estimates associated with new development – essentially, every new bedroom is expected to result in one new person. Since it was updated in 2008, the phasing policy has had a target of 205

1845 people per year, with a target range of 184 to 226. Prior to 2008, the Town sought to control
1846 development by the targeting 88 dwelling per year, rather than by population.



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1851 **Housing affordability**

1852 The town wants to ensure that residents can afford to live in Essex. In recent years, the Planning
1853 Commission has heard from residents and nonprofit organizations advocating for better support for
1854 housing issues such as affordable housing and micro-housing which is a catch-all term for tiny
1855 houses, micro-apartments, and micro-units.

1856 “Affordable housing developments help to revitalize neighborhoods and strengthen communities,
1857 reduce blight, and mitigate environmental hazards,” the [Vermont Housing & Conservation Board](#)
1858 wrote in its [2014 Annual Report to the General Assembly](#). “Construction and renovation of affordable
1859 housing creates jobs and stimulates the economy. Decent rental or owner occupied housing
1860 provides a secure place to raise a family or retire in old age. Transitional housing is a key component
1861 of a second chance for people leaving institutions.”

1862 As a general rule, a household should spend no more than 30 percent of its income on housing
1863 costs. The median household income in Essex in 2013, as estimated by the American Community

Survey, was \$80,567 – more than the median earnings in the county, state, and nation. The average assessed home value in Essex was \$251,000 in 2013. The [Vermont Housing Data's Home Mortgage Calculator](#) indicates that a household earning the annual median income of \$80,567 can afford a home costing \$247,500, which makes a home valued at the average assessed amount just slightly more than 30 percent of a median income household's income. The ratio of home value to income in Essex was lower than those of the county, state, and nation, which were 3.98, 3.71, and 3.42, respectively.

CHART: Annual household income

Project-based affordable housing (offered through a specific government-subsidized housing program) is based on a variety of standards but is usually related to the Area Median Income (AMI). Eligible households may be limited to those earning just 30% of the AMI, 50% of the AMI, or up to 80% of the AMI. Moderate income housing is affordable to households having between 80 percent and 120 percent of an area's household income.

The Town outside the Village had 171 “affordable” rental units across four different housing facilities in 2015, according to the [Vermont Housing Finance Agency](#). The Village had another 114 units in three facilities.

Essex has incentives in its [Official Zoning Regulations](#) to encourage more affordable housing – developers are allowed to build more homes on a property if some of the units are considered “affordable” – but developers have rarely used the density bonuses. Most of the affordable units built in recent years have been incentivized through federal subsidy programs. The affordable housing incentives in the [Official Zoning Regulations](#) were last updated in 2008. Essex has not closely studied affordable housing since 1990, when an Affordable Housing Task Force released findings and recommendations in the *Report of the Essex/Essex Junction Affordable Housing Task Force, March 1990*. The Task Force is no longer active, and the report has not been updated in 25 years, despite its conclusion:

“Affordable housing does not occur by itself. If it did there would be no need for this report... First it is critical that there be some strong local vehicle in the community with the express purpose of facilitating the construction of new affordable housing. Secondly, new affordable housing will only be created through cooperative efforts on the part of the municipalities and the developers and the builders who create the housing. The second is unlikely to occur without the first.”

The town should either appoint a new ad-hoc housing task force or commission a study, or do both, to fully assess the housing needs of the community for all ages and income levels, including affordable housing. The study shall compare Essex to similar communities and determine how the Town fits in the regional scope of housing. If the housing assessment shows a need for more affordable housing, the task force or study shall provide options to better incentivize or regulate more affordable housing. As Essex explores ways to expand affordable housing options, it should consider all types of alternative housing styles. While a comprehensive housing study is called for, efforts should be made to consider zoning changes to increase housing availability in the meantime.

The Town should also seek out grant opportunities to support affordable housing, and should partner with organizations that specialize in affordable housing, such as [Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity](#), [Cathedral Square](#), and the [Champlain Housing Trust](#).

Childcare

BOX: Specific Childcare Policy

1908 • **2(S).16:** The Town shall continue to allow childcare facilities and home daycares in all
1909 zoning districts that permit schools, as well as in residential zoning districts.

1910 The availability of adequate childcare facilities for working parents is widely considered a critical
1911 ingredient of a healthy community. Not only is childcare an essential part of a community's social
1912 infrastructure, support for such facilities is increasingly considered an important economic
1913 development strategy.

1914 Essex has 3,830 children who are 14 and younger and could potentially need childcare, according to
1915 the 2013 American Community Survey from the U.S. Census. Including the Village, 6 percent of
1916 Essex's 2010 population was younger than 5, 6.6 percent was between the ages of 5 and 9, and 7
1917 percent of the population was between the ages of 10 and 14.

1918 Childcare options in Essex include preschools, summer camps, and care for infants and toddlers.
1919 Childcare facilities are regulated by the [Vermont Department for Children and Families](#) (DCF).
1920 Providers must register with the state, whether they operate out of a private home or run a
1921 commercial child center.

1922 As of May 2015, the [DCF Bright Futures Child Care Information System](#) reports that six licensed
1923 programs (including school programs) and five registered homes outside the Village were providing
1924 childcare. The facilities had a total capacity for 364 children. Another 21 licensed programs
1925 (including school programs) and 11 registered homes offered child care inside the Village, with a
1926 combined capacity for 729 children.

1927 The existing childcare programs seem to have some capacity available, indicating that Essex is
1928 adequately served by existing childcare facilities. Programs are often licensed to serve more students
1929 than they report the capacity for, meaning the programs may be able to accommodate a greater
1930 capacity in the future.

1931 Most zoning areas in the Town – inside and outside the Village – allow childcare facilities and home
1932 daycare facilities. The [Official Zoning Regulations](#) contain a full list of zoning districts that allow
1933 childcare facilities.

1934 Local school districts are dedicated community partners in providing young children with preschool
1935 and early care learning experiences, as well as educational after-school care options for young
1936 students. [Essex Town School District](#) partners with the [Greater Burlington YMCA](#) to provide after-
1937 school care through an Extended School Program at Essex Elementary School and Founders
1938 Memorial School. Essex Elementary School also hosts a branch of Champlain Valley Head Start,
1939 providing preschool education to children from low-income families.

1940 The [Essex Parks and Recreation Department](#) offers a number of half-day and full-day summer camp
1941 options for elementary and middle-school aged students.

1942 The [2014 Village of Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan](#) contains more specific childcare information for
1943 the Village.

1944

Energy

BOX: Specific Energy Policies

1947 • **2(S).17:** Whenever possible, the Town shall encourage construction standards for new
1948 buildings that exceed Vermont's Residential Building Standards and Commercial Building
1949 Standards.

1950 • **2(S).18:** Initiatives, both regulatory and non-regulatory, shall be supported that result in
 1951 decreased greenhouse gas emissions, reductions in energy consumption, and increases in
 1952 renewable energy generation.

1953 Since releasing a [Comprehensive Energy Plan](#) in 2011, Vermont has been working toward a goal of
 1954 obtaining 90 percent of its energy from renewable resources by 2050. When the *Comprehensive Energy*
 1955 *Plan* was released, 23 percent of Vermont’s energy came from renewables.

1956 Led by the Essex [Energy Committee](#), Essex is striving to match the state’s 90 percent goal. The
 1957 Essex Energy Committee has taken the position that, “For Essex Town to achieve the 90 percent
 1958 renewables level of success for the overall betterment of our community, we must develop and
 1959 implement plans, which aggressively change the way in which we view energy from the standpoint
 1960 of cost, use and conservation.”

1961 Energy use in Vermont falls into three categories: transportation, commercial and industrial, and
 1962 residential. Transportation accounted for 38 percent of energy use in the state in 2012, the year with
 1963 the most recently available data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Commercial and
 1964 industrial operations accounted for 32 percent of energy use and residential energy use made up the
 1965 remaining 30 percent.

1966 With the 2014 closure of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant, which accounted for 70 percent
 1967 of the electric power generated within the state, Vermont will grow overwhelmingly dependent on
 1968 energy sources produced in other states.

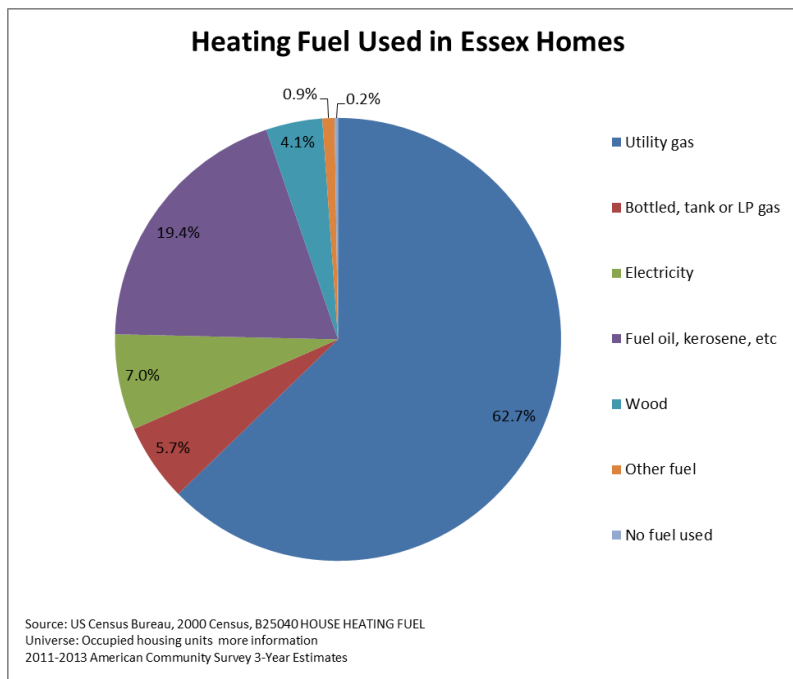
1969 The state’s Comprehensive Energy Plan makes many policy recommendations to move toward the
 1970 goal of 90 percent renewables, with the intentions of fostering economic security and independence,
 1971 safeguarding an environmental legacy, driving in-state innovation and job creation, and increasing
 1972 community involvement and investment. The plan prioritizes improvements in energy conservation
 1973 and efficiency and developing sustainable, local sources of energy.

1974 Essex will take a similar approach. The Town has yet to develop its own comprehensive energy plan,
 1975 but the Essex Energy Committee has identified four areas that have the most influence over energy
 1976 use in town: buildings, community, transportation, and government. The Energy Committee has
 1977 recommended multiple projects in each area. Completing the projects will lead to energy savings and
 1978 an improved quality of life for all residents of Essex through financial savings and less pollution.

1979 **Buildings**

1980 The building inventory in Essex includes government buildings, residences, and commercial
 1981 structures. Town-owned structures range from the new, energy efficient Essex Police Station to
 1982 historic, inefficient buildings such as Memorial Hall. With a goal of saving tax dollars by improving
 1983 energy efficiency of Town-owned structures, the Town should conduct an overall energy assessment
 1984 and retrofit plan for all municipally-owned properties.

1985 Residential energy costs are often overlooked due to the current low cost of natural gas and the
 1986 stable cost of electricity. Residential incentives, improvements in zoning regulations, and energy
 1987 education should be at the forefront of residential energy planning in Essex. Through regulations
 1988 and incentives, the town should also encourage commercial property owners to invest in energy
 1989 conservation measures, rather than letting heating, cooling, and lighting costs fall to tenants. The
 1990 state has [Residential Building Energy Standards](#) and [Commercial Building Energy Standards](#) that
 1991 establish a minimum level of energy efficiency in new and renovated buildings. The Town should
 1992 investigate incentives to encourage builders to exceed the basic energy standards.



1993

1994 Community

1995 Essex residents can improve energy use and improve the community by taking steps to reduce
1996 dependence on fossil fuels, supporting the Locavore farm-to-table movement, and installing forest
1997 management plans for relevant properties. Additionally, Essex should investigate the concept of a
1998 community net metering solar array by conducting an engineering study for the former town dump
1999 located near the intersection of VT Route 2A and VT Route 289.

2000 Transportation

2001 As noted in the Transportation section of the Town Plan, Essex has been and continues to be a
2002 transportation hub. The Town has the only Amtrak station in Chittenden County, an active bus
2003 terminal, and five state highways. Promoting compact development, providing more options for
2004 walking, biking, and public transit, and encouraging more effective use of automobiles can reduce
2005 energy use in the transportation sector. Essex should also explore regulatory changes to facilitate the
2006 installation of electric vehicle charging stations as part of development review. [Drive Electric](#)
2007 [Vermont](#) has information on the use of electric cars.

2008 Government

2009 As the town's primary source of regulation and enforcement, as well as a source of guidance for the
2010 community, the Town government can champion energy reform and efficiency.

2011 Essex needs to prepare for energy-related issues beyond its control. As the town and state take steps
2012 to improve efficiency, reduce consumption, and incorporate more renewable energy into the mix,
2013 large-scale renewable energy sites such as solar or wind farms may locate in Essex. Though the
2014 community could take pride in locally-produced, renewable energy, other Vermont towns can attest
2015 to the controversy that can arise when wind turbines are placed atop ridgelines or solar arrays fill
2016 previously undeveloped fields.

2017 The [Vermont Public Service Board](#), rather than the Town of Essex, issues permits for utility
2018 facilities including electric transmission facilities and electric generation facilities. As a result, energy
2019 projects can easily bypass local regulations. The Town must work to identify areas where it wants

2020 large-scale energy projects to locate, as well as the areas that should be off-limits to large-scale
2021 energy projects. The Town should also work to incorporate siting standards into the next version of
2022 the Town Plan, as the Public Service Board and Act 250 will look to town plans for some guidance.

2023

2024 **Flood Resilience**

2025 **BOX: Specific Flood Resilience Policies**

2026 • **2(S).19:** Development shall be avoided, and land conserved, in particularly vulnerable
2027 areas such as floodplains and river corridors.

2028 • **2(S).20:** Where development already exists in vulnerable areas, measures shall be
2029 taken to protect people, buildings and facilities to reduce future flooding risk.

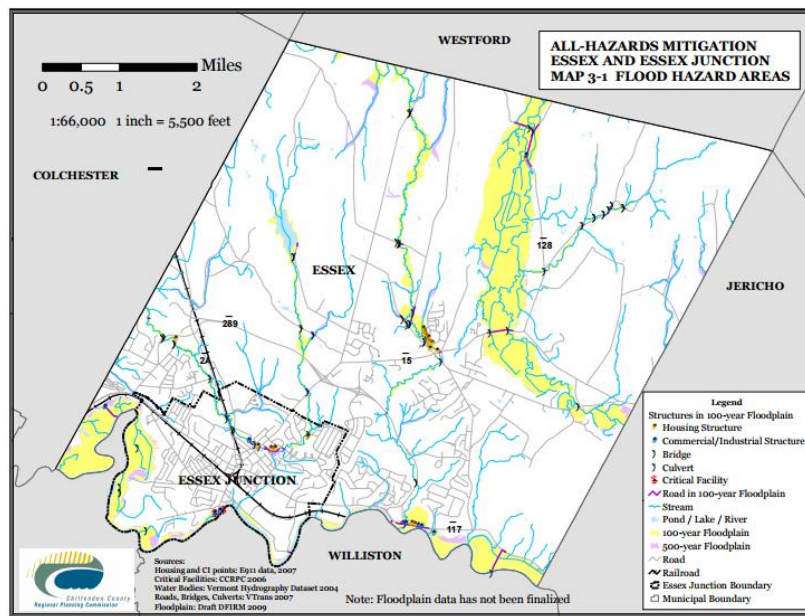
2030 • **2(S).21:** New development shall be planned for and encouraged in areas that are less
2031 vulnerable to future flooding events.

2032 • Stormwater management techniques shall be used to slow, spread and sink floodwater.

2033 Essex and the rest of Vermont have learned in recent years just how much devastation floods can
2034 cause. When Tropical Storm Irene hit in 2011, massive amounts of rain inundated the state's rivers
2035 and streams, flooding downtowns and washing out roads and bridges. Fortunately for Essex, the
2036 storm had minimal impact on the Town. Subsequent storms, however, showed that Essex is not
2037 immune to flooding. Rainstorms in May 2013, for instance, washed out parts of VT Route 15 and
2038 Weed Road. With several significant rivers and brooks and numerous smaller streams flowing
2039 through town, Essex needs to be ready for future floods.

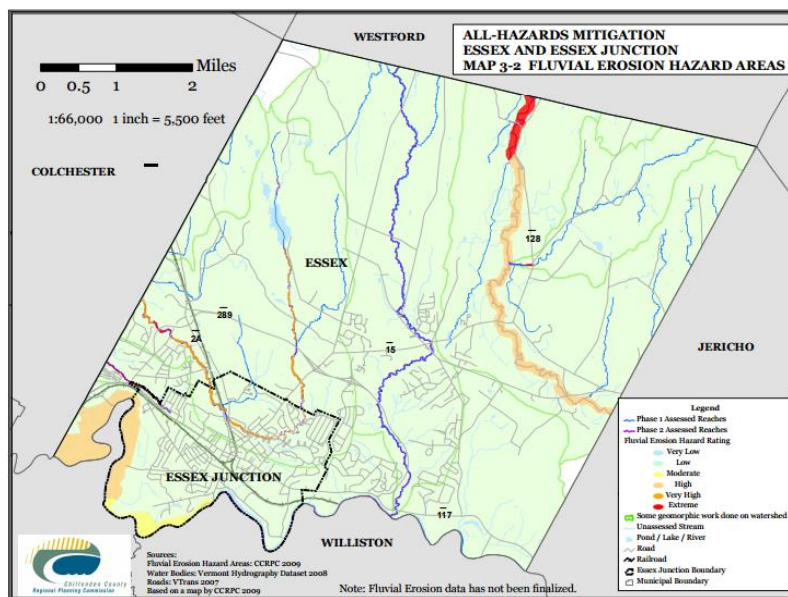
2040 To reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property, Essex needs to avoid
2041 new development in floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland
2042 forests, all of which can absorb storm water and reduce flood damage. Those areas need to be
2043 protected and, when necessary, restored. Wherever new development does occur, it cannot
2044 exacerbate flooding or fluvial erosion. Flood and fluvial erosion hazard areas, as well as areas to be
2045 protected, appear on the adjoining maps.

2046 ***MAP: Flood Hazard Areas***



Source: All Hazards Mitigation Plan, 2011

MAP: Fluvial Erosion Hazard Areas



Source: All Hazards Mitigation Plan, 2011

All Hazards Mitigation Plan

To respond to flooding and other potential disasters, the Town and Village worked with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission to adopt an [All Hazards Mitigation Plan](#) in 2011. An update is planned for 2016. The plan identifies flooding as one of the nine most significant hazards for Essex, including Essex Junction.

The *All Hazards Mitigation Plan* identifies and maps floodplains and other areas at risk. As of 2009, 17 residences and six commercial or industrial structures were located within the 100-year floodplain in Essex outside of the Village. The *Mitigation Plan* also notes the presence of Essex Dam #19 at Indian Brook Reservoir, “which is the only high-hazard dam located in Chittenden County. Green

2061 Mountain Power, which owns the dam, has mapped the area that would be inundated in the unlikely
2062 event of a dam failure. ... The emergency action plan for the dam is updated annually and provided
2063 to appropriate first-responder organizations.”

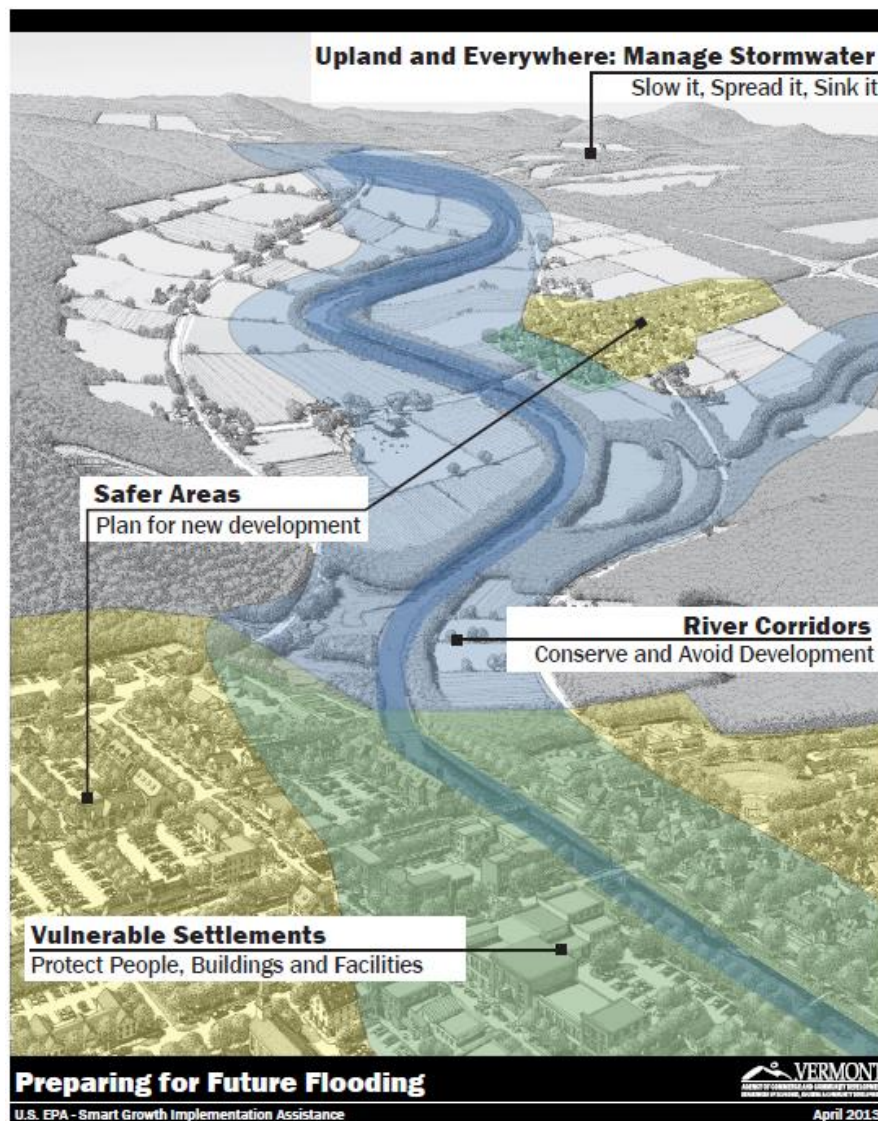
2064 The *Mitigation Plan* identifies three critical facilities in the floodplain in the Village of Essex Junction,
2065 downstream of Essex Dam #19. The Center for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance
2066 defines critical facilities as, “Those structures critical to the operation of a community and the key
2067 installations of the economic sector.” Two of the critical facilities are associated with Green
2068 Mountain Power, and the third is Essex Rescue, which may want to consider moving out of the
2069 floodplain.

2070 Bridges and culverts can help control the flow of water during floods, and the *Mitigation Plan* calls for
2071 continued monitoring of vulnerable infrastructure at locations with erosion and scouring concerns.
2072 The *Mitigation Plan* also calls for erosion monitoring or landslide mitigation projects on portions of
2073 Lamore Road and Osgood Hill Road that regularly incur damage from adjacent rivers and streams.

2074 Essex is already taking some actions to address flooding concerns. For example, the Town has an
2075 Emergency Operations Plan that provides directives for emergency preparedness and response
2076 planning. The Town also maintains a culvert inventory and has identified and replaced many of the
2077 deficient culverts. Furthermore, the [Official Zoning Regulations](#) protect vulnerable areas by heavily
2078 restricting development in floodplains, and on slopes greater than 20 percent, and by requiring
2079 buffers next to wetlands and streams.

2080 **Disaster Recovery and Long-Term Resilience**

2081 Following Tropical Storm Irene, the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) Office of
2082 Sustainable Communities and the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) (FEMA) partnered to
2083 provide the State of Vermont with requested flood planning and preparation assistance. The
2084 resulting document, [Disaster Recovery and Long-Term Resilience Planning in Vermont, August 2013](#),
2085 recommends improving flood resiliency in four areas: River Corridors, Safer Areas, Vulnerable
2086 Settlements, and Upland and Everywhere.



Policy options can enhance flood resiliency in four areas: River Corridors, Safer Areas, Vulnerable Settlements, and Upland and Everywhere.

Within **River Corridors**, Essex should conserve land and avoid development, particularly in vulnerable areas such as floodplains. The town uses its [Official Zoning Regulations](#) to heavily restrict new development in its river corridors and floodplains. The *Indian Brook Departure Analysis and Project Identification Summary* and the *Browns River Corridor Plan* identify improvement projects within those river corridors.

Based on recommendations from the EPA guide, the Town can acquire or protect land in flood-prone locations and remove vulnerable structures in those areas. Landowners can implement pre-disaster mitigation measures. The town can also continue to work on stricter zoning and subdivision standards in open spaces.

Inside **Vulnerable Settlements**, Essex should protect people, buildings and facilities to reduce future flooding risk for existing development. The *All Hazards Mitigation Plan* includes much more detail on these hazards. Essex has a capital improvement program for buyouts or relocation of damaged structures, and FEMA may have after-the-fact funds available for buyouts if an emergency

2103 is declared. The Town's [Official Zoning Regulations](#) protect rebuilt structures but do not allow new
2104 construction in floodplains.

2105 **Safer Areas** exist to accommodate new development in locations that are less vulnerable to
2106 flooding. Essex plans for and encourages new development in Safer Areas through its Future Land
2107 Use Map and Zoning District Map, which direct growth away from areas prone to floods.

2108 In **Upland and Everywhere** areas, the EPA guide calls for the implementation of stormwater
2109 management techniques to slow, spread and sink floodwater. Essex has proactively managed
2110 stormwater for a number of years through the [Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System](#) (MS4)
2111 permit program, which requires stormwater management efforts locally and throughout watersheds.
2112 Other ongoing efforts in the town include the management and regulation of roads, driveways and
2113 parking lots through the [Official Zoning Regulations](#) and *Public Works Specifications*. The Town can
2114 explore watershed-wide stormwater management efforts, many of which are identified in the Indian
2115 Brook and Browns River studies. The Village requires Low Impact Development techniques, and
2116 the Town can expand its own green infrastructure requirements. The Town can also adopt tree
2117 canopy protection measures, vegetated buffer requirements, and tighter restrictions on development
2118 on steep slopes.

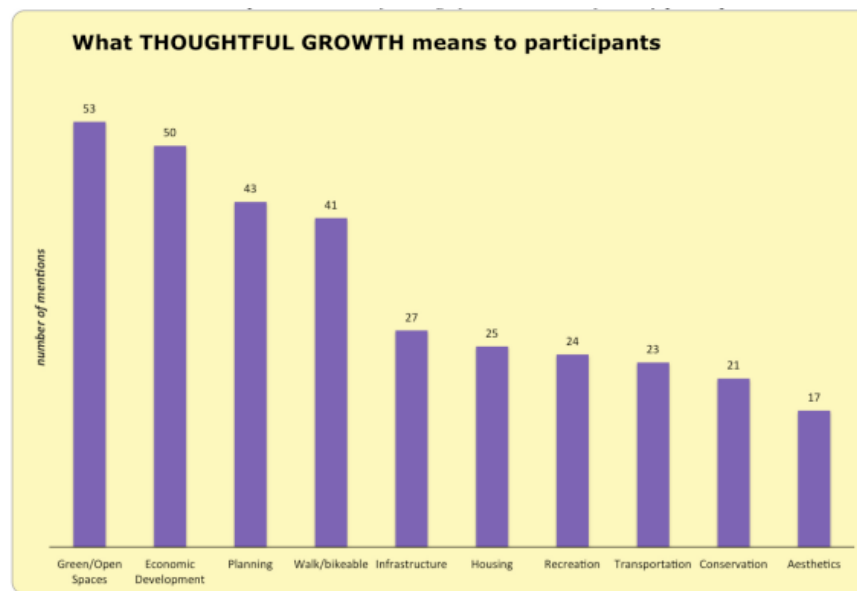
Chapter 3: Essex's Sense of Place

As Vermont's second largest community, Essex provides various amenities associated with development: restaurants, good schools, shops and retail outlets, and a vibrant business community. At the same time, the town has retained numerous parks, undeveloped natural areas, and agricultural properties.

Heart & Soul discovered the pride residents take in the community's blend of developed and natural areas. In identifying Thoughtful Growth as one of the community's top six values, Heart & Soul found, "We value wide-open spaces and tight-knit neighborhoods, rural roads and vibrant downtown streets. Essex is a place where we can enjoy a beautiful view, walk in the woods and go out to eat without ever leaving town. We support a diverse housing mix, opportunities for business development and a transportation system with a variety of options including a connected network of walking and biking routes."

By recognizing and understanding the presence and importance of the Town's natural, aesthetic, and cultural resources, it becomes possible to understand past development patterns and plan for future growth and conservation.

PULL QUOTE: *"We value wide-open spaces and tight-knit neighborhoods, rural roads and vibrant downtown streets."* - Heart & Soul of Essex



BOX: Heart & Soul describes Thoughtful Growth

Heart & Soul participants described the Thoughtful Growth value in the following ways:

- A balance of housing, business, and the preservation and maintenance of a variety of open spaces, including forests, trails, parks, and recreation fields;
- Economic development that provides government and community support for a diverse mix of start-ups and local businesses as well as the development of green businesses;
- Balanced and thoughtful planning and zoning with citizen input;
- A variety of housing options including affordable housing;
- A connected, coordinated transportation system that increases efficient traffic flow, and adds public transportation, walking, and biking options;
- Conservation of open spaces through a land trust or land acquisition fund; and
- A focus on aesthetics including landscaping, flowers, and trees.

2149

2150 **Natural Setting**

2151 Generally speaking, Essex can be divided into a northern, more rural section and a southern, more
 2152 developed section. The northern half of town is marked by three hilly areas that run in a north-south
 2153 direction, each separated by river valleys. The hills on the west extend into Colchester, Milton and
 2154 Westford. Indian Brook Reservoir, a 60-acre reservoir, sits among the western hills. On the eastern
 2155 side of town, hills extend to Westford and Underhill. A narrower ridgeline sits in the middle of
 2156 town. Forests cover much of the hillsides, providing large blocks of habitat.

2157 In the valleys between the hills, Alder Brook and the Browns River flow through land that has been
 2158 mostly dedicated to agriculture and residences. Other significant waterways in Essex include Abbey
 2159 Brook, which flows out of the northeastern hills into Browns River, and Indian Brook and
 2160 Sunderland Brook, both of which flow through the western side of Essex into Colchester.

2161 The southern half of town is flatter and contains the bulk of Essex's neighborhoods and commercial
 2162 and industrial areas.

2163

2164 **Natural Resources**2165 **BOX: Specific natural resources policies**

- 2166 • **3(S).1** While increasing access to and public enjoyment of the Town's natural resources, the
 2167 rights and concerns of private property owners shall be respected.
- 2168 • **3(S).2** Development within water supply protection areas shall be carefully designed to
 2169 prevent adverse impacts to groundwater resources.
- 2170 • **3(S).3** Development shall be designed to prevent the destruction of important natural
 2171 resources, including wetlands, floodplains, unique geological features, primary agricultural
 2172 soils, and slopes exceeding 15 percent).
- 2173 • **3(S).4** Critical wildlife habitat, including but not limited to deer wintering areas, rare
 2174 and/or endangered species habitat, local fisheries, and identified travel corridors, shall be
 2175 protected from inappropriate development and land management activities.

2176 A description of a community's natural resources is a fundamental element of a comprehensive plan.
 2177 By recognizing its natural features – its topography, slope, geology, soils, water resources,
 2178 agricultural and forest lands – a town can protect those resources and ensure a high quality of life for
 2179 its residents.

2180 Essex's 23,316 acres feature a diverse natural setting complete with river valleys, large forests, and
 2181 many hills. The presence and locations of those natural resources have guided development
 2182 throughout the history of Essex, and will continue to do so well into the future.

2183

2184 **Geology: Topography, Bedrock, Soil**

2185 Essex's landscape – its topography and soils – was shaped by glaciers that traversed the area and the
 2186 ancient lakes and seas that covered low-lying parts of town. Combined, topography and soil
 2187 determine the suitability of land for development.

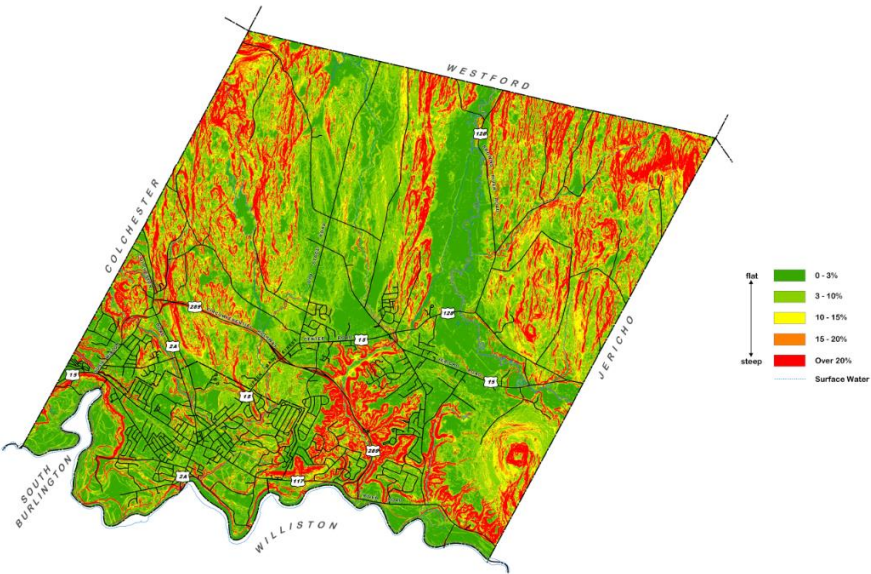
2188 Essex ranges from a low elevation of 170 feet in the southwestern part of Essex to a high point of
 2189 1,330 feet in the northwest corner of town. The floodplains of the Winooski River, Browns River,
 2190 and Alder Brook represent the flat areas of town, although steep ravines surround Alder Brook as it
 2191 flows into the Winooski River. The Brigham Hill area in northwest Essex and the high rolling hills in

northeast Essex also contain areas with steep slopes. Ideally, development should occur on land with slopes of 10 percent or less, which creates minimal restrictions for construction and septic systems.

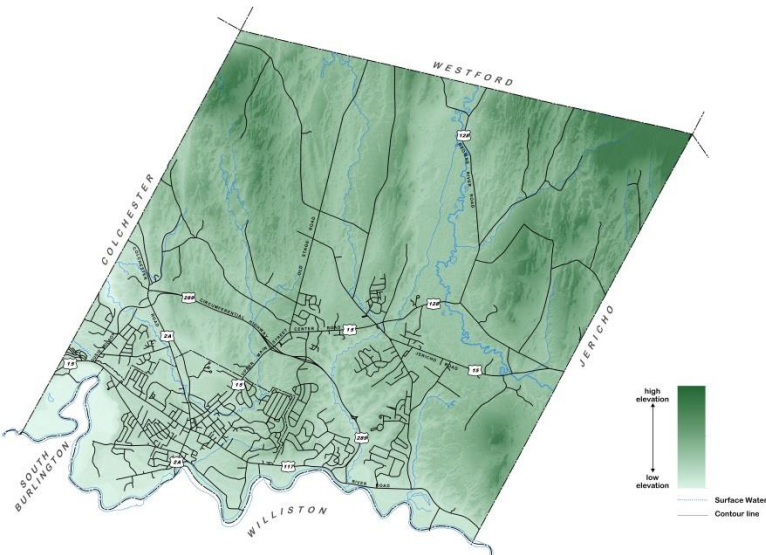
BOX: Suitability of slopes for construction

- **0 - 3%:** Suitable for almost all types of construction but may require drainage improvements
- **3 - 10%:** Most desirable for construction due to minimal restrictions
- **10 - 15%:** Suitable for low density housing on large lots with some consideration for erosion control and stormwater runoff.
- **15 - 20%:** Construction becomes expensive and erosion and runoff problems are likely; slopes are unsuitable for most septic systems. Construction is discouraged.
- **20% and steeper:** Construction shall be avoided due to the likelihood of environmental damage.

MAP: Slope



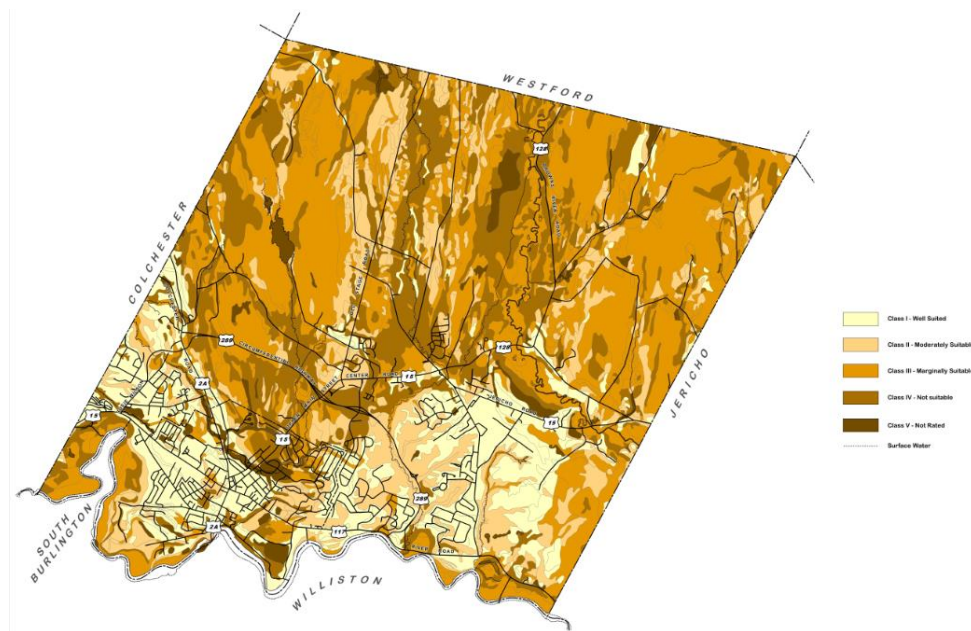
MAP: Hillshade



In addition to slope, soil types influence the suitability of land for development and its ability to support septic systems. Much of the soil in Essex is related to the Ice Age glacier. In the town's uplands – areas at least 500 feet above sea level – glacial till predominates. Lower elevations contain extensive areas of sand and gravel that remain from ancient lakes. In many areas, clay, till or both lie beneath the sand and gravel.

Deep soils that drain well are generally well-suited for septic systems, and can handle more development. Soils unfavorable for development are typically on steep slopes, are wet, erode easily, have a shallow depth to the underlying bedrock, or have some combination of those characteristics. The unfavorable properties limit the amount of septic effluent that soil can absorb. The U.S. Department of Agriculture [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) has mapped and typed all soils in Essex. The adjoining map shows the general soil patterns for the town and indicates areas that are suitable or unsuitable for septic systems. More detailed information is available from the soil survey maps and interpretations from the Natural Resources Conservation Service report.

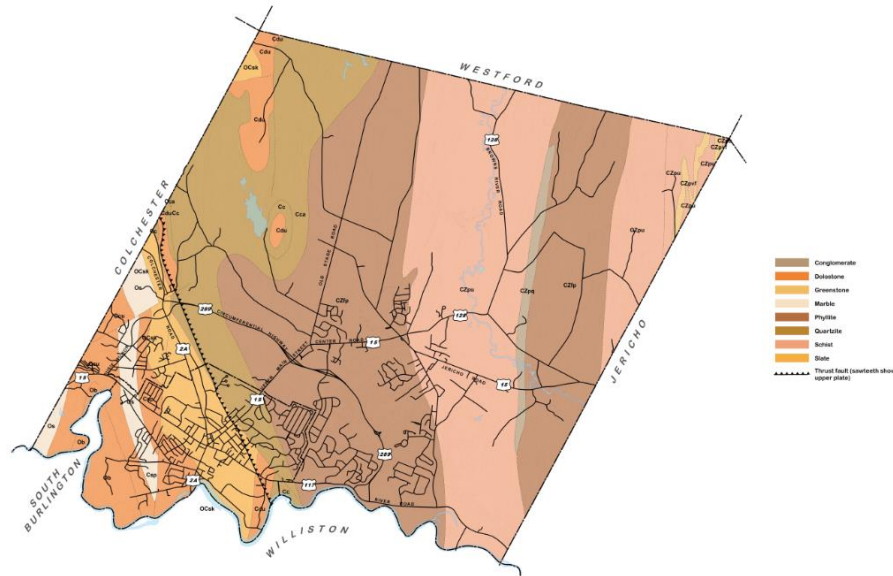
MAP: Soils



Predictably, most development in Essex has occurred in the flatter parts of Town. Municipal sewer serves many of these areas, although some neighborhoods within the sewer core still rely on septic systems.

Beneath the soil, the bedrock in Essex is dominated by a mixture of lightly metamorphosed rocks that were originally sedimentary in nature. Metamorphic rock tends to be hard and stable. The bedrock in the western third of Essex – roughly west of VT Route 2A – consists of dolomite and limestone. The eastern two-thirds of the town have primarily schist and slate rocks, which are part of the Underhill Formation.

MAP: Bedrock Geology



Two thrust faults run southeast to northwest through the southwestern quadrant of Essex, near Lost Nation Road and VT Route 2A. 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.

Rock, sand and gravel are capable of being mined and quarried. The Saxon Hill area has undergone sand extraction, and in 2014 and 2015 the Planning Commission approved a project to quarry ledge on Old Colchester Road. According to the Vermont State Geological Survey, Essex does not have any known mineral deposits, but the Town should plan for and be better prepared to regulate future mining and quarrying operations for rock, sand, and gravel.

BOX: Noteworthy sand and gravel deposits

1. Northern part of Osgood Hill Road
 2. Weed Road and Sleepy Hollow Road
 3. Intersection of Brigham Hill Road and Brigham Hill Lane
 4. Northern part of Alder Brook
 5. Intersection of Lamore and Lost Nation Roads
 6. VT Route 2A corridor south
 7. Southeastern quadrant of the Town of Essex
- Some of the deposits are located in environmentally sensitive areas.

Source: Vermont Department of Highways, 1961

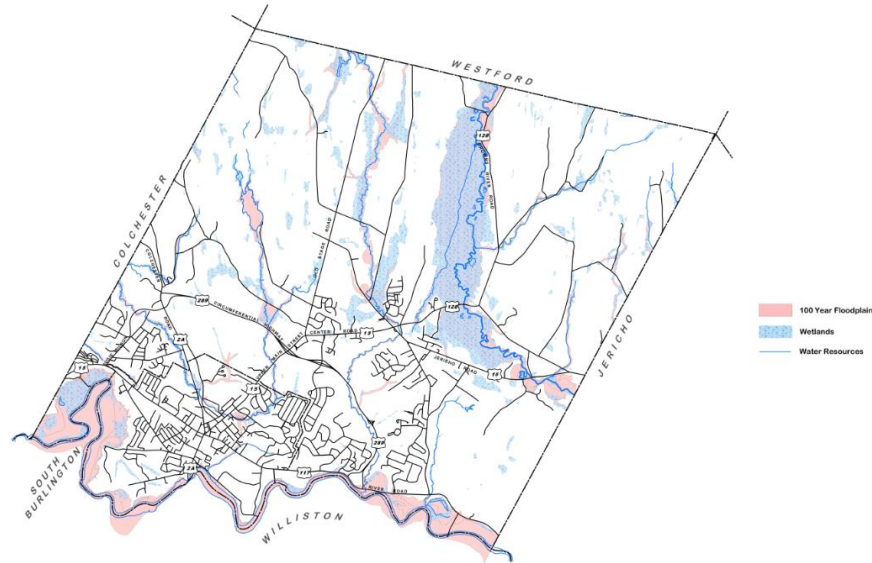
Water Resources

Water resources in Essex are classified as groundwater or surface water. Groundwater sits below the earth's surface and comes from precipitation that infiltrates into the soil and bedrock instead of evaporating or running off into ponds, streams and rivers. Information about the quality and supply of groundwater is important for evaluating sites for development. Groundwater information in Essex is limited, and the Town should undertake efforts to map areas with high groundwater

potential. The Town also needs to monitor the quality and supply of groundwater to protect against contamination and depletion.

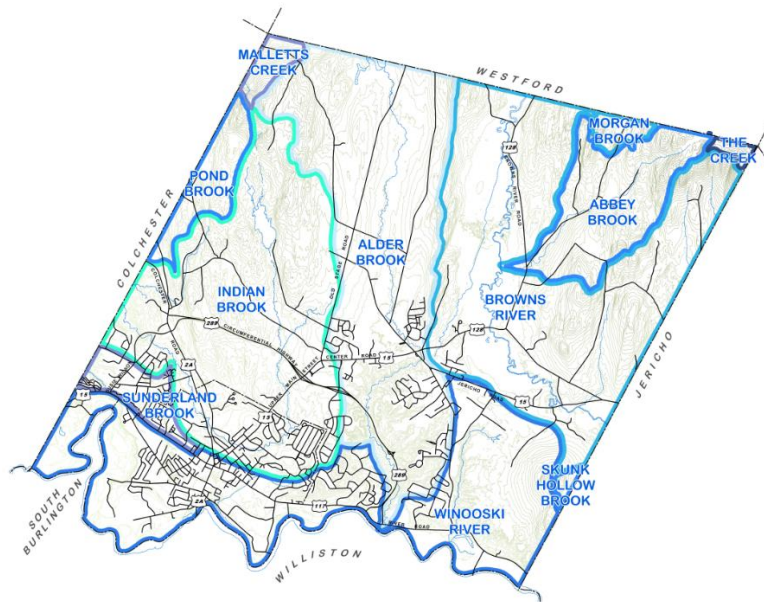
Surface water refers to any aboveground water body: rivers and brooks, lakes and ponds, wetlands, and areas subject to flooding. The surface waters scattered throughout Essex contribute to public health and safety, recreation, wildlife diversity, aesthetics, and environmental quality.

MAP: Water Resources



By state statute, Vermont's water quality should be maintained and improved according to the policies and actions developed in the basin plans established under 10 V.S.A § 1253. The Browns River and Abbey Brook watersheds are part of the Lamoille Basin, the Alder Brook and Sunderland Brook watersheds are part of the Winooksi Basin, and the Indian Brook watershed is part of the northern Lake Champlain Basin. The State of Vermont's Watershed Management Division has developed strategies for [Tactical Basin Planning](#).

MAP: Watersheds



2281
 2282 Based on a water quality classification system from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources,
 2283 virtually all waterways in Essex have been classified as Class B, meaning the water is suitable for
 2284 drinking with filtration and disinfection; for irrigation and other agricultural uses; and for swimming
 2285 and recreation.

2286 Despite the Class B assessment, Essex has room to improve water quality. Indian Brook and
 2287 Sunderland Brook are classified by the state as stormwater impaired waterways. When development
 2288 occurs, particularly in the Indian Brook and Sunderland Brook watersheds, every effort shall be
 2289 made to treat stormwater on-site – in other words, allowing precipitation to infiltrate into the
 2290 ground. Stormwater allowed to run off into nearby streams or other surface waters can cause
 2291 flooding or carry pollutants or sediment.

2292 Development occurring near surface waters and wetlands must adhere to buffer requirements
 2293 established in [Official Zoning Regulations](#). Buffers retain and protect the vegetated areas of native
 2294 species that border streams, lakes, ponds and wetlands. The vegetated buffers reduce impacts from
 2295 flooding and stormwater runoff, prevent soil erosion, maintain water quality, and protect wildlife,
 2296 fish habitat and ecological diversity.

2297 Areas around several of Essex's rivers and streams serve as flood hazard areas and floodways. A
 2298 flood hazard area, also known as a 100-year floodplain, has a 1 percent probability of flooding in any
 2299 given year. A floodway is the channel of a river or other watercourse and the adjacent land area that
 2300 must be reserved to discharge the 100-year floods without accumulatively increasing the water
 2301 surface elevation more than 1 foot; floodways are the most hazardous sections in a flood hazard
 2302 area. Flood hazard areas and floodways were identified on Flood Insurance Rate Maps prepared by
 2303 the Federal Insurance Administration and approved in 2010. The Town's [Official Zoning Regulations](#)
 2304 were updated in 2010 to reflect FEMA requirements in the flood hazard areas of the Winooski
 2305 River, Alder Brook, Browns River, and Indian Brook. The town also established a floodplain zone –
 2306 C2 zoning districts – along all Essex waterways not included in the federal maps. Development is
 2307 heavily restricted in C2 zones.

2308 In the aftermath of 2011's Tropical Storm Irene, the state required municipalities to include a flood
 2309 resiliency section in their municipal plans. While Essex escaped the devastation Irene wrought on
 2310 many other parts of the state, the town has suffered from its share of flooding events. In May 2013,
 2311 heavy rainfall led to washouts on VT Route 15 and Weed Road.

Some flood damage is caused by inundation when waters rise, fill, and damage low-lying structures, but most flood losses in Vermont are caused by fluvial erosion. Fluvial erosion can range from gradual erosion along river and stream banks to catastrophic channel enlargement, bank failure, and changes in a river's course.

Fluvial Erosion Hazard Areas (FEH) – the locations most susceptible to fluvial erosion – include a stream or river and the adjacent land, where stream processes can occur and enable a waterway to re-establish and maintain stable conditions over time. The boundaries of an FEH area attempt to include the lands most vulnerable to fluvial erosion in the near term, as well as the area needed by a river to maintain equilibrium. FEH areas have been identified and mapped in accordance with accepted state fluvial geomorphic assessment and mapping protocols.

Sections along Indian Brook and the Browns and Winooski rivers have been identified as having high fluvial erosion hazard. Most of the fluvial erosion hazard areas are located within the floodplain, which is protected from new development. Fluvial erosion is not, however, only caused by new development. Therefore, all fluvial erosion areas should be monitored to see how to best accommodate fluvial equilibrium and natural erosion processes while minimizing undue damage to property.

More information on flood resiliency, as well as a map of the FEH areas, appears in Chapter 2 of the Town Plan.

Wetlands

One way to limit the impacts of flooding is to preserve wetlands, which capture flood waters before they cause damage in developed areas. Wetlands are areas inundated by surface or ground water often enough to support significant vegetation or aquatic life that relies on the saturated or seasonally saturated soils to grow and reproduce. In addition to capturing stormwater, wetlands serve as valuable habitat.

Based on analyses by the U.S. Department of the Interior and Arrowwood Environmental, Essex has at least 430 wetlands totaling 3,081 acres. Thirty-four of the wetlands in Essex were considered locally or state significant for either functions and values, natural communities, or both. The [Natural Heritage Elemental Inventory and Assessment](#) recommends management objectives for each of the Town's significant wetland communities, which Essex should incorporate into its zoning and subdivision regulations.

Although the Arrowwood Environmental assessment and the state wetlands inventory provide valuable information for identifying the town's wetlands, the assessment and inventory are not comprehensive. As part of Planning Commission development reviews, all wetlands on individual properties shall be mapped on site plans, with delineations being supplemented by site visits as necessary. The Town shall enforce the wetlands buffer requirements established in the [Official Zoning Regulations](#). Many of the town's wetlands are shown in the Water Resources map.

Vernal Pools

The Arrowwood Environmental assessment also identified 19 vernal pools, seasonal wetlands that typically contain water during the spring but dry out as summer progresses. These isolated wetlands typically occur under a forest canopy, lack fish, and provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.

Most of the vernal pools in Essex are located east of Indian Brook or scattered throughout the forests in the northeast corner of town.

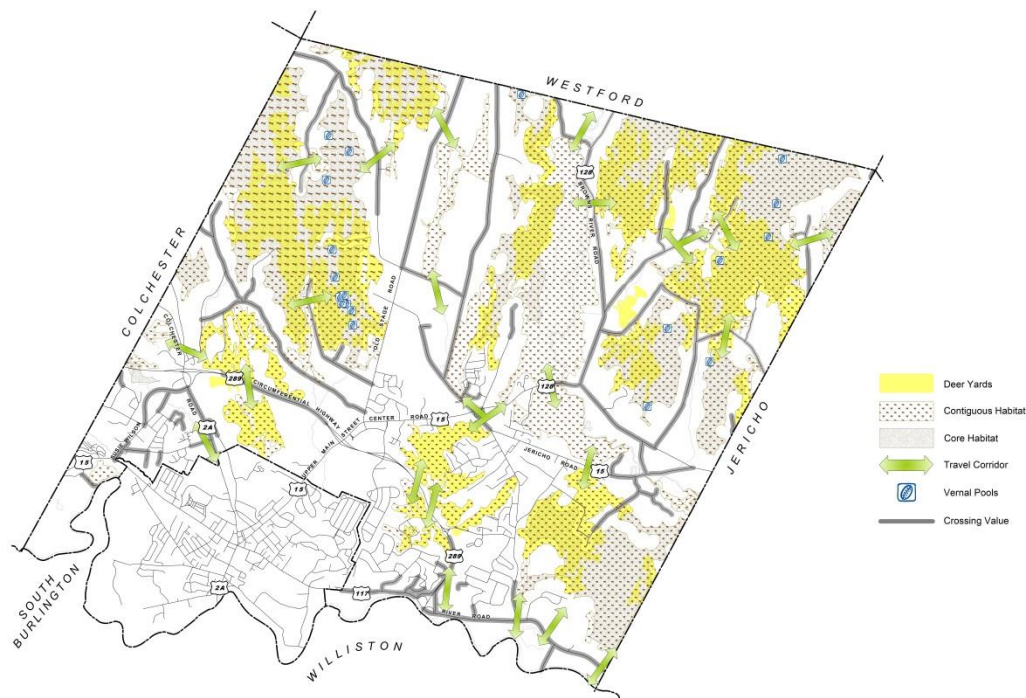
Arrowwood Environmental suggested specific buffer zones and management recommendations for the vernal pools mapped in the fields. Vermont Wetland Rules consider vernal pools to be Class II wetlands. The Town should update its zoning regulations to specify that wetlands buffers also apply to vernal pools.

Forest Lands

Essex's forests provide large habitat blocks for animals and offer economic potential through timber harvests. Forest trails open to hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling improve quality of life and can support a recreation-based sector of the economy. Nearly 13,000 acres in Essex are forested, yet forest fragmentation from development is a major problem in Vermont, including Essex.

The largest forests in Essex stretch north from the northeastern and northwestern parts of town north into Colchester, Milton, Westford, and Underhill. The largely unbroken woodlands serve as prime habitat – the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources scores both forests as 9 out of 10. When development must occur in those habitat blocks, every effort shall be taken to minimize the intrusion on the forests through the use of siting standards. The town should also continue to seek adoption of conservation subdivision regulations that will help preserve Essex's rural countryside.

MAP: Significant Features



The 1989 [Essex Open Lands Study](#) prioritized and identified significant forestland as contiguous tracts of wooded land having the potential for forest management due to the productivity of the soils, the species mix, the size of the overall tract, and presence of large (50-plus acre) properties and managed wood lots.

Approximately 8,300 acres in Essex – more than a third of the town's total area – were identified in the Open Lands Study as prime forestland. The areas were considered for commercial harvesting potential and for environmental and recreational uses. The Open Lands Study should be updated to assess the number of designated acres which no longer meet the definition of prime forestland set forth in 1989.

The [State of Vermont's Use Value Appraisal](#) forestry program – also known as current use – helps protect forestland by providing tax breaks for properties that actively maintain forest management plans (UVA programs also exist for agricultural properties). Thirty-six parcels in Essex outside the Village participated in the state's Use Value Appraisal forestry program in 2014, with a total of 1,997 acres enrolled.

BOX: Natural and Fragile Areas

Natural and fragile areas are defined as “areas of land or water that are unusual and/or have significant plant or animal species or geological or similar features of scientific, ecological, or educational interest,” according to the Natural Areas component of the 1988 *Vermont Recreation Plan*. Essex has several features meeting this definition, including unique forest cover types, wildlife habitats, rare plant communities, and an esker, a long winding ridge of sand and gravel. Sources for this information include inventories maintained by the state, the 1973 *Quality Environment Plan*, the 1989 [Open Lands Study](#), the 1989 *Natural Resources Inventory*, the 1986 *Municipal Development Plan*, the 2007 [Natural Heritage Element Inventory and Assessment](#), and the 2008 [Essex Open Space Plan](#).

BOX: Upland Natural Communities

The Vermont Non-Game and Natural Heritage Program tracks two significant upland natural communities in Essex: Sunderland Headwater woods and the Vermont Sandplain site. The Sunderland Headwater Woods is a seven-acre, dry sandplain forest near the headwaters of the Sunderland Brook which has seen little disturbance. The Vermont Sandplain, comprised of pitch pine and white pine trees mixed with black and red oak, has shrunk from five acres, due to development.

The 2007 [Natural Heritage Element Inventory Analysis](#) suggested management recommendations for the two communities, and the recommendations should be incorporated into the zoning regulations.

Agricultural Lands

Farm activity – particularly dairy farming – in Essex and Chittenden County has declined over the decades. Yet farming activities remain visible in Essex, and the variety of activities has likely increased. Undeveloped land dedicated to agriculture provides numerous economic, environmental, and aesthetic benefits to Essex and the greater region. Active farms serve as a crucial component of Vermont's working landscape, ensuring views of the Green Mountains and contributing to the local economy. Furthermore, unpaved land can soak up much larger amounts of stormwater, reducing the likelihood and extent of flooding during major storms.

In the early 1990s the town's grand list included 26 farm parcels. By 2014 only seven parcels, including one in the Village, were listed as “farm” parcels.

The 1989 [Essex Open Lands Study](#) found a similar decline in agricultural parcels. The study conducted a Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) of 53 farm parcels on the basis of the productivity

of their soils and such attributes as size, character, location, and current use. Though direct comparisons are difficult because of boundary and ownership changes, at least 24 of the 53 parcels identified have since been subdivided. Of the 53 parcels evaluated in 1989, 20 were identified as “prime” farmland, comprising around 2,000 acres – 70 percent of which were in floodplains. As then anticipated, farmland was taken out of production for the construction of the Circumferential Highway (I-289), and for two large residential subdivisions.

Farmland conversion reflects, in part, ongoing changes in the local farm economy – many of which were identified in the 1989 study. By 2014, only two dairy farms remained in town. On the other hand, USDA Agricultural Census data suggests that there are a growing number of smaller, more diverse farming operations in the area – such as Mazza’s Vegetable Farms and the Chapin Orchard – that market and sell their products locally through direct sales, farm stands, farmers’ markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).

Although the number of farms in Essex has dwindled, the number of parcels enrolled in the town’s Farm and Open Land Stabilization Program increased from five in 1989 to 13 in 2014 (not all parcels are farms).

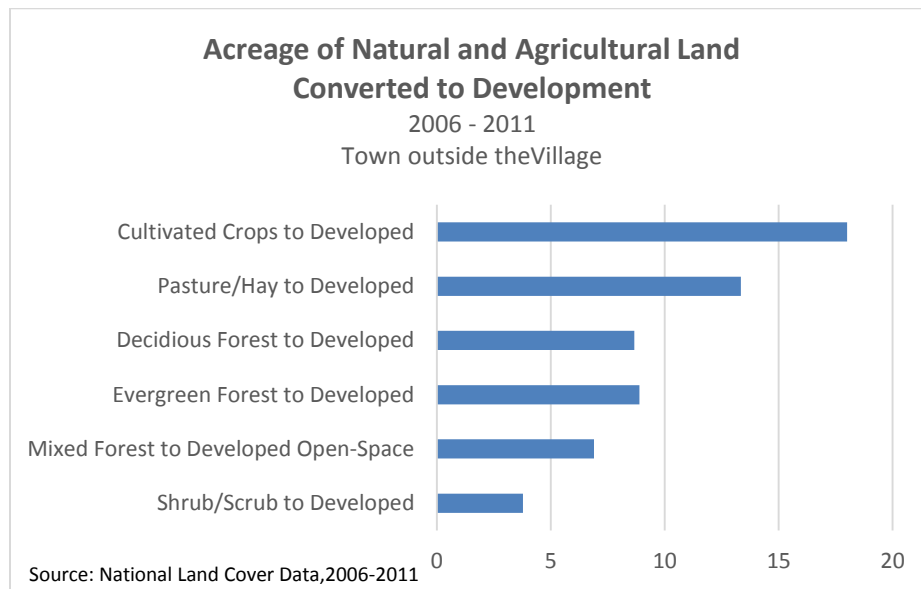
Other agricultural parcels not included under the Essex Farm Contract are enrolled in the Vermont UVA program. Twenty-five parcels had at least some farm acreage enrolled in UVA (some parcels have land enrolled in forestry and agriculture programs) in 2014, with seven parcels enrolled solely in agriculture. The 25 parcels had 930 acres enrolled in agriculture.

IMAGE: Farm/orchard

Much of the farmland remaining in Essex coincides with floodplains, particularly in the Browns River Valley and along the Winooski River. Continued zoning restrictions on development in the floodplain can help preserve existing agricultural land.

Residents have pushed in recent years to allow parts of the agricultural lifestyle in more urban and suburban parts of town. The Village allows residents to house up to four chickens on a lot, and residents outside the Village have approached the Town of Essex Planning Commission about amending zoning regulations to allow chickens. The Town supports the production of locally grown foods.

While zoning and subdivision regulations can limit the impacts of development on forest fragmentation and agricultural land, the current regulations do little to guarantee the preservation of open space. Heart & Soul participants described Thoughtful Growth, in part, as “conservation of open spaces through a land trust or land acquisition fund.” The town should explore ways to ensure the preservation of important undeveloped parcels, whether through the stricter regulations, a conservation or land acquisition fund, partnerships with the [Vermont Land Trust](#) or [The Nature Conservancy](#), or other means. The town should undertake a study to identify parcels important to wildlife, natural resources, water protection, recreation, and the working landscape.



SIDEBAR: Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife habitat in Essex is an ever-changing mosaic, as humans and wildlife continually adjust and readjust to each other's presence. The landscape constantly changes as active agricultural lands go fallow and as humans increasingly settle in Essex.

The Essex urban core is largely concentrated in the southern portion of Essex; for wildlife, the human settlement pattern presents a highly fragmented environment characterized by isolated backyards, woodlots, wetlands and streamsides. Wildlife must coexist with roads, houses, industries, people and pets. Animals living in southern Essex include white-tailed deer, red foxes, skunks and raccoons.

The less developed northern parts of Essex have landscapes dominated by forests with broad-leaved deciduous and needle-leaved evergreen trees. The forests provide habitat for a rich diversity of wildlife including waterfowl, herons, hawks, coyote, moose and mammals such as mink, fox, and muskrat.

Invasive Species

Invasive species threaten many of the Town's natural areas. [Vermont Invasives](#), an online resource with information about invasive species, calls invasives, "Nonindigenous plants, animals, algae, fungi or pathogens – disease-causing organisms like viruses and bacteria – that threaten the diversity and survival of native species or the ecological stability of infested ecosystems, or commercial, agricultural or recreational activities dependent on these natural resources. ...

"They are opportunists not historically known to our region. Most come without the natural checks and balances – predators, pests, parasites and pathogens – that keep species' reproduction and survival well balanced in their native regions. Many have the advantage of thriving in a wide variety of conditions. Native species find it hard to compete with such invaders."

Invasive species fall into three categories: tree pests, plants, and aquatic.

Regarding trees pests, Vermont Invasives warns, "Two exotic invasive pests, emerald ash borer and Asian longhorned beetle, that have devastated forests in the mid-west and mid-Atlantic, have been found close to Vermont borders. Another exotic invasive insect, hemlock woolly adelgid, has been

found in several communities in Windham County. These pests, along with others we are watching out for will (undoubtedly) change Vermont's forests."

While it would be nearly impossible to prevent an invasive outbreak in large tracts of forest such as Indian Brook or Saxon Hill, the Town can and should plan for the impact of tree pests on the many street trees in Essex. The 2002 [Street Tree Inventory](#) shall be updated to identify the streets and neighborhoods most susceptible to invasive insects, and then the Town shall develop a management plan to protect or replace susceptible trees.

Invasive plants also present a threat to local forests. As Vermont Invasives says, "Non-native, invasive terrestrial plants are one of the greatest threats to the health of Northeastern forests. They negatively impact the environment, are costly to manage, and can be harmful to human health." Responding to and controlling invasive plants will require a multitude of approaches, from private land management to careful roadside maintenance.

Indian Brook Reservoir has had to deal with aquatic invasives. Eurasian Watermilfoil was identified in the reservoir in 2001. The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation describes milfoil as "a rooted, submerged perennial plant that grows rapidly, producing dense stands. It aggressively competes with native plant communities reducing biodiversity. Dense mats clog propellers, impair swimming, restrict boating and fishing accesses, and affect water quality." Populations of the invasive have fluctuated in the subsequent years, and the Town has used herbicides as well as non-chemical methods to try to control and remove the plant.

In addition to protecting street trees against invasive insects and continuing milfoil removal efforts at Indian Brook Reservoir, Essex needs to continue educating residents about the problems caused by invasive species.

Aesthetic Resources

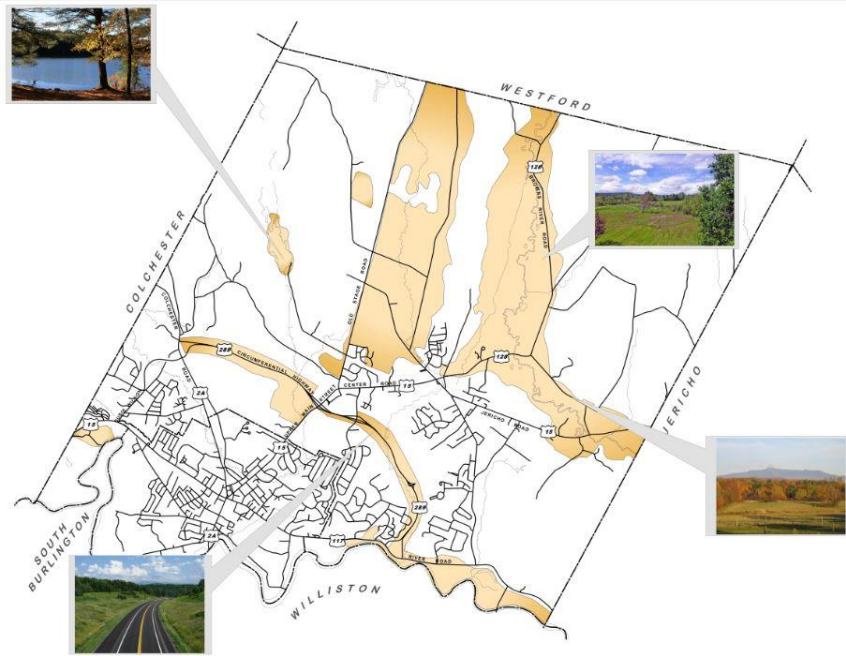
Specific aesthetic resources policies

- **3(S).5** Site plan and subdivision review shall follow the recommendations in [Views to the Mountain: A Scenic Protection Manual](#) (2011).
- **3(S).6** The Town supports the responsible development of commercial scale (500KW and greater) ground-mounted solar electric generation facilities in the commercial/industrial zoned areas of Town. Such facilities, as well as wind electric generation facilities, shall have zero impact on views identified as "Most Scenic" in Appendix 6, Segment Maps, [Views to the Mountain: a Scenic Protection Manual](#) (2011), which is incorporated into this Plan by reference.

The visual character of a community helps define an identity and sense of place. Scenic views and roads, as well as historic buildings and neighborhoods, reflect the cultural development and character of a town. Scenic resources can include natural features or a mixture of natural features and human elements such as houses, roads, and farms.

Essex has had several inventories prepared on its more significant scenic resources, which include many of the landscapes representative of Vermont. Roads radiating from the Town Center provide views of farms, rolling hills, forests, mountains, historic buildings, rivers, and streams.

MAP: Scenic Resource Areas



2528

2529 The *Essex Natural Resource Inventory*, conducted by the University of Vermont in 1988, first offered a
 2530 descriptive inventory of Essex's scenic views. The *Scenic Resources* map, which identifies areas of the
 2531 Town with a high priority for conservation, includes most of the scenic areas identified in the
 2532 Natural Resource Inventory:

- 2533 • Parallel north-south ridgelines running the length of Essex, divided by roads, form the
 2534 backdrop for views from lower areas and provide high elevations for viewing distant
 2535 ridges and mid-ground expanses of farmland divided by hedgerows.
- 2536 • Distant views of Mount Mansfield, Camel's Hump, the Bolton range, and the
 2537 Adirondacks.
- 2538 • Large, relatively flat terrain along the Winooski River Valley provides views of mountains
 2539 in both directions; the long-distance views are not often available in the hillier areas of
 2540 Vermont.
- 2541 • Dirt roads through forested hills and steep slopes provide for appealing foreground
 2542 views.
- 2543 • Several streambeds and floodplain areas create interesting foreground and mid-ground
 2544 views, especially when close to farmland.
- 2545 • Historic buildings and homesteads in rural settings or compact settlements.
- 2546 • A sense of separation of the developed central part of the Town from surrounding lands
 2547 and towns. This is especially evident on VT Route 15 leading to Jericho, on VT Route
 2548 117/River Road leading to Jericho, Williston and Richmond, and roads heading north
 2549 toward Westford. These gateways to Essex are visually appealing due to minimal
 2550 development.
- 2551 • Flat terrain in the vicinity of Chapin, Colonel Page, Old Stage, and Towers roads is
 2552 comprised of low density development, farmland, pasture, and open space surrounded
 2553 by wooded ridges and hills.

2554 In 2008, the Selectboard adopted the [Essex Open Space Plan](#), which contains a number of
 2555 observations and recommendations to protect Essex's aesthetic resources. The Community

Development Department subsequently initiated a Scenic Roadside Protection Project in conjunction with the Town of Jericho, Smart Growth Vermont, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, and the Metropolitan Planning Organization. Citizen volunteers spent the summer and fall of 2009 performing a photo inventory and assessment along the roads identified as scenic in the *Scenic Resources* map. The results of the inventory and viewscape rankings were converted to GIS-based maps and included in [*Views to the Mountain: A Scenic Protection Manual*](#).

The Scenic Protection Manual contains protection methods to be incorporated into the zoning and subdivision regulations and used by the Planning Commission during development review. Siting standards have yet to be written into the zoning and subdivision regulations, but the Planning Commission shall adopt a scenic resource overlay district and implement siting standards in the [*Official Zoning Regulations*](#). In the interim, site plan and subdivision reviews shall continue to use the recommendations of the Scenic Protection Manual when projects are proposed within the town's Scenic Resource Areas.

The town's aesthetic qualities are not limited to designated scenic resources. Residents have also called for better landscaping along roads and on individual properties: one of the main suggestions emerging from the Thoughtful Growth value of Heart & Soul was "a focus on aesthetics including landscaping, flowers, and trees." Increased street tree planting in between the Town Center and Essex Center along Route 15 has specifically been mentioned. The [*Official Zoning Regulations*](#) and [*Official Subdivision Regulations*](#) contain requirements for landscaping and street trees. Ongoing maintenance of trees and landscaping – as well as the preservation of mature trees whenever feasible – will enhance the overall scenic qualities of the town.

Particular care should be given to landscaping and building aesthetics when development occurs at the gateways to Essex: VT Route 15 in front of Fort Ethan Allen and near the Jericho border, VT Route 2A at the Colchester border, VT Route 117 at the Jericho border, and VT Route 128 at the Westford border.

Creating siting standards for the location of renewable energy generation facilities in Essex is a priority Action Item in Chapter 1.

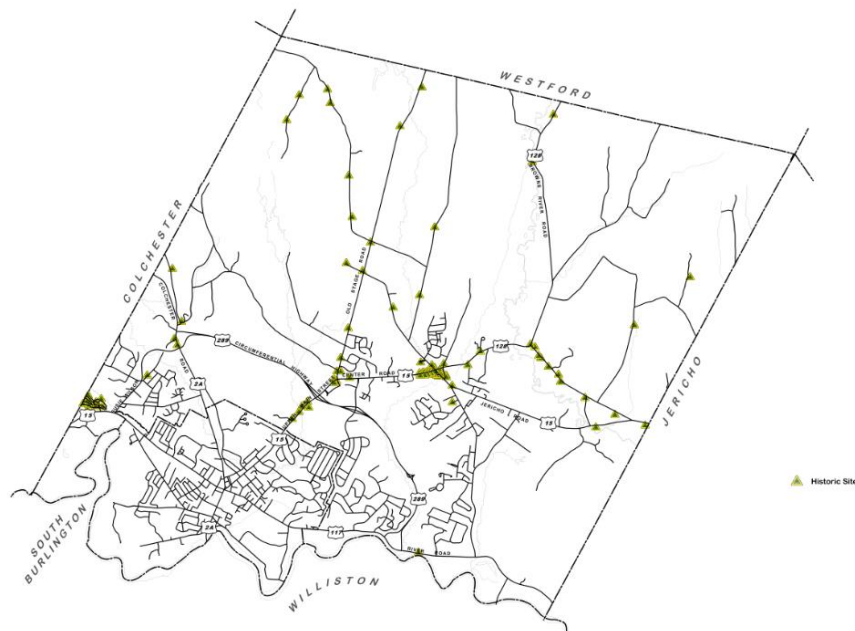
Cultural / Historic and Archeological Resources

Specific policies:

- **3(S).6 A sense of community shall be fortified by the expansion of arts and other cultural opportunities.**
- **3(S).7 The adaptive reuse of historic structures shall be encouraged.**

Essex has grown and changed since its inception, but the town has retained many of its historical structures. The [*Vermont Division for Historic Preservation*](#) lists 107 individual historic sites in Essex, including the Village of Essex Junction. A significant portion of the historic sites are located in what the Division considered the Essex Center Historic District. Fort Ethan Allen contains the town's other concentration of historic structures. All but a few of the Fort's buildings are included in Vermont Division for Historic Preservation's [*inventory for Essex*](#), and the entire Fort has been established as being of national significance.

MAP: Historic Sites



2597

2598 Fort Ethan Allen was built as a permanent army post in 1893, on land taken from Colchester and
 2599 Essex. Command of Fort Ethan Allen transferred to the Air Force in 1952, and it became Ethan
 2600 Allen Air Force Base until 1961. Between 1962 and 1965, after the Air Force officially relinquished
 2601 the base, private individuals and the University of Vermont acquired various properties in the Fort.
 2602 Currently, the Fort is used by St. Michael's College, the University of Vermont, the Vermont Agency
 2603 of Transportation, educational and private television stations, and various private businesses and
 2604 residents.

2605

IMAGE: Fort Ethan Allen

2606 The [Vermont Planning and Development Act](#) allows the enabling authority to create a Design Control
 2607 District for “any area containing structures of historical, architectural or cultural merit.” Unless a
 2608 design control district is established for a specific area, neither the Planning Commission nor the
 2609 Zoning Board of Adjustment have any jurisdiction over ensuring that the design and scale of a
 2610 building is harmonious with its surroundings. To maintain and enhance the cultural heritage of
 2611 Essex’s historic neighborhoods, and to eliminate or minimize substantial character alteration of
 2612 existing buildings, the Town enforces design control guidelines in Essex Center and Fort Ethan
 2613 Allen. The two areas were established as design control districts in 1987. [Historic Preservation and](#)
 2614 [Design Control Standards for Essex Center and Fort Ethan Allen](#), a report prepared as part of the 1991
 2615 Town Plan, shall be consulted in the design or review of any project within the historic areas. The
 2616 Town should also update the design control regulations.

2617 Essex has many other historic structures and few tools to protect them from demolition or damage
 2618 to their architectural integrity. Buildings at Butlers Corners are at risk. The 1820 House, for example,
 2619 has been razed. Residents and members of the [Essex Community Historical Society](#) have urged
 2620 the Town to adopt comprehensive measures to protect such structures, and the protection measures
 2621 should be taken into consideration.

2622 In addition to the built environment, Essex has a strong cultural community. The Town is the home
 2623 of the [Essex Art League](#), one of the largest local art groups in the state. The league’s membership
 2624 is open to any interested Vermonter. Memorial Hall, an historic structure, hosts the [Essex](#)
 2625 [Community Players](#) theater group.

Land Use and Development

BOX: Specific land use policies

3(S).8 Development shall be consistent with Essex's role as a sub-regional growth center, with the scale of development supportable by a market derived from Essex and surrounding communities.

3(S).9 Strip development along roadsides, instead of compact development, shall be discouraged.

3(S).10 Essex shall continue to implement a residential phasing policy that establishes a rate of growth that can be accommodated by the Town.

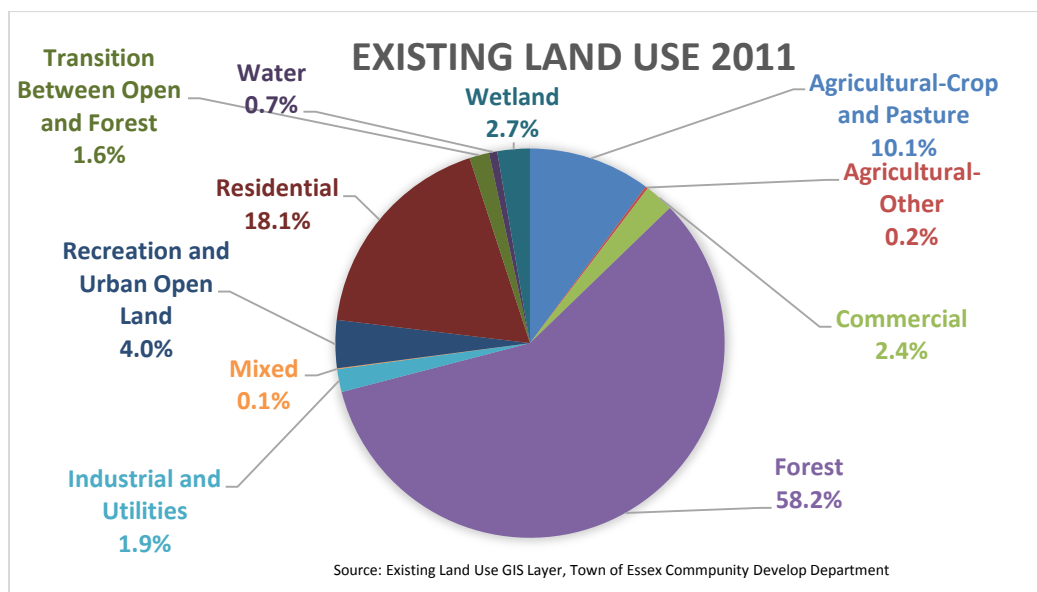
3(S).11 The land ratio of 60 percent conservation /40 percent developable in the Resource Preservation District – Industrial (RPD-I) zoning district shall be maintained.

3(S).12 The 200-foot buffer requirement in the RPD-I district between residential areas and along VT Route 15 and Sand Hill Road shall be maintained.

3(S).13 Residential uses shall not occur in the RPD-I district.

3(S). 14 When reviewing relevant development proposals, the Planning Commission shall consider access to and along the Winooski River Corridor.

Essex is comprised of several dense areas surrounded by more rural areas of forests, farmland, and floodplains. Development in Essex has, in recent decades, concentrated in three of the denser areas: Five Corners in the Village of Essex Junction; the Town Center (particularly the new Town Center at Butlers Corners); and the Susie Wilson Road corridor. Industrial and commercial development has also picked up in the Saxon Hill area, which has some of the last remaining undeveloped industrial land in Chittenden County. The new Town Center, Susie Wilson Road corridor, and Saxon Hill industrial lands lie in the Town's sewer core area, which serves as a de facto boundary for growth; water and sewer infrastructure can handle denser development than wells and septic systems. Essex also has a residential phasing policy that allows for more annual development to occur inside the sewer core.



One of the tenets of Thoughtful Growth, as described by Heart & Soul of Essex, is a “balance of housing, business, and the preservation and maintenance of a variety of open spaces, including forests, trails, parks, and recreation fields.” Heart & Soul participants also wanted to ensure that citizens have input in planning and zoning processes.

By continuing to concentrate development in the sewer core – particularly in the growth areas described above – the town can increase its tax base while protecting the natural and scenic resources in the more rural parts of town. Existing zoning districts reflect the desire for higher density areas surrounded by more rural countryside. Outside the Village, the Susie Wilson Road corridor and Town Center area have zoning districts that support a mix of uses, including residential, commercial, and industrial zoning districts.

Residential neighborhoods are strung between the mixed use areas. The northern half of Essex remains less developed, with individual homes strung along rural roads between forests and agricultural land. Though Essex uses its zoning regulations and sewer core area to limit development in rural parts of town, residential development can slowly erode the community’s more rustic, natural settings.

Essex has another dwindling Chittenden County resource: a significant amount of undeveloped industrial land. In the Town outside the Village, industrial land is primarily located in Essex West, Fort Ethan Allen, and the Saxon Hill area. A small portion of developed industrial land abuts the Village along VT Route 117/River Road.

Essex had long conducted its planning with the expectation that the Circumferential Highway would be completed. Since the 2011 Town Plan, however, Gov. Peter Shumlin announced that the Circ would not be finished. As a result of the announcement, Essex has worked with Colchester, Williston, the Village of Essex Junction, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, and the Vermont Agency of Transportation to develop a series of [Circ Alternatives](#) to improve transportation in the region. The Circ Alternatives are described in the Transportation section of Chapter 2.

As Essex continues to develop, it will face the challenge of providing infrastructure and services to support a strong economy and a variety of housing types while also protecting the natural resources, open spaces and recreational offerings treasured by the community.

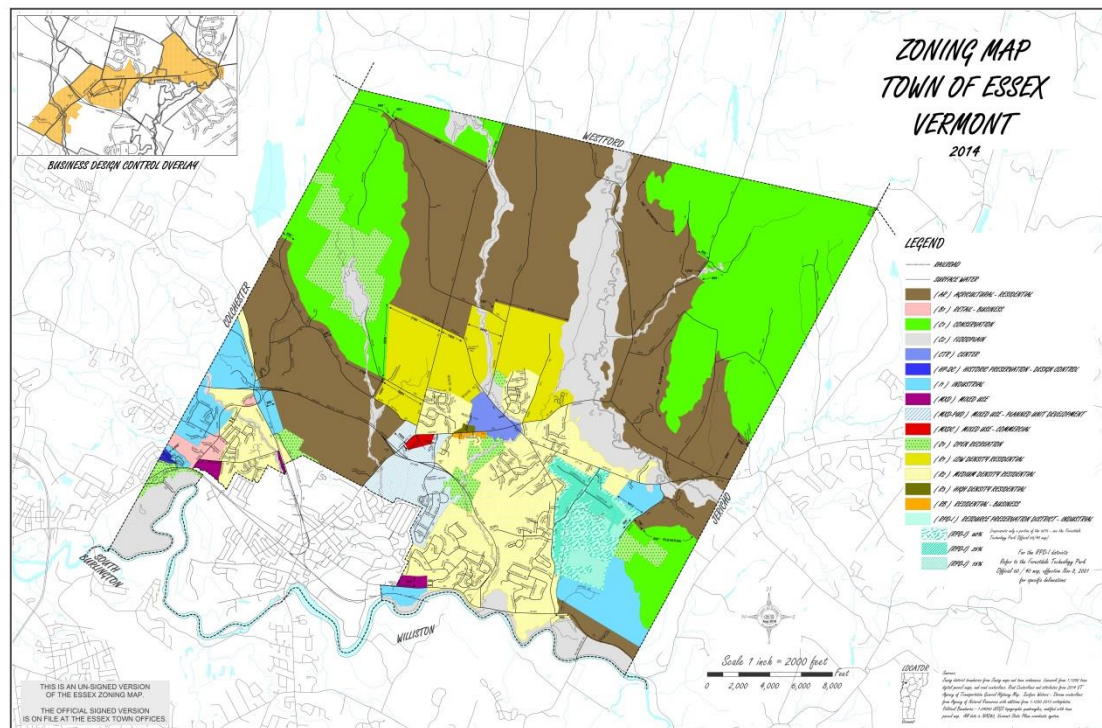
Description of planning areas

The Planning Commission has divided Essex into distinct planning areas based on the town’s diverse, extensive land area: Fort Ethan Allen, Essex West, Neighborhood Growth Centers, Saxon Hill, the Highlands, the Lowlands, the Winooski River Corridor, and the Town Center area. The Town Center contains several sub-areas known as Butlers Corners/Lang Farm, and Essex Center.

2689

2694 **SIDEBAR: Zoning Districts and Proposed Land Use**

2695



The town's 15 zoning districts and two design control overlay areas guide the type of development that can occur in the various parts of town. The Village of Essex Junction has its own zoning districts that are not described in the Town Plan. More information about Village zoning is available in the [Village of Essex Junction Land Development Code](#).

Conservation (C1): The Conservation Area is intended to protect the sensitive natural resources and steep slopes that make these areas inappropriate for intensive development. The areas in C1 districts are removed from municipal services and facilities. Low-density residential development and related uses are permitted on parcels of 10 or more acres.

Floodplain (C2): Floodplain Areas are in place for several reasons: to reduce the potential for damage from flooding; to protect streams and water courses from erosion, siltation and pollution; and to protect the natural ecology of streambeds and lands adjacent to water courses. No building is permitted in floodplain areas; excavation, fill, disruption of vegetative cover or other encroachment is restricted.

Open Recreation (O1): Open Recreation Areas protect the natural resource value of publicly owned lands that meet the following criteria: are essentially undeveloped; lack direct access to public roads; are important to wildlife and wildlife habitat; have high potential for commercial forestry use; are unsuitable for land development; or include irreplaceable, limited or significant natural, recreational or scenic resources. No public sewer and water facilities are planned for these areas. The only encouraged uses, which do not require additional facilities and services, are limited recreation uses, conservation, and forestry.

Agriculture/Residential (AR): Agriculture/Residential districts exist to protect lands that have an economic capability for agriculture. Currently, the districts contain some low-density residential development on lots no smaller than 3 acres, but are otherwise undeveloped except for uses associated with agriculture or forestry. With limited exceptions, the town has no plans to develop roads or extend public water and sewer systems into AR districts. Therefore, only low density residential and recreational development that utilizes existing facilities, adequately disposes of sewage, and is compatible with the district's purposes and guidelines should be permitted. Encouraged uses include planned residential developments, as well as open space projects, conservation efforts, or forms of outdoor recreation that do not remove the potential of the land for agricultural production.

To facilitate effective use of existing structures, particularly historic structures and farm structures, the town should explore additional allowable uses, such as Community Supported Agriculture and renewable energy production that will generate some economic return while not jeopardizing the rural character of the area.

If the Town and Village explore the potential to merge or consolidate services, the community should evaluate the AR district boundary by the Circumferential Highway, VT 15, and the Village border to determine if other development allowances are more suitable than the current AR uses.

Low Density Residential (R1): Low Density Residential districts are intended to facilitate residential development in areas adjacent to but outside of the sewer core area. Minimum lot sizes of 1 acre maintain low densities and ensure that lots are large enough to accommodate on-site septic systems. Sites may be required to connect to municipal water service.

Medium Density Residential (R2): Medium Density Residential districts exist to facilitate residential development in areas inside the sewer core area. Connection to municipal sewer

service shall be required when feasible or deemed necessary. Densities and lot sizes are based on the provision of municipal water and sewer services or a property's ability to accommodate on-site services.

High Density Residential (R3): The High Density Residential district is in place to encourage a wide range of housing opportunities in an area served by municipal services and facilities and public transportation. Home occupations, accessory apartments, and multi-family units on small lots are encouraged to enable some expansion of uses. Strip commercial development shall be avoided.

Residential Business (RB): Located on the south side of VT Route 15 in Essex Center, the Residential Business district includes properties that are predominantly residential in nature. The district was established to protect existing residential uses while allowing for limited commercial uses that will generate minimal traffic and be compatible with neighboring residences.

Business Design Control Overlay (B-DC) and Historic Preservation Design Control Overlay (HPDC): The B-DC and HPDC areas exist to maintain and enhance the rich cultural and architectural heritage of the Essex Center and Fort Ethan Allen areas, respectively, and to eliminate or minimize substantial character alterations of buildings in those areas. A report entitled [*Historic Preservation and Design Control Standards for Essex Center and Fort Ethan Allen*](#) (1986) contains standards and guidelines to be used in the review of development proposals in these areas. The Town should consider updating the design control standards.

Mixed Use (MXD): MXD areas allow a mix of residential and commercial uses in keeping with the existing character of the area.

Mixed Use-Planned Unit Development (MXD-PUD): The town has conducted a comprehensive planning effort for the MXD-PUD district, a large tract of land near the new Town Center that has a combination of residential and commercial development.

Mixed Use District-Commercial (MXD-C): The MXD-C district provides land in the new Town Center for a broad range of retail and personal service shops, professional and governmental offices, and supportive, compatible commercial uses. High-density residential uses are encouraged when they add vitality to the area. All uses should be properly located and designed to enhance the existing structures in the area. Development should be reviewed in accordance with the 1991 *Town Center Master Plan* or any subsequent revisions. The Town should consider updating the Town Center Master Plan.

Center (CTR): The Center district, located around the intersection of VT Route 15 and VT Route 128, supports the role of the Historic Essex Center as the focus of many social and economic activities. Uses encouraged for the Center district include residential, civic, cultural, neighborhood commercial, home occupations, and others that will serve the needs of the community. Development should occur in a pattern and scale that maintains the traditional social and physical character of the Historic Essex Center and preserves its historic and scenic resources. Sufficient facilities and services are planned for this area to accommodate moderate to high-density development. Development should be reviewed in accordance with the 1991 *Town Center Master Plan* or any subsequent revisions. The Town should consider updating the Town Center Master Plan.

Retail Business (B1): The town's B1 districts consist of existing commercial areas and adjacent lands that are becoming predominantly commercial. Because the B1 districts are located on major thoroughfares, they are well-suited for providing the retail, business and personal service needs of Essex and nearby towns. Strip development along these

thoroughfares must be prohibited in favor of consolidated access points that minimize traffic hazards and maintain smooth traffic flows. The B1 areas are the focal point of activity for the town, and the review of commercial development within B1 districts must ensure attractiveness for site design and signage. New commercial development should be compatible with adjacent commercial and residential structures. The town should consider creating a business design control overlay for the B1 districts.

Resource Preservation District-Industrial (RPD-I): The RPD-I district, located in southeast Essex, contains forests, water bodies, and other natural settings. The district can also host industrial and commercial development when economically and aesthetically feasible. The district's specific objective is to protect the natural attributes for public enjoyment; economic development activities must occur in harmony with the natural surroundings.

Industrial (I1): The town's industrial districts are serviced by transportation facilities and public facilities, and provide employment opportunities in manufacturing, warehousing, and research and development. Commercial uses in I1 districts serve the industries and their employees. Development incompatible with industrial uses, such as residences, shall not be permitted for the health, safety and welfare of the community.

Fort Ethan Allen (HP-DC, I1, O1)

Fort Ethan Allen is an historic complex of buildings on VT Route 15 that spans the towns of Essex and Colchester and accommodates industrial, institutional, and residential uses. The large open area in front of Officers' Row, known as the Parade Grounds, is zoned for recreational uses and maintains an aesthetically pleasing gateway to the Town by providing a visual break in the built-up areas along VT Route 15. Because of its proximity to the Circumferential Highway and other major commuter routes, Fort Ethan Allen will be an attractive area for increased development. In 1987 the Town of Essex designated Fort Ethan Allen as a design control district to enhance the rich cultural heritage of the Fort and to minimize the threat of demolition or substantial character alterations of the many historic structures within the area as future development occurs.

Essex West (B1, I1, MXD, O1, R2)

The Essex West area functions as a self-contained community with a diversity of industrial and commercial businesses, a mix of housing opportunities, and direct access to major transportation routes. Essex West is bounded by Fort Ethan Allen to the south, the Town of Colchester on the west, Gentes Road and the Tree Farm recreation facility to the north, and the Village of Essex Junction on the east. With five different zoning districts and several gateways to the community, Essex West has experienced significant development pressure. Susie Wilson Road has become one of the primary commuter routes in Chittenden County by connecting the Circumferential Highway and VT Route 15. Three reports and studies completed since 2000 – Susie Wilson Road, Capacity and Access Management Study, a follow-up "scoping report," and a 2004 report from the Susie Wilson Road Study Committee – provide recommendations for traffic and zoning changes meant to accommodate growth in the Essex West area.

Neighborhood Growth Centers (C2, O1, R1, R2)

Because of past policies and regulations, nearly half of all homes in Essex are located on neighborhood streets as opposed to major roads. The areas immediately adjacent to River Road, Sand Hill Road, VT Route 15 and the Town/Village boundary have historically been the Town's residential growth centers. Neighborhoods help create a sense of community and future residential growth should be encouraged to maintain this development pattern. All of the neighborhood growth centers are located within the Town's sewer service area. Town services, including schools,

adequate streets, sidewalks, sewer, water and recreation facilities, should be provided as needed to support these land uses.

Saxon Hill (I1, C1, O1, RPD-I)

Consisting of mature and reclaimed forest and four ponds formerly used as a public water supply, the Saxon Hill area has long been considered a resource to be preserved. The Saxon Hill forest has educational, historical, recreational, and commercial (logging) value, and serves as a prime example of how forest management can reclaim poor soils and maintain a watershed.

In 1977, the town designated a major portion of the Saxon Hill area – approximately 750 acres – as a Resource Preservation District – Industrial zoning district. The RPD-I district allows for limited, well-planned industrial and office uses. Within the RPD-I, 40 percent of the land can be developed industrially and commercially, while the remaining 60 percent must be kept as undeveloped open space. The land offers many of the characteristics desirable for industrial and office uses: level terrain, well-drained soils, proximity to transportation routes, and availability of utilities. Portions of the undeveloped forest buffer neighboring residences from commercial and industrial development. A number of industries have located in Saxon Hill Forest since 1977, but development had stalled, in part due to delays on construction of the Circumferential Highway. Since 2012, however, several businesses have opened new facilities or expanded existing operations in the RPD-I district.

The Highlands (AR, C1, R1)

Essex faces the challenge of preserving the fragile natural resources in the Highlands, areas with steep slopes and high elevations that make up more than 20 percent of the town's land. The Highlands include Brigham Hill (elevation 1,032 feet), Bixby Hill (elevation 666 feet), Saxon Hill (elevation 807 feet), and the Osgood Hill Road and Sleepy Hollow Road areas. The majority of these areas fall in Conservation (C1) districts, which require minimum lot sizes of 10 acres. Steep slopes and poor soils make the Highlands ill-suited for anything other than low-density development. As a result, the Highlands have light, scattered residential development surrounded by large tracts of productive timber. The undeveloped land is important for wood production, aquifer recharge, wildlife habitat, recreation, erosion control and aesthetics. The State of Vermont has identified much of the Highlands as high priority habitat blocks that extend into Colchester and Westford and other towns to the north. Development that occurs in the Highlands shall be subject to strict siting standards and tight building envelopes to protect natural resources and scenic views.

The Lowlands (AR, C2, R1)

The river basins around Alder Brook, Browns River, and Indian Brook make up Essex's Lowlands. These water resources and their associated floodplains and wetlands influence the distribution of other low-lying, open lands. Floodplains, for example, closely align with the availability of prime agricultural soils and often represent the Town's most visually sensitive areas. A prohibition on floodplain development has preserved open land, particularly along the Browns River, Alder Brook, and Abbey Brook. Similarly, the land surrounding the Winooski River and its tributaries contains networks of recreation areas and proposed trails identified in the 1989 Open Lands Study.

Despite the protections afforded by floodplain regulations, significant portions of the Lowlands are vulnerable to development. The Lost Nation Road area and the area northwest of VT Route 15 have become particularly attractive to development because of their proximity to the Circumferential Highway. Agricultural lands tend to lack physical constraints, making them attractive for development. Zoning in the Lowlands allows for agricultural, forestry, rural housing, recreation and resource protection. The established zoning seeks to protect and manage the area's significant natural, scenic, and recreational resources.

The town should seek to further protect the resources in the Lowlands through the careful placement of housing and the establishment of open space requirements.

Town Center (CTR, MXD-C, MXD-PUD, O2, RB, R3)

At the public forum for the 1990 Town Plan, residents overwhelmingly expressed a desire to maintain a sense of community and pride in the place they live. Heart & Soul participants reaffirmed that sentiment in 2012 and 2013. At the 1990 forum, residents identified the historic Essex Center area around the intersection of VT Routes 15 and 128 as essential to maintaining a sense of community, and called for the preservation of the historic town center. Around the same time, a Land Use Committee tasked with formulating a vision for future land use in Essex recommended that a new Town Center be developed.

Through a series of workshops and studies, Essex decided to locate the new Town Center at Butlers Corners and the Lang Farm, in the area where VT Route 15 intersects with the Circumferential Highway and Old Stage Road. A *Town Center Master Plan* released in 1991 describes a new town center at Butlers Corners and a more historic, civic center at the intersection of VT Routes 15 and 128. The *Town Center Master Plan* reinforces the goal of compact settlements surrounded by rural countryside by seeking to preserve and improve the quality of open space and enhance settled areas. The plan calls for lively, walkable, mixed-use centers in close proximity to greenways, trails, recreation land, forests, and farmland.

At Butlers Corners and the Lang Farm, the *Town Center Master Plan* calls for higher density and mixed-use buildings offering a variety of housing types within close proximity to shops, services, community facilities, places of work, and a new common. The Master Plan expected the scope and scale of commercial development in the Town Center to serve a market that extends beyond Essex. A street network described in the plan would provide a framework for development and promote pedestrian circulation and public transit. Historic buildings in the Butlers Corners area are to be retained as prominent features within the greenway.

The *Town Center Master Plan* defines Essex Four Corners – the intersection of VT Routes 15 and 128 – as the cultural center of the community. The vision calls for a renovated common and a center in which civic spaces, cultural events, churches, community groups, pedestrians, artists, and performers thrive.

VT Route 15 links the new Town Center to Essex Four Corners, and the *Town Center Master Plan* envisions a broad, tree-lined boulevard that scales down to fit the character of the area as it enters historic Essex Center. Commercial development between Butlers Corners and Essex Center shall be limited in scale.

The designs, standards and recommendations from the *Town Center Master Plan* shall be considered in the review of future development for the area, although the Planning Commission can permit modifications if they conform to the overall goals and objectives of the Town Plan. In the years leading up to the 2016 Town Plan, the Planning Commission classified several residential care facilities in the Town Center area as commercial, rather than residential, uses. The determination allowed developers to build at a higher density that would have been otherwise allowed. As the Town Center continues to develop, the Town should revisit its classification of residential and congregate care facilities to determine if the commercial use should be allowed, or if residential facilities should be permitted at higher densities in the town's growth areas.

Twenty-five years after the release of the *Town Center Master Plan*, full build-out of the new Town Center has yet to occur due to market conditions, the uncompleted Circumferential Highway, and other factors. Development has, however, picked up in recent years, and the Town should prioritize

2927 an update of the *Town Center Master Plan*. Even the 2011 Town Plan acknowledged, “The 1991
 2928 Master Plan is long overdue for a comprehensive update to examine densities, infrastructure
 2929 funding, uses and design control.”

2930 **PULL QUOTE:** *The 1991 Master Plan is long overdue for a comprehensive update to examine*
 2931 *densities, infrastructure funding, uses and design control.’*

2932 - 2011 Essex Town Plan

2933 Secondary commercial and residential center

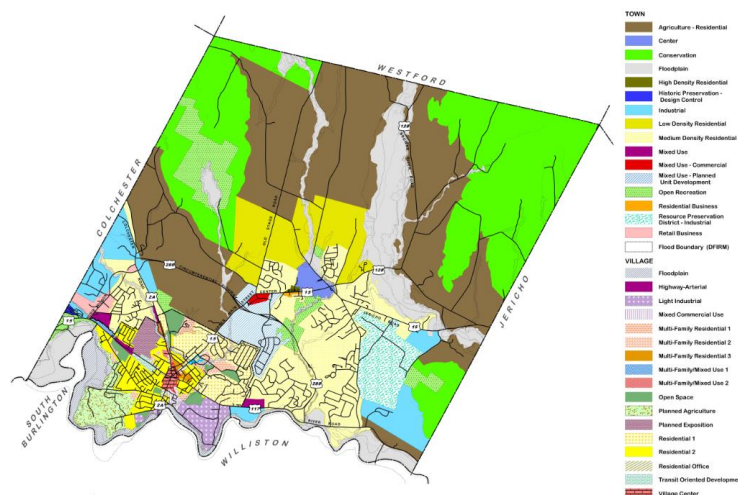
2934 A secondary commercial and residential center is proposed for the area west of VT Route 15, south
 2935 of Lost Nation Road, and north of the Circumferential Highway, as shown on the *Future Land Use*
 2936 map. High-density residential development will go forward only if, in addition to the sole planned
 2937 VT Route 15 vehicular access at the existing traffic signal, a strong pedestrian connection is
 2938 provided across VT Route 15 to the Town Center.

2939 This secondary center will allow for an expansion of the locally oriented commercial services that
 2940 were originally expected to fill the former Lang Farm Retail Center and the Town Center area.
 2941 Development should be carefully designed and executed to preserve the rural/urban settlement
 2942 pattern proposed by the Town Center Master Plan. Of particular concern would be the size, scale,
 2943 and orientation of proposed buildings and how the final appearance of this highly visible area would
 2944 be altered. Development in this area can probably be best accomplished through a Planned Unit
 2945 Development that would allow proposed projects to address setbacks and other zoning regulations
 2946 constraints with some flexibility.

2947 Land Use in Outlying Areas

2948 Much of the Town’s land use planning is focused on directing new development toward the Town
 2949 Center and other planning areas within the sewer service area. A complementary planning goal is the
 2950 prevention of excess development on rural land outside the municipal service boundary. Outside
 2951 Butlers Corners and Lang Farm, Essex Center, and existing residential areas, development should be
 2952 clustered and multi-unit dwellings discouraged. Such development patterns reinforce the concept of
 2953 compact settlement surrounded by countryside, create more contiguous open space, and preserve
 2954 significant views. The Town should consider additional analysis to address possible expansion of the
 2955 sewer core area that enhances the Town Center. If the analysis occurs, it must consider the
 2956 consequences of additional growth and sprawl.

2957 **MAP: Future Land Use**



2958

Chapter 4: Serving the Community

BOX: Specific Policy

- **4(S).1** People expect many things of town government. When considering the competing demands for services, the Town shall carefully measure these demands against the need to maintain fiscally responsible budgets and tax rates.
- **4(S).2** To the greatest extent possible, municipal buildings shall be located in the economic core of the community.

The Town provides community services for the health, benefit, safety and enjoyment of its residents. Careful planning is essential if community facilities and services are to meet local needs for growth, safety, recreation, transportation, education, and sustainability.

Local Government

The government of Essex derives its authority from a combination of Vermont statute and separate charters for the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction. The Town of Essex includes the Village of Essex Junction, and Village residents are also Town residents.

The Town of Essex adopted its [charter](#) in 1763, with voters accepting a redrawn charter in 1971. The Village formed in 1893, when residents wanted more services than the rest of the Town was willing to support and successfully petitioned the Vermont Legislature for a [Village Charter](#). A [Village President and a board of four Trustees](#), whose duties are similar to those of the Town's Selectboard, oversee the Village government.

In the town, five people are elected to the [Selectboard](#) for staggered three-year terms. The Town charter gives the Selectboard powers that include the provision of police and fire protection, acquisition of land, adoption and enforcement of ordinances, and dog control. The Selectboard also appoints volunteers to several [boards and committees](#) that serve the Town in various regulatory or advisory capacities.

The Town of Essex is responsible for functions related to records, listing (real estate assessment), tax collection, planning, issuing of licenses (liquor, dog, hunting, fishing, marriage), public health and welfare, and monitoring of the landfill. The Town is also responsible for water and sewer utilities, fire protection, regulation of elections, zoning enforcement and maintenance of Town roads.

Oversight of daily town affairs falls to the town manager, a salaried official appointed by the Selectboard. The manager is accountable to the Selectboard, but also advises the Selectboard and can initiate policy. In 2013, Town Manager Patrick C. Scheidel also began serving as the village manager. By creating a position for a joint municipal manager, the Selectboard and Trustees took the first step in a combined Town and Village effort to improve the delivery of services by consolidating various municipal departments.

SIDEBAR: To merge, or not to merge?

Since the creation of the Village of Essex Junction in 1893, Essex has seen various attempts to either separate the Village entirely or merge back into a single municipality.

In 1964, the government of the Village of Essex Junction and the Town of Essex launched a detailed study to determine the advisability of merging into one government to economize and end unnecessary duplication of municipal departments. The question of merging the

two governments was voted on a number of times during the 1970s and early 1980s but was rejected each time.

At the end of the century, Village residents voted to separate from the town, while residents outside of the Village supported consolidation of the two governments into one City of Essex Junction. The issue was sent to the Vermont Legislature for resolution in 2000, but the Local Government Committee returned it for another attempt at local agreement.

More recently, in April 2005, residents inside and outside the Village approved a non-binding proposal to establish a commission to draft a charter for the merger of the two municipalities. Upon the completion of the commission's work, residents approved a merger. By petition, however, a second vote occurred and the proposal was rejected.

With the early stages of the municipal manager model proving successful, the Selectboard and Trustees explored other consolidation possibilities. In September 2014, the Selectboard and Trustees accepted [*An Examination of a Shared Services Delivery Model for the Village of Essex Junction-Town of Essex, Vermont*](#), a report of a study conducted by former Selectboard member Jeffrey B. Carr and former Trustee Mary L. Morris. The report considered consolidation from the perspective of service quality, noting, "If there were budget savings ... or new sources of revenue ... that emerge from the implementation of the recommendations, those economic or financial gains were treated as secondary impacts."

Consolidation efforts continued in 2015, when voters approved a fiscal year 2016 budget that consolidated the Town Public Works Department and Village Highway Department, as well as the finance and administration functions for the Town and Village. The shared public works model came on a three-year trial basis.

The Town and Village also launched a project in 2015 to study the best way to plan for future growth and development in Essex. Entering 2015, each municipality had its own planning commission and zoning board of adjustment. As an outgrowth of Heart & Soul, the facilitated, community discussions planned as part of Thoughtful Growth in Action were meant to explore different scenarios for planning governance, including a single planning commission and zoning board for the entire Essex community, or a movement toward a planning commission and development review board. A working group for Thoughtful Growth in Action expected to release recommendations early in 2016.

BOX: Regional partners

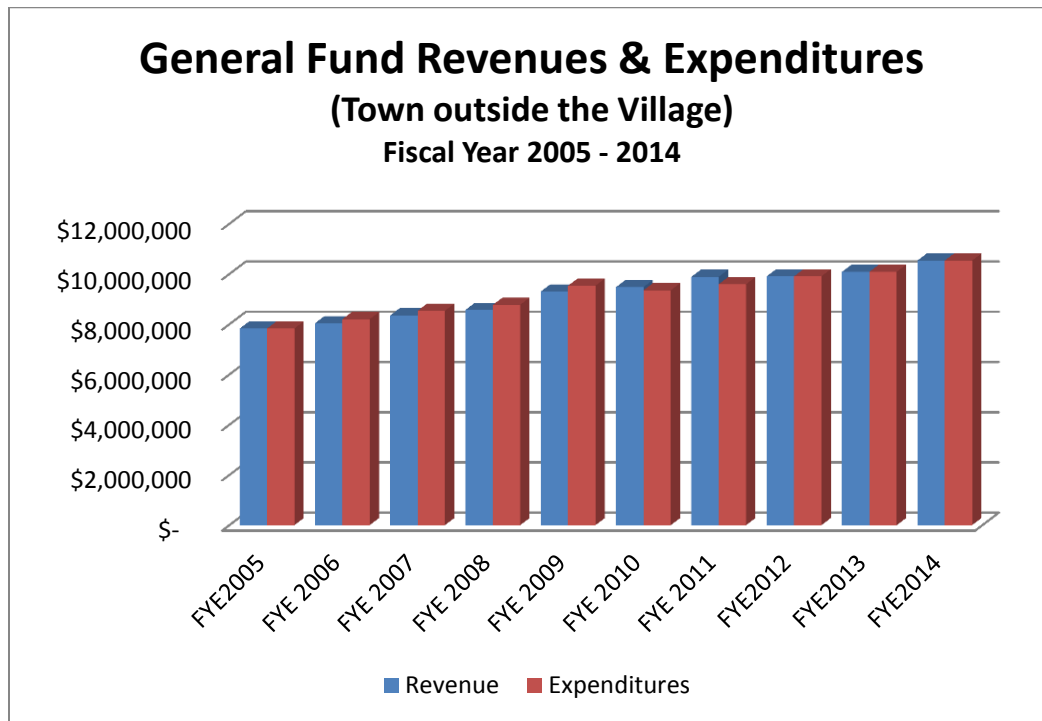
In addition to its municipal government, Essex actively participates in or provides funding to a number of regional governmental entities, including the following:

- [Champlain Water District](#) (CWD)
- [Chittenden County Court System](#)
- [Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission](#) (CCRPC)
- [Chittenden County Transportation Authority](#) (CCTA)
- [Chittenden Solid Waste District](#) (CSWD)
- [Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation](#) (GBIC)
- [Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce](#) (LCRCC)
- [Winooski Valley Park District](#) (WVPD)

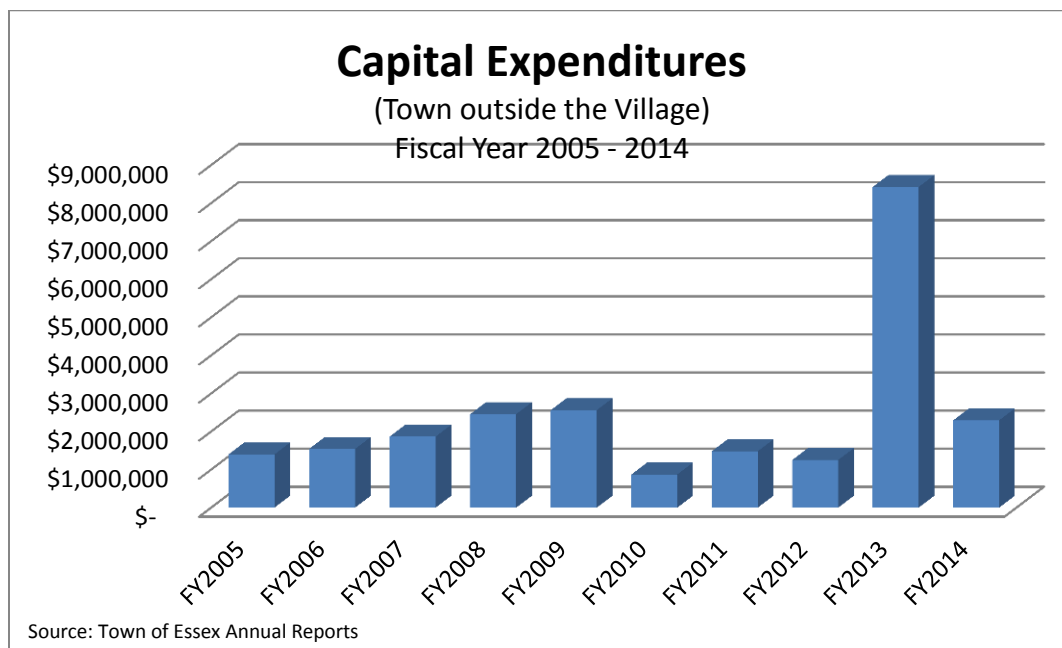
Fiscal Conditions

Property taxes account for most of the Town's non-school revenue and pay for the numerous services provided by local government. The Town receives taxes from properties located in the Village, but the bulk of the analysis in this section will focus on the Town municipal budget and the value of property located outside the Village.

In the 10 years between fiscal year 2005 and fiscal year 2014, the Town saw annual expenses increase by an average of 3.4 percent. In fiscal year 2014, the Town had general fund expenditures of \$10.53 million.



The Town has also had a capital budget since 1994, when voters approved a 1 cent capital tax.

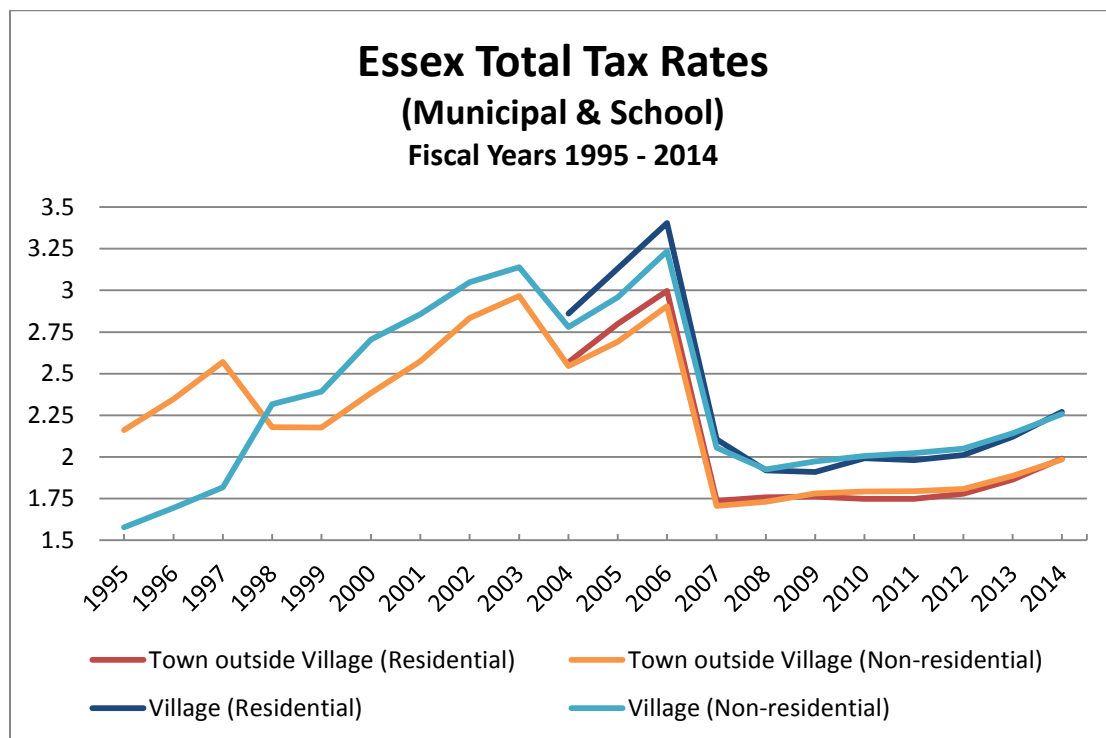


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3054 Municipal taxes include the Town's general fund, capital fund, highway tax, and local agreement rate.
 3055 The total tax rate also includes school taxes. Tax rates vary each year based on the size of the budget
 3056 and the value of the grand list, which represents 1/100th of the value of property in Essex. The
 3057 Assessor's Office determines the grand list value by appraising and assessing all taxable real estate in
 3058 the town. The last reassessment occurred in 2007.

3059 Between 2007 and fiscal year 2014, the total residential tax rate in the Town outside the Village has
 3060 increased from \$1.7367 to \$1.9911 per \$100 of a property's assessed value. Non-residential tax rates
 3061 rose from 1.7068 to 1.9840 over the same time period. The total tax rate includes municipal and
 3062 school taxes. Municipal taxes – the Town's general fund, capital fund, highway tax, and local
 3063 agreement rate – comprise less than 25 percent of the total tax rate.

3064 Village taxes fund the Village general fund and Essex Junction Parks & Recreation in addition to the
 3065 Town municipal taxes, although the Village rate does not include the Town Highway tax. School tax
 3066 rates also differ between the Village and the Town outside the Village.



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The passage of Act 60 in 1998 dramatically changed financing methods for school expenditures. Prior to Act 60, many communities encouraged commercial and industrial growth. After Act 60, a town keeps its commercial and industrial tax base for municipal costs, but that portion of the tax base is shared with the entire state to pay for state-wide educational costs. Growth in a community's commercial and industrial tax base benefits the entire state, but has a much smaller financial benefit for the community. With school costs representing a high percentage of overall municipal expenditures, the new funding formula greatly reduces a community's incentive to seek commercial and industrial growth. As described in Chapter 2, however, Essex would like to increase its commercial and industrial base so that non-residential properties make up a greater proportion of the grand list and reduce the proportion of municipal taxes paid by residents.

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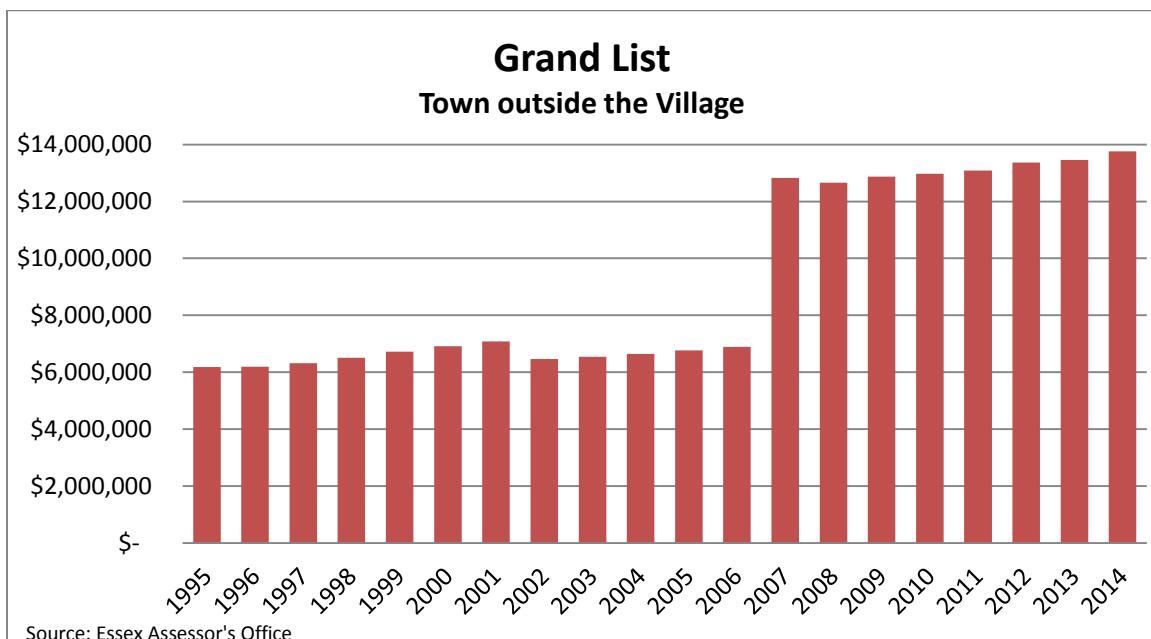
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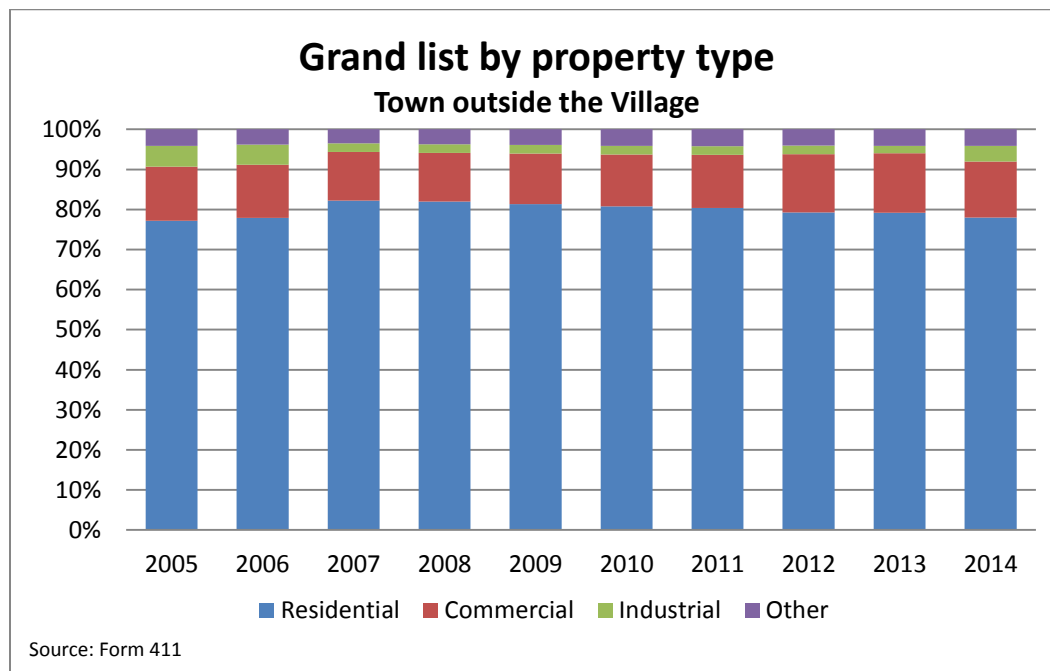
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The grand list grows in two ways. First, the value of new development is added to the grand list each year. Second, appreciation of property values causes the grand list to grow. Property value appreciations only occur when adjustments are made through a reassessment. Between reassessments, grand list growth only reflects new development. The Town's last reassessment took place in 2007. Since the reassessment, the grand list has averaged growth of slightly more than 1 percent per year through 2014, indicating a steady rate of development in the Town.



As of 2014, residential property (homes, mobile homes, apartments, and condominiums) made up 78 percent of the grand list. Commercial properties accounted for 14 percent of the grand list, and industrial plants nearly 4 percent. All other property types – utilities, farms, undeveloped land – made up the remainder of approximately 4 percent.



The Town has enacted impact fees to cover some or all of the capital costs of new public facilities needed to serve new development. Funds generated by impact fees must be used for the designated capital expenditures within a specified period of time. Impact fees reduce the burden of funding new capital facilities, which otherwise falls on the remainder of the grand list.

The Town's [capital plan](#) identifies capital improvement needs, proposed funding, and potential funding sources.

3096 The Town has also established enterprise funds for sewer and water facilities. The funds cover
3097 capital and operating costs by charging water and sewer customers for the services. The enterprise
3098 fund operations do not derive any revenue from the general tax base.

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3100 **Municipal Office Building**

3101 The municipal office building, located at 81 Main Street, provides 8,000 square feet for the Town
3102 Manager's office, Real Estate Assessment, Community Development, Finance, Parks and
3103 Recreation, and the Town Clerk. The Police Department moved out of 81 Main Street in 2014 to
3104 occupy a new building at 145 Maple Street.

3105 The municipal office building had long needed to come into compliance with the federal Americans
3106 With Disabilities Act (ADA) by installing an elevator and ADA-accessible bathrooms. When the
3107 police moved out of the municipal office building, the town had an opportunity to make the
3108 necessary renovations, and did so in 2015. In addition to accessibility upgrades, renovations included
3109 an expanded vault, new entry stairs, new ceilings, new HVAC equipment, some reconfigured walls,
3110 new lighting, new windows and a new membrane roof.

3111 **Assessor's Office**

3112 The [Assessor's Office](#) maintains property information records – including property ownership and
3113 physical attributes of taxable properties – sales information, and tax maps. The information is
3114 available to other Town departments, outside agencies, and the public.

3115 **Community Development Office**

3116 The [Community Development Office](#) oversees all planning and zoning issues. Staff coordinates the
3117 development review process by Town boards, commissions, and other municipal departments. The
3118 Community Development Office also undertakes long-range planning efforts for the future of
3119 Essex, and maintains and updates the Town Plan, the [Official Zoning Regulations](#) and the [Official
3120 Subdivision Regulations](#).

3121 The [Planning Commission](#), [Zoning Board of Adjustment](#), and [Conservation Committee](#) receive staff
3122 support from Community Development.

3123 The health officer and GIS computer mapping services also reside in the Community Development
3124 Office.

3125 **Finance Department**

3126 The [Finance Department](#) is responsible for all financial record keeping; tax, water, and sewer billings
3127 and collections; insurance; and accounts payable and receivable.

3128 **Town Clerk's Office**

3129 The [Town Clerk's Office](#) serves as the hub of the Town Offices, providing a variety of services to
3130 residents and generating revenue for the Town. The policies and actions of the Clerk's office are
3131 mandated by state statutes. Residents can pay their taxes or utility bills in person in the Clerk's
3132 office. The Clerk's office prepares many licenses for the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex
3133 Junction, including marriage, dog, fish and game, and liquor licenses. The Clerk's office records and
3134 prepares certified copies of all vital records, land records and survey maps for the Town. Residents
3135 can also use the Clerk's office for notary services, temporary DMV registration renewals, and

recording military discharges. Many attorneys and paralegals do title work in the vault, helping Town and Village residents buy new homes or refinance the homes they have.

BOX: Dogs in Essex

Dog licensing increased from 1,240 dogs in 2001 to 1,500 in 2014, based on tag number records kept in the Clerk's office. All dogs owned in the Town, including the Village, must be registered with the Town Clerk before April 1 of each year.

Dogs can roam off-leash at the dog park on West Street in the Village, at undeveloped parts of Indian Brook Park, and the Saxon Hill Forest.

The Clerk's office also acts as the central location for voters. Residents can go to the Clerk's office to register to vote, or to vote by absentee ballot before an election. On an election day, polls are open at Essex High School and Essex Middle School. The number of registered voters in Essex has increased from 13,727 in 2001 to 15,808 in 2014.

BOX: Townwide voter turnout

The Town Clerk's Office tracks voter turnout. Since 2002, Essex has seen the following turnout in general elections:

2002:	7,582
2004:	10,411*
2006:	9,071
2008:	10,926*
2010:	8,550
2012:	10,433*

* *Presidential election*

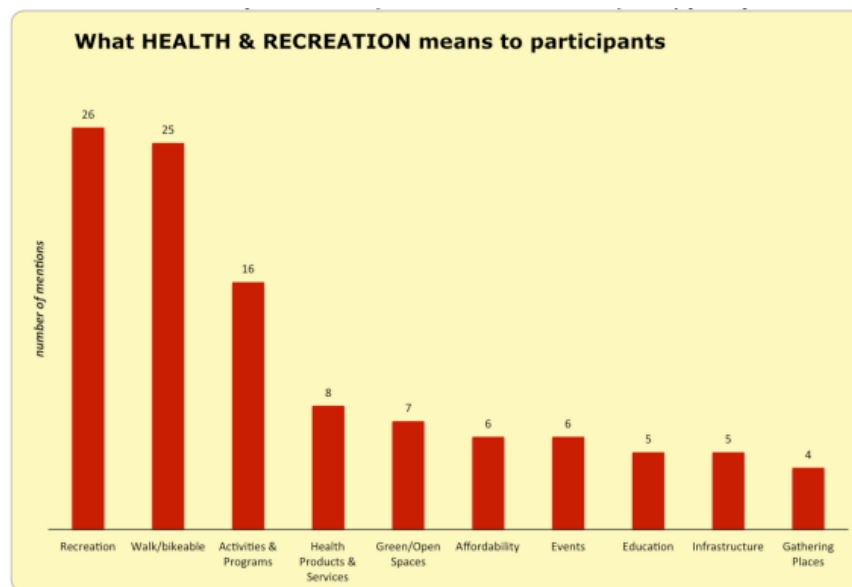
Parks and Recreation Department

The Essex [Parks and Recreation Department](#) helps ensure that residents can enjoy healthy, active lifestyles by managing recreational facilities and offering a variety of programs for everyone from preschoolers to seniors. With a goal to be "Your Connection to a Healthier Community," Parks and Recreation has responsibility in six areas: Recreation, Park Maintenance and Development, Senior Vans, Aquatics at Sand Hill Pool, Cemetery Maintenance, and the Extended School Program.

Essex residents appreciate the importance of a community that provides opportunities for healthy, active lives, and as the 2012 [Recreation Needs Assessment](#) found, "The Town of Essex is a thriving community with a rural character, offering a wide range of opportunities for outdoor recreation and active partnerships to serve a variety of indoor recreational needs." The report was based on a town-wide, statistically significant survey. The *Recreation Needs Assessment* contains a set of goals related to park, trail, and facility improvements, and shall be consulted as the Town plans for and expands its recreational offerings.

Not long after the release of the Recreation Needs Assessment, residents again highlighted the importance of healthy living during the Heart & Soul project: Health & Recreation emerged as one of Essex's six community values.

"We value public places for outdoor and indoor recreation for all ages and abilities," Heart & Soul said. "We treasure Indian Brook Reservoir, neighborhood parks and the chance to connect by bicycle or on foot. Community institutions provide education and programs to support healthy lifestyles."



BOX: Heart & Soul describes Health and Recreation

Heart & Soul participants described the Health and Recreation value in the following ways:

- Support for strong recreation departments;
- Biking and walking friendly, including the presence of lanes, paths, trails, sidewalks, and connectivity of these across the community;
- Diverse year-round recreational opportunities for all age groups, including community events;
- A variety of recreation facilities including pools, parks, fields, and shared community spaces;
- Access to health providers;
- Access to healthy, local food;
- Affordable and accessible opportunities for physical activity;
- Maintenance of open spaces and parks, particularly Indian Brook Reservoir; and
- Health, fitness and nutrition education.

The Parks and Recreation Department has supported active lifestyles in Essex since 1972, when the department was created with a part-time status. Parks and Recreation became a full-time department in 1979. As of 2015, the Department was staffed with four full-time employees, two part-time employees (one funded through the Enterprise Fund, which is not taxpayer-based), and more than 60 seasonal employees.

The department maintains more than 18 parks and facilities in the Town outside the Village; [Essex Junction Recreation and Parks](#), which operates under the Chittenden Central Supervisory Union, cares for the three parks within the Village limits. The recreation departments strive to complement each other, and collaborate on special events throughout the year.

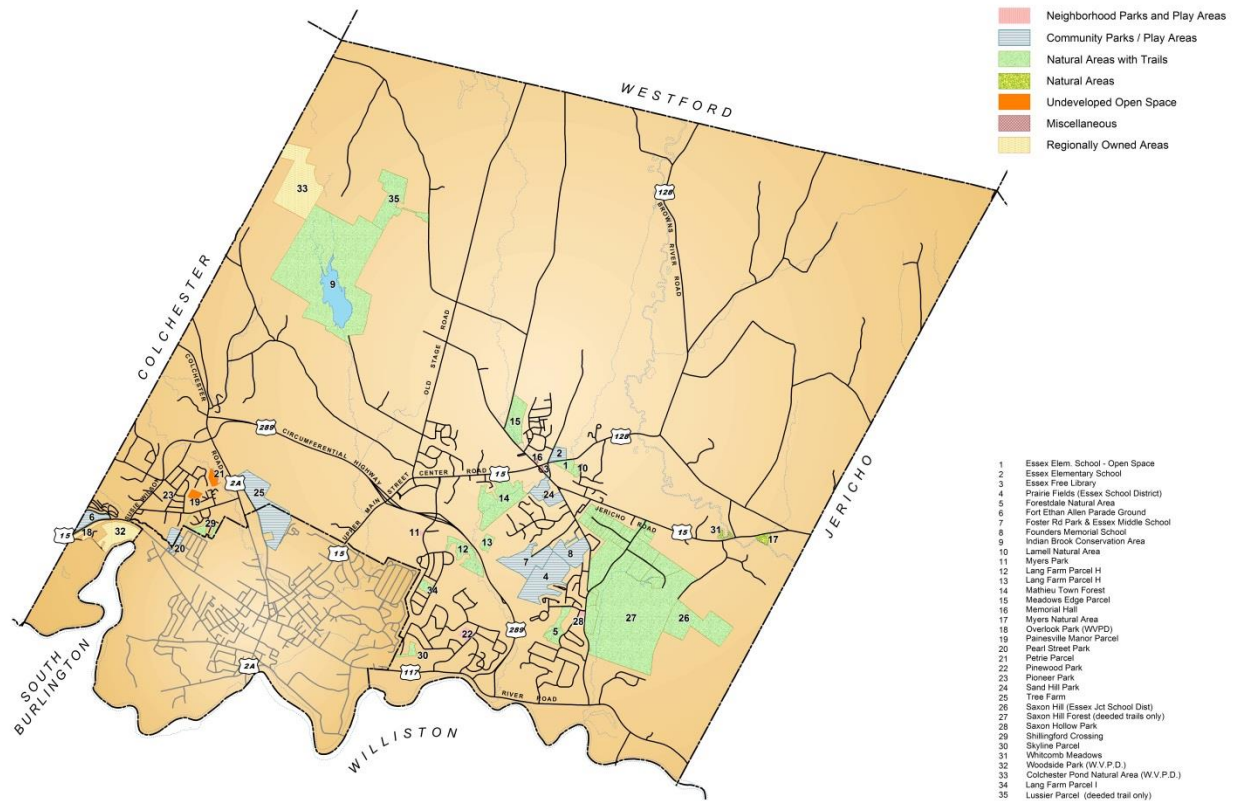
Parks and Facilities

The Parks and Recreation Department maintains all town-owned land in Essex outside of the Village, allowing residents to recreate in parks and open spaces, in water, and on trails. The Town's [capital improvement plan](#) ensures timely maintenance and enhancements occur at parks and playgrounds. The Town's insurance company also inspects the facilities.

The Town has adapted a classification system from the [National Recreation and Parks Association](#) to describe the types of parks outside the Village. By classifying facilities, the Town can better decide

how to allocate money and staff time to its parks. The adjoining map and sidebar show and describe the sites in Essex.

MAP: Parks and Recreation



SIDEBAR: Park Classification

Community Parks are the largest type of park in the classification system. Visitors generally ride or drive to community parks, which are typically 10 acres to 25 acres in size. A community park should possess diverse environmental features such as a pond, some open space, and a forest. The park should also be suited for intense recreational activities, and should have facilities for people of all ages. Facilities might include a baseball or softball diamond, a basketball court, a tennis court, an ice skating rink, playground equipment, shuffleboard courts, a picnic area, or an outdoor nature study area.

Neighborhood Parks provide passive and active recreation opportunities for a nearby neighborhood, making them pedestrian-oriented parks. A neighborhood park that serves an area with single-family houses might consist of a softball field, playground equipment, and a picnic area. Alternatively, a neighborhood park near a condominium project with few children might contain a tennis court and a basketball court. Neighborhood parks will range in size from 1 acre to 15 acres. These spaces are often associated with elementary schools.

A **Mini-Park** is a specialized recreation space, usually 1 acre or smaller. Mini-parks provide recreational opportunities for a concentrated and limited population, and may guarantee green space within a subdivision. Almost exclusively accessed by pedestrians, mini-parks usually serve a radius of several blocks. Mini-parks should be low-maintenance facilities. Tot lots are a common type of mini-park. A mini-park designed for senior citizens could contain horseshoes or a shuffleboard court in addition to walking and sitting areas.

Natural Areas offer the potential for multi-purpose recreational use for the entire community. These sites contain significant natural features such as forests, water bodies, and high elevations. Natural areas can be used for conservation purposes or, with proper management and use, can provide varied recreational opportunities without damaging the natural qualities of the site.

[Indian Brook Park](#) is the Town's most popular park. The 575-acre natural area in northwestern Essex contains miles of trails and a 60-acre reservoir where visitors can swim, fish, and paddle. The reservoir served as the public water supply for the Village of Essex Junction until the Village joined the Champlain Water District in 1973. A private owner purchased the entire parcel in 1977. The Town obtained the park in 1986, when voters approved a \$750,000 bond to purchase the property, repair the dam, and make necessary improvements. The Town also received a \$16,000 donation from The Nature Conservancy toward the purchase price of \$435,000.

Initial renovations to Indian Brook Park took place during 1988. Parks and Recreation continues to enhance the park with trail improvements, signage, and treatment of the invasive species Eurasian milfoil. The Town explores mitigation measures for milfoil on an ongoing basis. Beavers have dammed tributaries in the past, causing problems that Essex has attempted to resolve by trapping and by using beaver baffles.

IMAGE: Indian Brook Park

To combat overuse of the park, the Town began to limit Indian Brook permits to Essex residents in 2013. All park visitors must purchase a permit from Parks and Recreation; the Town issued nearly 4,000 passes in 2014. The Town needs to conduct a capacity study and develop a master plan for the park. Parks and Recreation should coordinate with the Police Department to map zones and trails within the park to improve wayfinding and support emergency response. During the busy summer months, Parks and Recreation would like to share a seasonal staff person with Public Works for maintenance purposes.

When possible, the Town seeks to expand the trail system around Indian Brook by capturing trail easements in the area. North and west of Indian Brook, the [Winooski Valley Park District](#) owns an abutting property that contains trails leading to [Colchester Pond](#).

Residents can enjoy other natural areas in town, as well. In southeast Essex, **Saxon Hill Forest** features a combination of conservation/recreation land and industrial land over approximately 750 acres. The forest contains at least 12 miles of trails. Public access easements exist over some trails, but entering 2015, only 90 acres were under public ownership – the Essex Junction School District leases the top of Saxon Hill and lands immediately east of Saxon Hill Road to the Town. In the spring of 2015, however, the Selectboard reached a conceptual settlement with a private landowner to acquire approximately 245 acres for conservation and recreation purposes. Once the Town takes over the land, it should develop a forest management plan for the property.

In Essex Center, the 30-acre **Town School District Forest** contains a small reservoir. Founders Road provides access to the forest. Nearby, **Mathieu Town Forest** covers 76 acres between Sunset Drive and Birchwood Manor. Donated by Robert Mathieu, the forest includes a rough trail that runs through steep ridges and deep gullies. Trails also run through more than 44 acres of abutting forestland recently acquired by the Town at the end of Tanglewood Drive. Alder Brook provides fishing opportunities in Mathieu Town Forest.

The southernmost portion of Alder Brook, after it leaves Mathieu Town Forest, flows through an area likely to see future residential development. As proposed residential development abutting

3277 Alder Brook goes through the subdivision approval process, the Town should consider acquiring the
3278 most sensitive areas and incorporating a greenway and trail system.

3279 Other water-based recreation opportunities exist on the Winooski River and Browns River. The
3280 Winooski Valley Park District owns [Woodside Natural Area](#), a 58-acre parcel in the southwest
3281 corner of Essex off VT Route 15. The park contains trails and a small boat ramp, offering the only
3282 public access to the Winooski River in the Town outside the Village.

3283 The Browns River Valley makes up the largest contiguous tract of open land in Essex. In addition to
3284 its agricultural potential, the valley could support snowmobiling, fishing, and trails. Undeveloped
3285 public accesses to the river exist, including land owned by Essex. At least one of the Town-owned
3286 parcels should be considered for a public canoe launch.

3287 The Town shall pursue opportunities to acquire or preserve open space to support the community
3288 desire for passive recreation and conservation. When the Town does acquire land for passive
3289 recreation, it should expect to see an increase in activities such as hiking, biking, and cross country
3290 skiing. Because of staffing limitations – at 2015 staffing levels, Parks and Recreation had only one
3291 full-time employee available to respond to the demands of the parks and facilities – the Town may
3292 seek to support passive recreation on public open space by collaborating with groups such as local
3293 Scout troops, [Local Motion](#), and [Fellowship of the Wheel](#).

3294 Another popular park, the [Tree Farm Recreational Facility](#), is frequently used by organizations
3295 such as Essex United, Nordic Soccer, the Vermont Soccer Association, Burlington Rugby, and both
3296 Essex recreation departments. Located off Old Colchester Road, the 99-acre property spans the
3297 border between the Village of Essex Junction and the Town outside the Village. The Tree Farm had
3298 operated as a state tree nursery until 1995. In its post-nursery life, the property was developed as a
3299 regional recreational facility by the non-profit Tree Farm Management Group. After years of leasing
3300 the property, the Town and Village purchased the Tree Farm in 2010; the Tree Farm Management
3301 Group still manages the property. Although best-known for its 13 fields used for soccer, rugby, and
3302 other sports, the Tree Farm also contains a cross-country running trail and a multi-use bicycle and
3303 pedestrian path.

3304 The multi-use path signifies the importance of trails within Essex. Residents want to run, bike, walk
3305 and jog, whether for recreation or to travel around the community. Chapter 2 contains a map of
3306 proposed trail networks, and the 2014 [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Town of Essex and Village of
3307 Essex Junction](#) includes an inventory of existing bicycle and pedestrian paths, funding opportunities,
3308 and collaborative visions between the Town and the Village. Combined with the Town Plan, the
3309 *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan* will help Essex become even more friendly for bicyclists and pedestrians.

3310 **Programs and Funding**

3311 The Parks and Recreation Department does much more than just maintain the Town's parks and
3312 natural areas. The department offers programs to meet community needs and interests, programs
3313 that build family unity, teach life skills, and elevate personal growth. The department also promotes
3314 community-wide events, including the Spring Egg Hunt, Touch-a-Truck, Winter Carnival, and the
3315 Youth Fishing Derby.

3316 Volunteers are crucial to Parks and Recreation's sports programs, including fall soccer, the Bolton
3317 After School Ski & Ride program, and Youth Lacrosse. The Department also supports non-
3318 municipal organizations such as Babe Ruth Baseball and Little League Baseball and Softball, Essex
3319 Youth Football, Essex Youth Hockey, and Warrior Wrestling.

3320 Registration and enrollment fees have, since 2011, financed a self-sustaining Enterprise Fund. Over
3321 the years, the fund has relieved taxpayers from more than \$250,000 for programs. The Enterprise

3322 Fund now pays the salary of a part-time Assistant Program Coordinator and covers the pay of
3323 seasonal employees.

3324 The Parks and Recreation Department wants to expand the number and variety of programs –
3325 particularly those geared toward adults – and continue cooperating with other organizations.

3326 Many Essex seniors enjoy Parks and Recreation programs, and the department hired a part-time
3327 Senior Activities Coordinator in 2014 to support senior programming. Senior participation increased
3328 so rapidly that the Town increased the coordinator's hours in 2015. The Town should consider
3329 making the position full-time to meet the demand for senior programming. The Town should also
3330 conduct a study for a new senior center; an existing senior center is located in Lincoln Hall at Five
3331 Corners in the Village.

3332 **Aquatics**

3333 Sand Hill Pool, built in 1979, provides Essex residents with learn-to-swim opportunities throughout
3334 the summer months. The pool serves as the home of the Town of Essex Swim Team, which had
3335 135 swimmers in 2014 and has held many records and titles over the years. Sand Hill Pool has also
3336 hosted the Champlain Valley Swim League meet, most recently in 2015.

3337 Smaller children can enjoy a sprayground element at Sand Hill Pool, which was added in 2010 in
3338 place of a small wading pool. The Town should consider creating a master plan for the future of
3339 Sand Hill Pool.

3340 Because of the popularity of Sand Hill Pool, the community has often considered adding an indoor
3341 aquatic center. One of the top nine goals from the 2012 *Recreation Needs Assessment* was to conduct a
3342 feasibility study for a community/aquatics center. Additional space for aquatics and general
3343 programming for all ages and seasons would allow residents to sustain their high quality of active life
3344 throughout the year, and not just during the short Vermont summer.

3345 **Senior Van**

3346 Parks and Recreation operates the Essex Senior Van service, offering free, in-town transportation to
3347 residents 60 and older. Two vans drive more than 150 miles per day, bringing eligible riders to
3348 appointments and Sunday church. Ridership has increased over the years and should continue to
3349 grow with the construction of 55-and-older congregate housing complexes and rehabilitation
3350 residences.

3351 Parks and Recreation also uses the vans for special trips and programs, including the Holiday Lights
3352 Tour in December, weekly sponsored lunches, and theatre productions.

3353 Per a lease agreement with the Chittenden County Transportation Authority, most van maintenance
3354 occurs in the CCTA garage. Maintenance occurs quickly, but the Town does not have a suitable
3355 backup vehicle and should consider using the capital budget to purchase a minivan.

3356

3357 **Essex Free Library**

3358 [Essex Free Library](#), located at the corner of VT Route 15 and VT Route 128, is an integral part of
3359 historic Essex Center and a much-used community resource. The library primarily serves Essex
3360 residents who live outside the Village, as Village residents can enjoy the services of [Brownell](#)
3361 [Library](#).

3362 Library cards, also known as HOMECARDS, are issued to Essex residents every two years and may
3363 be used at any library in Chittenden County except for Burlington's Fletcher Free Library. As of July

3364 2013, 8,629 Essex residents had updated cards from Essex Free Library. More than 1,000 patrons
3365 from Westford, Cambridge, Jericho and Underhill also use the library.

3366 As of July of 2013, the library housed a collection of 35,743 items for public use, including nearly
3367 9,000 items in the Children's Room. Inter-Library Loan allows Essex patrons to access titles not
3368 available in this collection, including 3,398 e-books and audiobooks.

3369 The library has had an automated circulation system since 1996. Patrons can access the catalog
3370 online or by using one of five Online Public Access Catalogs (OPACs) at the library. The public
3371 workstations are located on all three floors and allow visitors to use the internet and word
3372 processing, as well as a printer/scanner/fax/copier.

3373 Essex Free Library joined the Vermont Organization of Koha Automated Libraries (VOKAL), a
3374 project of the Green Mountain Library Consortium, in November 2013. Patrons from more than 50
3375 libraries in the state now have access to Essex Free Library records. Patrons can also renew online
3376 or place a hold on a book.

3377 In addition to the collection of books and other items, Essex Free Library offers programs
3378 throughout the school year for toddlers, preschoolers, their parents or caregivers, and other adults.
3379 The Summer Reading Program creates a fun, popular way for youngsters to continue good reading
3380 habits throughout the warmer months. An adult book discussion meets monthly and follows a new
3381 theme each year.

3382 As an historic structure, the library originated in 1804 as the timber Essex Congregational Church.
3383 Following a disastrous fire in 1838, a brick structure was constructed on the foundation. The
3384 building was used by a succession of small church organizations and for other community purposes
3385 during the early- to mid-1900s, but the building continued to deteriorate structurally until it was
3386 abandoned in 1985. Two years later, Essex voters approved a bond to restore the building as a new
3387 home for Essex Free Library. The library left the building now housing Public Works, completing
3388 the relocation in February 1989.

3389

3390 **Public Safety**

3391 **Fire Department**

3392 Essex has two fire departments operating out of two stations. The [Essex Town Fire Department](#)
3393 is located on Sand Hill Road, in front of the highway garage. The [Village of Essex Junction Fire](#)
3394 [Department](#) is located on Pearl Street near Five Corners. Each department consists of paid, on-call
3395 volunteers who provide fire protection and, in conjunction with [Essex Rescue](#), emergency medical
3396 first response.

3397 Although each department is funded separately by its respective jurisdiction, both operate on a
3398 written mutual aid agreement to provide dual response coverage to any significant call for service
3399 anywhere in the community. The Essex Police Dispatch Center provides dispatching services,
3400 ensuring a coordinated response of police, fire, and rescue services directly from VT 911. In 2013-
3401 2014, the Essex Fire Department responded to 665 calls for service, 279 of which were medical first
3402 response calls. Essex Fire Department also provides mutual aid to Westford for most calls, and to
3403 other neighboring communities when needed.

3404 Neither the Town nor the Village fire department has full-time personnel. Each department has a
3405 roster of about 30 people who respond to calls when nearby and available. The on-call volunteers
3406 receive an hourly wage when they show up for an emergency call. The Essex Fire Department does

pay for some members to stay at the station on a part-time basis during the weekdays to conduct maintenance at the station and on the vehicles, and to ensure coverage.

In addition to responding to fire calls, the Essex Fire Department maintains a Bureau of Life Safety, which conducts courtesy inspections of buildings in conjunction with Community Development and the State Fire Marshal.

Police Department

The [Essex Police Department](#) has served the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction since its inception in 1980. The department had 33 full-time employees in 2014, including 27 sworn officers (1 IT/officer position is shared with the town), four dispatchers, one administrative assistant and one records clerk. The department also had five part-time officers, one part-time dispatcher and one part-time administrative assistant.

The demand for police services — including patrol, motor vehicle enforcement, investigations, crime prevention, and court preparation — has stretched the department's resources to the limit. The new police facility at 145 Maple Street, which opened in the fall of 2014, will allow staff to provide services more efficiently. Staffing limitations, however, will restrict expansion of the services provided by the police department.

BOX: Officer-to-population ratios (2014)

National average:	2.0 officers per 1,000 residents
Burlington:	2.1
Colchester:	1.6
Essex:	1.3
South Burlington:	2.1
Williston:	1.9
Winooski:	2.2

Because of limited staffing levels, the Police Department has sought to proactively deter crime by forming partnerships in the community. The police and community benefit from programs such as Neighborhood Watch, robbery seminars, neighborhood meetings, youth drug and alcohol education programs Project Northland and ALERT, and School Safety Committee meetings.

The [Essex Community Justice Center](#) has also expanded its capacity to address low-level crime and conflict since its inception in 2003. As a community organization, the CJC allows citizens to work together to prevent crime, resolve conflicts, and render justice by using the principles of restorative justice.

Essex Rescue

A private, nonprofit corporation, [Essex Rescue, Inc.](#) was organized in 1971 as a professionally-trained, volunteer emergency medical service. The squad provides emergency medical treatment and transportation in Essex, Jericho, Underhill, and Westford. A staff of approximately 50 volunteers, four full-time paramedics, and an executive director respond to 9-1-1 calls 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Essex Rescue has a community advisory board with Selectboard-appointed representation from each of the covered towns.

Funding for Essex Rescue's operating budget comes from patient and insurance billings, member town contributions, private donations, and a subscription plan that allows residents to pay an annual fee in lieu of any bills not covered by insurance. The four member towns pay less than 5 percent of the squad's annual operating funds. Essex Rescue values its volunteer labor at more than \$250,000 a year.

Essex Rescue owns its primary station near the Essex Community Educational Center in the Village of Essex Junction. The building sits on leased land, in a 100-year floodplain, with a 99-year lease that will expire in 2070. The squad also deploys an ambulance out of the Underhill-Jericho Fire Station on VT Route 15 in Underhill. Because emergency call volume has increased to more than 2,000 responses per year, Essex Rescue is exploring options for various response models, including additional station sites.

SIDEBAR: Valuing Safety

Heart & Soul identified Safety as one of the community's six core values, noting, "Essex is a safe place where neighbors watch out for one another. We value an active, visible police force and strong fire and rescue services. Upgrades to our physical infrastructure will allow us to move about our community with comfort and security."



Heart & Soul describes Health and Recreation

Heart & Soul participants described the Health and Recreation value in the following ways:

- Support for strong recreation departments;
- Biking and walking friendly, including the presence of lanes, paths, trails, sidewalks, and connectivity of these across the community;
- Diverse year-round recreational opportunities for all age groups, including community events;
- A variety of recreation facilities including pools, parks, fields, and shared community spaces;
- Access to health providers;
- Access to healthy, local food;
- Affordable and accessible opportunities for physical activity;
- Maintenance of open spaces and parks, particularly Indian Brook Reservoir; and
- Health, fitness and nutrition education.

Public Works Department

The [Public Works Department](#) moved to the old Essex Free Library building in 1989. The 700-square-foot office, located on the Town Common near the intersection of VT Route 15 and VT Route 128, provides space for four employees – the Public Works director, the town engineer, the stormwater coordinator, and the secretary. Moving to the office freed up space in the Town Offices and provided better accessibility to the Public Works Garage, which is located off Sand Hill Road.

The Public Works Highway Garage Complex is a 10,000-square-foot facility that houses the Town's snow plows, heavy equipment, and maintenance equipment.

Memorial Hall

Memorial Hall was built as the Town Hall and dedicated in 1871 to the men of Essex who died fighting in the Civil War. When the Town government moved to the Village of Essex Junction, Memorial Hall began hosting indoor basketball games and a variety of other events, eventually becoming the home of the [Essex Community Players](#). The theater group made many interior improvements to Memorial Hall, but overall condition of the building continued to deteriorate.

During the low point in the building's history in 1986, however, Memorial Hall was found eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The Selectboard appointed a committee to study the building in the late 1980s and determine what improvements were needed. As a result of the committee's work, Town voters authorized a bond to pay for basic safety improvements.

Another Selectboard-appointed group, the Memorial Hall Study Committee, completed a more in-depth assessment of renovation and restoration needs in 1995. As of 2015, the Study Committee had been inactive for several years, although the Public Works Department has set aside funds to install a food preparation area within the building.

Sewage Disposal

The Town operates its own sewer system. A network of wastewater gravity sewers, pressure force-mains and pump stations deliver wastewater to the Village of Essex Junction's sewage treatment facility. Per an agreement signed in the early 1970s, the plant treats wastewater from the Village of Essex Junction, the Town of Essex outside the Village, and Williston. Improvements to the plant have increased the treatment capacity to 3,100,000 gallons per day, up from the original capacity of 2,750,000 gpd. Each municipality has purchased a portion of that capacity:

	Original Capacity	2015 Capacity
<i>Village of Essex Junction</i>	1,220,000 gpd	1,220,000 gpd
<i>Town of Essex outside the Village</i>	1,000,000 gpd	1,100,000 gpd
<i>Williston</i>	530,000 gpd	780,000 gpd
TOTAL PLANT CAPACITY	2,750,000 gpd	3,100,000 gpd

The wastewater treatment facility was reconditioned in 2013 and 2014 for \$15 million. The three communities shared the costs of the upgrade in proportion to their respective purchased capacity.

Essex sewage flows in March 2015 had a five-year daily average of 480,183 gpd – almost 44 percent of the Town's purchased treatment capacity of 1,100,000 gpd. Another 122,635 gpd had been allotted to developments that were approved but not yet built as of August 2014, leaving 497,182 gpd of available capacity. The Town has tentatively assigned 366,975 gpd to individual parcels within

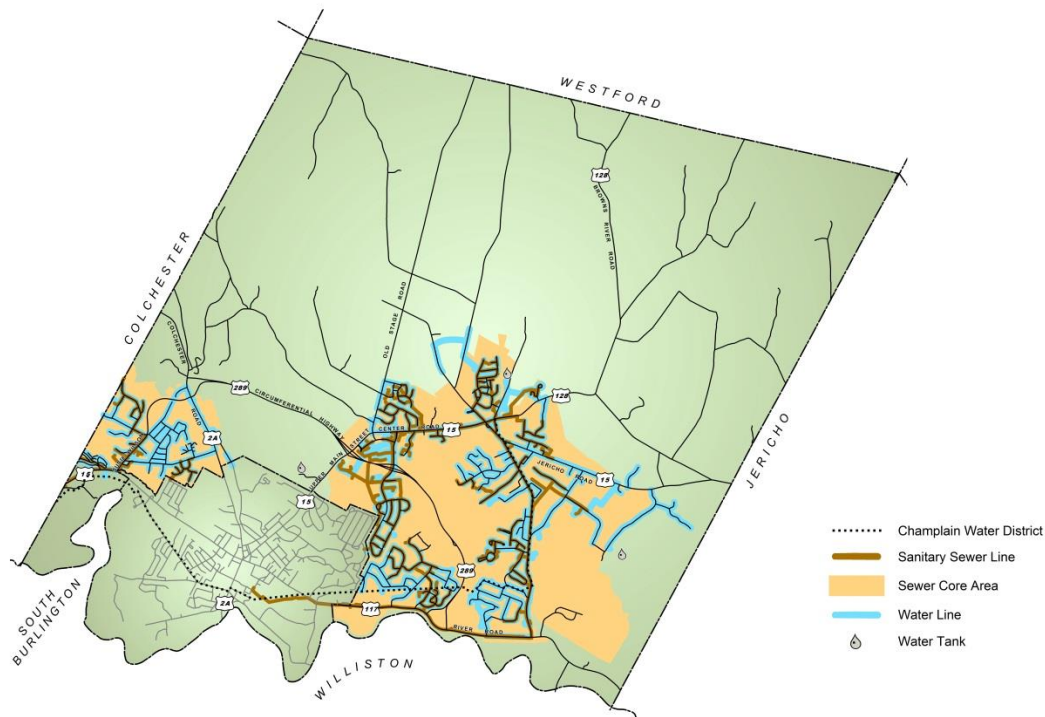
the sewer core, although landowners have yet to purchase that capacity. If all properties in the sewer core with tentatively-assigned capacity were to be completely built-out per the allocation map, the Town would have a remaining, undesignated allocation capacity of approximately 130,200 gpd.

The net unallocated capacity may increase or decrease depending on changes in land use and climate, but full build-out is unlikely to occur within the time frame of this Town Plan. The Selectboard therefore has the ability to provide wastewater allocations in the approximate range of 130,200 gpd (unallocated capacity) to 497,200 gpd (unpurchased capacity). The reserve capacity appears to be adequate for an estimated 10 to 15 years. Planning for additional capacity should begin around 2020.

The Selectboard distributes sewer capacity based on the Sewer Allocation Policy, which is contained in Chapter 10.18 of the [Town Ordinances](#). The policy was established based on the results of a 1998 sewer capacity study and amended following a 2003 update to the 1998 study.

Past Town Plans have identified parts of Essex that need sewers due to failures of on-site septic systems. One of those areas, the Wildwood Drive area of Pinewood Development, connected to municipal sewer in the fall of 2000. The Town has indefinitely postponed plans to extend municipal sewer service to Blair Road, portions of Pinecrest Drive from Susie Wilson Road to Pioneer Street, Pioneer from Pinecrest to Ira Allen Drive, and Ira Allen Drive. The area has many small lots and a history of septic problems. A design for the sewer extension project was completed in 2007, but the Selectboard shelved the project due to high costs and insufficient funding sources.

MAP: Water and Sewer



Water Supply

The Town of Essex operates a distribution system of waterlines, fed with water supplied by the Champlain Water District. The Town water system has more customers than the Town sewer system.

Two principal service areas exist outside the Village: a low service area and a high service area. The low service area, which consists of Fort Ethan Allen, Susie Wilson Road, Kellogg Road, Pinecrest Drive, and VT Route 2A, lies below the 468-foot elevation of the Essex Junction storage tanks. The highest elevation served in the low service area is approximately 420 feet USGS, resulting in a static pressure at the high point of 38 pounds per square inch (psi). Winooski and portions of Colchester are also served within the low-pressure zone.

The high service area, located in the eastern and central portions of Essex, is between the elevation of the Essex Junction storage tank at 468 feet and the two Essex Town storage tanks at 640 feet. The Town has 500,000 gallons in storage in the tank on Bixby Hill and 680,000 gallons in the Saxon Hill tank. Static pressure ranges from 43 psi at the high point near Butlers Corners to more than 110 psi along River Road.

Within the existing water system, a number of areas have been identified for the expenditure of capital funds. The two most significant categories are pipes with insufficient sizes to accommodate fire demand, and dead-end lines that need to be looped, or connected, to improve water quality, pressure, and service. Loops could be completed with future water projects on VT Route 2A from Pinecrest Drive to the Village boundary, and from Douglas Road to Willoughby Drive.

Another category of potential water projects could prove costly. In the late 1960s and early '70s, the Town water system rapidly expanded. The pipe used during this period was coated asbestos-cement. Because of a lack of tensile strength, the pipe is subject to shear failure when the ground shifts. The pipe has also softened in some areas due to constant exposure to a high water table. The Town does not have any plan to systematically replace the piping, but the project will likely become a capital need prior to 2020.

Stormwater

Rather than a central stormwater system serving the entire town, Essex has a collection of independent culverts, catch basin systems with interconnected pipes, and some stormwater detention basins. Not including road cross culverts or soil discharge systems, the Town has more than 195 separate catch basin/piped discharge stormwater systems and 1,707 total catch basins, including 489 private catch basins and 71 owned by the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Public Works maintains all culverts and catch basins within the public right-of-way, as well as permitted systems specifically accepted by the Town.

The Environmental Protection Agency published a Final Rule (64CFR68722) titled Stormwater Phase II that requires certain designated urban core areas, including Essex, to develop and implement a comprehensive stormwater management program. The Town has a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II stormwater permit (#3-9014), amended in 2012, that is intended to accomplish three goals: reduce the discharge of pollutants as much as possible; protect existing water quality that meets standards; and improve water quality in streams that do not meet the Total Maximum Demand Load.

To accomplish these goals, the Phase II permit requires a small stormwater management program of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) to contain six elements, to be implemented in concert:

- Public Education and Outreach
- Public Participation/Involvement
- Construction Site Runoff Control

- Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination
- Post-Construction Runoff Control
- Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping

The issuance of the new December 2012 NPDES Phase II MS4 permit required a revised [Town of Essex Stormwater Management Plan](#). Public Works staff prepared the document, which was approved by the Selectboard and accepted by the State. The document identifies Essex's strategy for meeting the permit requirements and is a component element of the Town Plan.

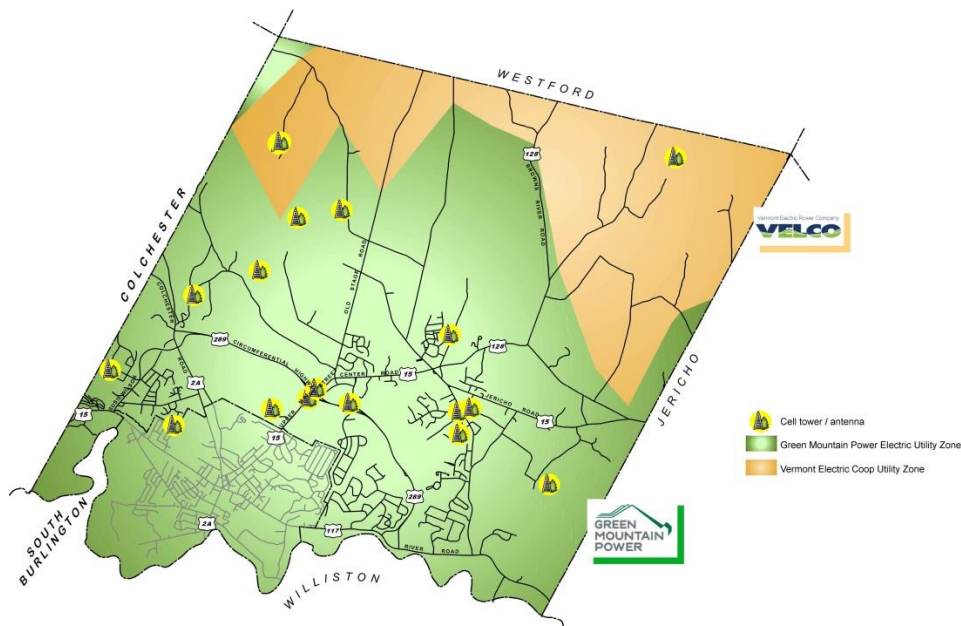
A [Joint Stormwater Coordinating Committee](#) established by the Selectboard and Village Trustees works with municipal staff to develop a plan for meeting the new permit requirements. The plan functions on a watershed basis, rather than by political boundaries. The committee has a goal of developing a community-wide stormwater permit and management program that encompasses the interests of the Town of Essex, including the Village. Work overseen by the committee has made substantial progress in all areas, with the status of the tasks available on the Town website.

Telecommunications Facilities

Essex is generally well served by modern telecommunications services and facilities. Cellular phone service is available throughout most of the town, and since 2011 providers have applied to the state to install several new cell towers. Residents can receive broadband internet access from Fairpoint Communications. Comcast provides cable television and broadband access to properties within the Village and adjacent neighborhoods. Cable service is not available in more rural parts of the community. Wireless internet access has been developed in many areas of the community.

The Vermont Public Service Board regulates telephone service providers and cable television providers, as well as electric power companies, pipeline gas companies, and some private water companies. As a result, the Town has little oversight regarding the siting of telecommunications facilities.

MAP: Utilities



3616

3617 Solid Waste

3618 The Town of Essex operated a municipal landfill off VT Route 2A until the landfill was closed in
3619 the early 1990s with EPA closure grant funds. The landfill remains on the list of active
3620 Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Information System
3621 (CERCLA) sites, also known as EPA Superfund sites. The landfill has a low rank priority relative to
3622 its potential to be a risk to the general public. The site, which operates under an Administrative
3623 Closure Order issued in November 1992, is tested twice a year and will be monitored for the
3624 foreseeable future.

3625 Essex is a member of the [Chittenden Solid Waste District](#), which handles disposal of the Town's
3626 solid waste. The former municipal landfill is now serving as a transfer station for CSWD, with drop-
3627 off and storage facilities.