

TOWN OF ESSEX
TOWN PLAN PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4385(a), the Essex Planning Commission has scheduled a public hearing for Thursday, November 16, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. at the municipal offices, 81 Main Street, Essex Junction, Vermont, or online via Zoom, using the following link: <https://www.essexvt.org/1043/Join-Zoom-Meeting-Essex-PC>, or by calling [1-888-788-0099](tel:1-888-788-0099) using the meeting ID: 923 7777 6158 # and Passcode: 426269.

The purpose of the hearing is to solicit public input on the 2024 *Essex Town Plan*.

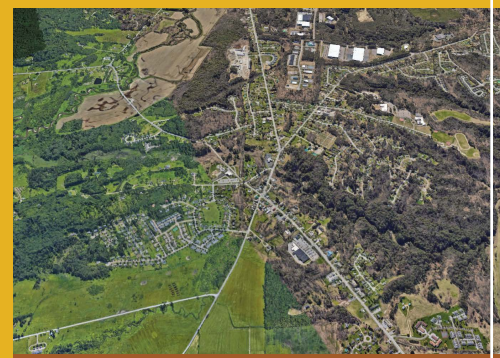
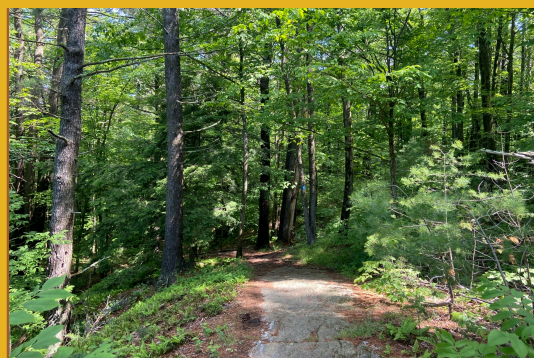
Significant items in the Plan include an Act 171 Forest Block and Habitat Connector element; incorporation of the new identity of Essex since the separation of the City of Essex Junction in 2022; and incorporation of the Essex Town Center (ETC) NEXT Master Plan and desired implementation steps, including the Town's desire to seek Village Center, New Town Center and Neighborhood Development Area designations from the state's Designation Program. The draft Town Plan includes an Introduction and four chapters: The Action Plan, Essex as a Community, How We Relate to the Land, and Serving the Community. The proposed Plan will affect all areas in Town.

Copies of the proposed Town Plan, as required by 24 V.S.A. § 4384(f) and 24 V.S.A. § 4444(b), may be obtained or examined at the Essex municipal offices at 81 Main Street, Essex Junction, VT, the Essex Free Library at 1 Browns River Road. The proposed Town Plan may be downloaded from the Town website at <https://www.essexvt.org/1140/Town-Plan-2024>.

For more information contact Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director at ksonnick@essex.org or 878-1343.

Dustin Bruso, Chair
Essex Planning Commission

2024 *Essex* Town Plan



Planning Commission Public Hearing Draft



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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**Special thanks to the Town Plan
Working Group for their efforts to
engage the community in the Town
Plan visioning process.**

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**Additional Special thanks to our UVM
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**Printing & Design and Layout
TBD**

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Purpose of a Town Plan	2
Planning History in Essex	2
Consistency with Adjoining Town Plans	4
Consistency with the ECOS Chittenden County Plan	5
Regulatory Use of the Town Plan (Act 250 and Act 248)	5
 Chapter 1: The Action Plan.....	 7
What You Will Read.....	7
Important Caveat	8
The Action Plan	8
 Chapter 2: Essex as a Community.....	 31
What You Will Read.....	31
Historic Background.....	32
Demographic Profile	34
Economic Development.....	37
Transportation.....	42
Education	50
Housing	54
Childcare.....	57
Energy.....	59
Flood Resilience	62
 Chapter 3: How We Relate to the Land.....	 66
What You Will Read.....	66
Natural Resources	67
Geology	68
Water Resources.....	71

Forest Lands	74
Agricultural Lands.....	77
Invasive Species.....	79
Aesthetic Resources.....	79
Historic, Archeological and Cultural Resources.....	82
Land Use and Development	83

Chapter 4: Serving the Community..... 94

What You Will Read.....	94
Local Government.....	94
Fiscal Overview.....	95
Municipal Office Building	98
Town Departments.....	99
Assessing Department.....	99
Community Development Department	99
Finance Department.....	99
Information Technology (IT) Department.....	99
Town Clerk’s Office	100
Parks and Recreation Department	100
Essex Free Library	108
Fire Department.....	109
Police Department.....	110
Essex Community Justice Center	110
Rescue Service	112
Public Works Department.....	113
Other Town Buildings	113
Sewage Disposal.....	114
Water Supply.....	115
Stormwater.....	116
Broadband and Telecommunication Services.....	117
Solid Waste.....	118

Maps

Map 1: Future Land Use	9 and 93
Map 2: Areas for Commercial Development.....	44
Map 3: Existing and Proposed Footpath Network.....	45
Map 4: Existing and Proposed Bicycle Network	45
Map 5: Transportation by Classification.....	47
Map 6: Community Facilities	59
Map 7: Flood and Fluvial Erosion Hazard Areas	63
Map 8: Slope	69
Map 9: Contours	69
Map 10: Soils.....	69
Map 11: Bedrock Geology.....	71
Map 12: Water Resources	72
Map 13 Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors	76
Map 14: Scenic Resources.....	80
Map 15: Historic Resources	82
Map 16: Planning Areas and Neighborhoods.....	85
Map 17: Official Zoning Map	86
Map 18: Parks and Recreation	102
Map 19: Horseback Network.....	106
Map 20: Cross Country Ski Network.....	106
Map 21: Snowmobile Network.....	106
Map 22: Water and Sewer Service Areas	115
Map 23: Utilities	118

Introduction

Welcome to the 2024 Essex Town Plan! Town plans express a shared community vision and inspire the regulations that set the guidelines for such things as future growth, development, and land preservation. In the following pages, you will read the vision the residents of Essex expressed and the means to make that vision a reality.

For over one hundred and sixty years, Essex has been the crossroads of Chittenden County. As a result, the town has had a bit of everything: from mills, railroads, and large-scale businesses to working farms, flourishing waterways, and undisturbed woodlands. Truly, our town saw phenomenal growth and deep change to the natural landscape over that time span, but one thing remained constant: the people of Essex have always wanted a community that's **better connected** and **more cohesive**¹.

A new challenge to Essex came in 2022, when the Village of Essex Junction separated to form the City of Essex Junction, representing a divergence of visions. Undeterred by this massive change, in early 2023 Essex residents and businesspeople came together to offer their thoughts on what the Town of Essex can be, and, true to form, ways in which to continue building a community that is **connected, diverse, inclusive, sustainable, and a joy to live in.**²

The overall themes noted above were expressed across a variety of categories and topics in different ways:

- For example, in the realm of Development, residents named **affordable housing** as a top priority. It is important to note, however, that residents wanted the development review process to consider the broader impacts of development on the community as a whole, as well as to pay attention to the aesthetics of development.
- In the realm of Economic Development specifically, the community emphasis was on creating and sustaining a **variety of local businesses**.
- With respect to Conservation and Climate and Agriculture, residents sought to preserve a **sustainable working landscape** that could provide both food security for all and economic diversity, as well as to preserve and promote biodiversity in those truly undeveloped parts of town. Both were seen as bulwarks against climate change, and residents expressed a preference for both regulations and so-called green incentives to bring this about. In addition, conservation was also seen as meaning the preservation of open space and scenic views.
- When it comes to Infrastructure, the generalized desire for connectivity was strongly expressed as a desire for infrastructure that supports **bicycle and pedestrian connectivity**. There were also concerns about lack of car connectivity and attendant travel times.
- Regarding Recreation, the common theme was **“opportunities,”** which can be taken to mean either an increase in the number of opportunities for recreation - such as more connections between trails in the town - or simply highlighting the current

¹ See “History of Essex” by Frank Bent, specifically the discussion in Chapter 10 about the 19th century Town Common!

² The raw data for the community’s response to visioning questions can be found here: [2024 Town Plan Visioning](#)

opportunities, such as Sand Hill Park or Saxon Hill. Whether that means more programs or more recreation space, townspeople want more opportunities to recreate in Essex.

This document elaborates upon this vision in greater specificity and contains recommended actions to make the vision a reality. Thank you for reading and thank you for making Essex such a special place to live!

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, development, and land preservation. A plan should clearly express how the community intends to accomplish priority 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 the [Vermont Planning and Development Act](#), Vermont Statutes Annotated (VSA) Title 24, Chapter 117. The state instituted the Planning and Development Act in 1968. Under 24 V.S.A. § 4382, Essex is required to include several elements in its municipal plan, containing, but not restrained to, a land use plan and maps, economic development element, a transportation plan, a housing element, an educational facilities plan (including childcare), an energy plan, a flood resilience plan, a statement of natural, scenic, and historic resource protection, important forest block and habitat connectors, and a utility and facility plan, plus accompanying policies and maps.

Town plans are implemented through zoning regulations and capital improvements, as well as through the initiatives of individual town departments, committees and commissions. Per state law, 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 programs and grants.

Planning History in Essex

The Town of Essex's planning history dates back to 1965, when the Town – including the Village of Essex Junction – hired professional planning consultants to create a plan for the community. Voters adopted the resulting comprehensive plan in 1967. Ensuing decades brought various amendments and updates. State statute requires municipalities with Town Plans to be updated every eight years.

Town plans often lead to specific planning projects. Essex and partnering communities have completed the following studies 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)
- [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) (2021)
- [Essex Declaration of Inclusion](#) (2023)

Sidebar: Declaration of Inclusion (Adopted June 26, 2023)

The Town of Essex Selectboard hereby declares our commitment to fostering an inclusive and welcoming place for all residents, visitors, employees, and more. We recognize that people have unique experiences, perspectives and identities that shape their individuality, and it is that diversity that contributes to the richness and strength of our community. We understand that our community is best served when all residents feel included and have a sense of belonging with equitable access to town services and facilities.

To that end, The Town of Essex Selectboard condemns racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, discrimination, religious intolerance, and homophobia, in all their forms. We welcome all people, regardless of ethnicity, color, religion, national origin, gender identity or sexual expression, age, or physical and/or mental capabilities, to participate in governance. We will make every effort to provide a safe and welcoming community for all.

The Selectboard understands that inclusion is not merely a statement but a continuous effort that requires active engagement and collaboration from all members of the community. We commit to regularly review our efforts and policies, engage in constructive feedback, and make adjustments as necessary to ensure that our community is welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all.

The 2024 Town Plan does not include major changes to the vision of the Town as expressed in previous Town Plans. However, with the separation of Essex Junction, our Essex Town Center is, well, an even more important center of focus. For that reason, this document incorporates and builds on the work done in the ETC Next plan, which foresaw the Essex Town Center as emphasizing the human experience: an area in town that contains a mix of uses (residential, commercial, municipal and historical alike) that can all be accessed on foot. Again, this in no way contradicts previous Town Plans, but the matter has taken on great importance in the past three years. See Chapter 3, “Planning Areas” for a description of the Essex Town Center area.

As for the rest of the Town Plan, revisions and changes from the 2016 plan involved statistical updates and a graphic redesign to make the document more readable and visually appealing. A Forest Block and Habitat Connector element was added, as required by statute. The Plan also places greater emphasis on equity and inclusion throughout, including how Essex undertakes daily decision making through municipal operations. The Plan addresses increasing community connection opportunities and building our unique Town of Essex identity. In addition, as Essex seeks to purposely build out the Essex Town Center, we will pursue state designations from the [state Designation Program](#) for this area. The Plan includes language in support of these designations. It should be noted that although the State designation programs are undergoing [legislative study](#) for prospective Statewide reforms, it is unknown if, when, or how the programs could be modified by the General Assembly. Until reforms are proposed, enacted or implemented by the State, the Town will continue to pursue the following current designations available to Vermont municipalities: a Village Center Designation for Historic Essex Center, a New Town Center Designation for the core of the Essex Town Center area, and a Neighborhood Development Area for the area in between. Stating the Town’s intent to seek these designations is important to ensure that our local policy interests are understood by Vermont officials for successful coordination between existing and any potential proposed designations – including recognition that the Town is pursuing the prerequisite planning for designation under the existing designation program and allowing the Town access to future state place-based incentives.

Consistency with adjoining Town Plans

Essex is bordered by Westford to the north, Colchester to the west, Jericho to the east, Essex Junction, South Burlington, Williston to the south, shares a corner point with Underhill to the northeast, and shares a corner with Milton to the northwest. 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. Starting from the northwestern corner, the Colchester side of the border has Agricultural zoning, and the Colchester Pond Natural Area and Essex has Conservation and Open Recreation with Indian Brook Park. These areas are compatible.

The next district abutting in Colchester is Residential One, which allows more residential density than Essex's Agricultural district in Essex, but both are primarily residential. Along Colchester Road (VT Route 2A), the Essex side of the border is zoned for industrial uses but contains a number of residential uses as well as the Champlain Solid Waste District transfer facility, a former landfill site in the northern portion and a mostly developed industrial area along and off of Kellogg Road. On the Colchester side, most of the area is zoned Village, residential uses and agriculture, with a small portion of industrial zoning along Colchester Road. Further development in the northern part of the industrial area in Essex is unlikely due to the presence of the landfill and steep slopes. The currently developed industrial area that abuts residential development does not currently generate conflict, however, the Towns should talk if Essex builds out this area any further.

Fort Ethan Allen spans both towns, and the uses in Fort Ethan Allen are compatible between the two towns.

Essex Junction – Planning areas along the border between Essex Junction and the Town of Essex are consistent. Most of the areas on each side of the border are residential. The towns each have Industrial zoning areas along VT Route 117 and Essex has a mixed-use district as well as a residential district, whereas the Essex Junction side of the border is a purely residential area. The uses in the Essex Mixed Use district are not incompatible with residential uses. Although the Town side of the border contains more business activities in the planning areas along Susie Wilson Road and Pinecrest Road areas than Essex Junction, development along the border is limited due to the presence of the Sunderland Brook and wetlands.

Jericho – In Jericho, the border shared with Essex is Jericho's Rural/Agriculture Residential district and along VT Route 15, Jericho's Village Center district begins at the border between the towns. This is compatible with the land use on the Essex side of the border are the Conservation and Agricultural districts. One portion of Essex's Industrial planning area extends to the Jericho border. The plans are compatible, as conflict is not expected since Jericho does not permit access to this area from Skunk Hollow Road.

Milton – Essex and Milton meet at the northwest corner of Essex. In Milton, the border with Essex is characterized by Agricultural/Low Density Residential, ten-acres zoning, which is compatible with the ten-acre Conservation District on the Essex side of the border.

South Burlington – The short border that Essex shares with South Burlington is Floodplain on both sides, although South Burlington's zoning is Mixed Industrial and Commercial. Both have regulations in place to protect the river and floodplain.

Underhill – Similar to Milton, Essex and Underhill meet at a corner, the northeast corner in this case. In Underhill, the border with Essex is characterized by Rural Residential district, with 3-acres zoning, which is compatible with the ten-acre Conservation district on the Essex side of the border.

Westford – In Westford, the border with Essex is characterized by Agricultural, Floodplain, Forestry, and Low-Density Residential zoning areas. Land in Essex contains Agricultural, Conservation, Floodplain, and Low-Density Residential zoning areas. Given the rural nature and similar zoning, the Town Plans are compatible with each other.

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 zoning areas. Williston has largely the same planning areas just past the floodplain, with no significant inconsistencies.

Consistency with the 2018 Chittenden County ECOS Plan

The 2018 [Chittenden County ECOS Plan](#) designates Essex as an area primed for growth in Metro, Suburban, and Enterprise planning areas – areas that have higher density, mixed use development. The Town’s emphasis on concentrating development in the Essex Town Center, Saxon Hill industrial area, and in 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.” Essex plans on obtaining state designations for Historic Essex Center and the Essex Town Center core in the near future. The current areas described by the ECOS plan as “metro” could be considered by the ECOS plan as “center,” if the Town receives state designations.

ECOS stands for Environment, Community, Opportunity, Sustainability. The 2024 Essex *Town Plan* is also consistent with the ECOS Plan’s goals for natural systems, social community, and economic infrastructure.

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 law sets goals and priorities for environmental and scenic protections and is responsible for helping Vermont retain its rural character, preserve the natural environment and support the state's environmental diversity - which foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place.”

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)).

The 2024 Essex Town Plan is a big - picture document that is not complete without the incorporation, by reference, of a number of other plans and studies. These plans and studies are recognized in the appropriate chapters.

For Act 250 jurisdictional purposes, the Town has zoning and subdivision bylaws and is therefore considered a “ten-acre town,” meaning jurisdiction for commercial projects is triggered only on more than 10 acres of land. Jurisdiction can also be triggered by a number of other factors, including subdivisions with 10 or more lots.

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 Utility Commission](#) (PUC) prior to site preparation of construction of electric generation and transmission facilities within Vermont. Approval from the PUC is called a Certificate of Public Good (CPG) pursuant to [30 V.S.A. § 248](#).

Utility facilities are statutorily exempt from local regulation. Therefore, unlike Act 250, the Vermont PUC does not consider zoning regulations when interpreting town plan provisions. Section 248 was passed in 2016, which established a set of energy planning standards for municipal and regional plans. Plans that meet these standards will be given an affirmative “determination of energy compliance” and will receive “substantial deference” in the PUC’s Section 248 siting process. Essex developed an Energy Plan with Essex Junction in 2019 with the hopes of obtaining “substantial deference,” but with the separation from Essex Junction, this plan does not contain specific enough data to meet this requirement. Essex intends on developing its own energy plan in the spring of 2024. It should be noted that Essex has been planning for energy conservation for many years. More information about Essex’s many energy initiatives and focus are contained in Chapter 2 of this Plan.

Chapter 1: The Action Plan

Introduction

If the overarching purpose of a town plan is to express and formulate the vision of a town, the Action Plan chapter is where the town lays out how to make that vision into a reality. In this chapter you will find Essex's priority **action items** for the next decade. In this way, everyone in the community - residents, landowners, developers, and town officials & staff - will have a clear understanding of both the town's goals and the *way the town will achieve those goals*. Subsequent chapters will provide the data and basis for both the goals and how they will be achieved.

As we saw in the introduction to this plan, the people of Essex have always wanted a community that's **better connected** and **more cohesive**. Following the separation of Essex Junction in 2022, Essex residents and businesspeople came together to offer their thoughts on what the Town of Essex can be, and, true to form, ways in which to continue building a community that is **connected, diverse, inclusive, sustainable**, and a **joy to live in**. This trend, as we saw, was further confirmed by what those residents and businesspeople offered as their high-priority items: **affordable housing**; a **variety of local businesses**; a **sustainable working landscape** that could preserve and promote **biodiversity**; and **bicycle and pedestrian connectivity** that could support greater **recreation and mobility opportunities for the whole community**.

What You Will Read:

This chapter will be divided into sections based on a common theme (for example, "Land Use and Development"). Each thematic section will begin with a general statement of **policy** that emerged from community input as described above. Following that statement of policy, you will see specific **goals** to which that statement of policy applies. Finally, you will read the **actions** that will be taken to achieve those specific goals. Actions are classified as either short-, medium-, or long-term. Finally, you will see which boards, commissions, committees, staff members, and/or community volunteers are best suited to take those actions.

State statute, 24 V.S.A. § 4382, 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.

The authority to prepare and implement the comprehensive plan is granted to the Town through the Vermont Planning and Development Act, Title 24 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated, Chapter 117. Under 24 V.S.A. § 4382, the Town is required to include several elements in its municipal plan, including, but not limited to, a land use plan and series of maps, a transportation plan, a utility and facility plan, a statement of natural, scenic, and historic resource protection, educational facilities plan, energy plan, housing element, economic development element, and a flood resilience plan, plus accompanying policies and maps.

The sections are as follows:

- (1) Land Use
- (2) Economic Development
- (3) Transportation
- (4) Education
- (5) Housing

- 270 (6) Energy
- 271 (7) Flood Resilience
- 272 (8) Resource Protection
- 273 (9) Forest Blocks and Connector Protection
- 274 (10) Local Government Services, including utilities and facilities

275 **Important Caveat**

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

279 Implementation may take several forms:

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

287 Town plans are meant to be aspirational, visionary documents. Not all of the proposed Action Items
288 may be accomplished within the next 8 years. Some of the Action Items may prove to be politically
289 or financially infeasible. When an Action Item identifies the Operating Budget, Capital Fund, or
290 bond authorization as a potential funding source, it does not mean the item has been vetted by the
291 Selectboard or approved by voters. In forwarding the 2024 *Town Plan* to the voters for approval, the
292 Selectboard did not necessarily agree to fund any of the Action Items.

293 Funding of planning initiatives with an asterisk (*) indicates that they are particularly well-suited for
294 application to the State of Vermont’s Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) program.

295 Funding for items under the Education section would come out of the school budget, not the
296 municipal budget.

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

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

301 **The Action Plan**

302 **1. Land Use and Development**

303 **General Policy**

304 **1:** Plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact
305 village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

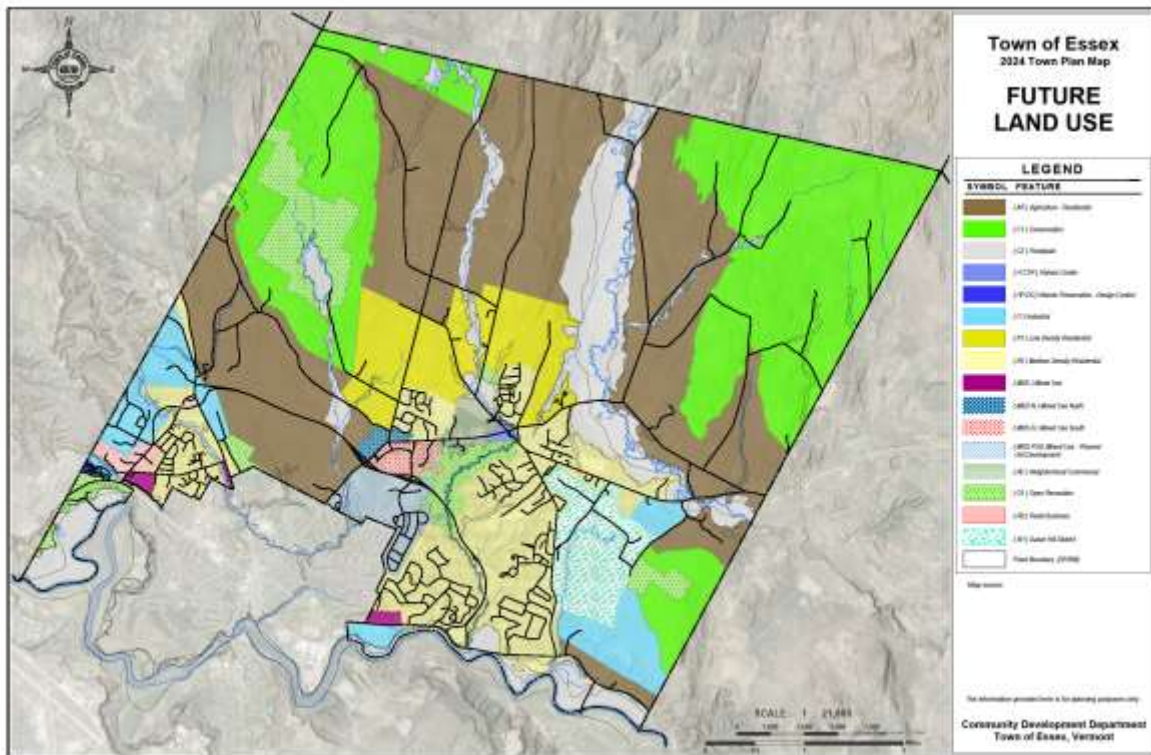
Specific Land Use Policies

- 1(S).1 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.
- 1(S).2 Strip development along roadsides, instead of compact development, shall be discouraged.

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 Essex 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 1: Future Land Use Map



Actions

Developed by the Planning Commission and the Community Development Department

- Action 1.1:** Implement the 2021 Essex Town Center (ETC) NEXT Master Plan.
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department, Planning Commission

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants*

Time frame: Short term to medium term

- **Action 1.2:** Seek state designations for the Essex Town Center area, including Historic Essex Center (Village Center), the Essex Town Center core (New Town Center), and the area in between (Neighborhood Development Area).

Lead responsibility: Community Development Department, Planning Commission

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants*

Time frame: Short term to medium term

- **Action 1.3:** Relocate the Town Offices and other municipal facilities to the Essex Town Center

Lead responsibility: Town staff

Potential funding: Operating Budget, bond authorization

Time frame: Medium term to long term

2. Economic Development

General Policy

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

Specific Economic Development Policies:

- 2(S).1:** Infill development within existing industrial and commercial zoning districts shall be promoted.
- 2(S).2:** Transportation system-related decisions shall include consideration of how those decisions may support or hinder economic development goals.
- 2(S).3:** To improve the community's attractiveness to existing and prospective businesses, elements such as affordable housing and childcare services shall be supported.
- 2(S).4:** An entrepreneurial environment in Essex shall be fostered by encouraging co-working spaces, maker spaces, and partnerships with neighboring communities.

Goals

- 2a.** Develop a marketing identity for Essex that reflects our values, history, aspirations and sense of place.
- 2b.** Maintain Essex's rural areas while increasing and diversifying economic development, emphasizing start-ups, agriculture, home businesses and retail.
- 2c.** Foster a culture of innovation, collaboration, sustainable growth, and job creation.
- 2d.** Maintain and improve roads, bridges, trails, sewer, water lines, etc. but be mindful of infrastructure carrying capacity and development demands upon it.
- 2e.** Create policies and programs that incentivize the provision of childcare services and affordable housing and revise those that increase demand for these.

Actions

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

- **Action 2.1:** Update the 2010 [Economic Development Vision and Plan](#) with a stronger emphasis on the Essex Economy utilizing the EDC business inventory.
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission, Community Development Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 2.2:** Commit to and follow the plan and action items for the new Town Center in the [ETC Next Plan](#).
Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Zoning Board (Development Review Board)
Potential funding: N/A
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 2.3:** Create a marketing brand for the Town of Essex and logo that expresses that brand. It should reflect what we want outsiders to think of when they think of Essex.
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission, Selectboard
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 2.4:** Once action 2.3 is complete, update the two existing large Welcome to Essex signs, and add at least three more, on main thoroughfares leading into Essex.
Lead responsibility: **Public Works Department**, Economic Development Commission
Funding: Operating budget
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 2.5:** Collaborate with organizations that inform local current and potential businesses about vacant spaces to help with on-boarding.
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 2.6:** Assess opportunity for an incubator or think tank space for entrepreneurs, innovators, and small businesses. Determine feasibility of business case, funding sources, and location for program within Essex.
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission, Planning Commission
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants*
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 2.7:** Learn about and consider opportunities to collaborate with Milton, Williston, Winooski, and Colchester Economic Development Commissions and Committees.
Lead responsibility: Economic Development Commission
Potential funding: N/A
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 2.9:** Develop a plan for the Tree Farm Recreational Facility in partnership with Essex Junction to protect and preserve it as an economic driver.

Lead Responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department

Potential Funding: N/A

Time Frame: Medium term

- **Action 2.10:** Develop a plan to address industrial growth vs. recreation growth at Saxon Hill and how to sustainably manage both for the future.

Lead Responsibility: Economic Development Commission, Planning Commission

Potential Funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Medium term

- **Action 2.11:** Develop a plan for Saxon Hill recreation trails in consultation with current partners (Fellowship of the Wheel, EWSD, Allenbrook Development) to protect and expand trails. The plan shall include creating a regional facility, related business to attract users from the county and statewide and increase revenue to the town.

Lead Responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails Committee, Planning Commission

Potential Funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Short term

- **Action 2.12:** Investigate alternatives to solve problems resulting from the abandonment of a commercial transportation outlet from Saxon Hill Industrial Park to 289.

Lead Responsibility: Planning Commission, Community Development Department, Public Works Department

Potential Funding: Operating Budget, VTrans

Time Frame: Medium term

- **Action 2.13:** Create a development plan in coordination with Colchester for Fort Ethan Allen that:

- assesses the historic and commercial elements that are there;
- addresses traffic patterns, improve flow and parking;
- includes recommendations for beautification; and
- enhances and advertises the historical aspects to increase tourism and Parks and Recreation revenue.

Lead Responsibility: Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails Committee, Essex Historical Society, Public Works Department

Potential Funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Medium term

- **Action 2.14:** Define a new **agritourism** businesses use in zoning regulations and allocate that use to existing zoning districts where appropriate.

Lead Responsibility: Economic Development Commission, Select Board, Finance Department

Potential Funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Long term

- **Action 2.15** Review current tax incentive programs and consider creating or eliminating, increasing or reducing programs for industry, agriculture, affordable housing and childcare.

Lead Responsibility: Planning Commission, Community Development Department

Potential Funding: N/A

Time Frame: Short term

- **Action 2.16:** Assess and report the potential economic impact of the Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act on the Essex economy.

Lead Responsibility: Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, Community Development Department

Potential Funding: Operating Budget

Time Frame: Long term

- **Action 2.18:** Learn about advanced manufacturing and technology education at the Essex Center for Technology (CTE) and how it supports local businesses.

Lead Responsibility: Economic Development Commission

Potential Funding: N/A

Time Frame: Medium term

3. Transportation

General Policies

3: The Town of Essex strives to provide a safe, convenient, and well-maintained transportation system that equitably serves the mobility needs of all user groups, while also protecting the environment, supporting the economy, and engaging the community by:

- 1) Basing decisions on sound transportation planning & engineering methods
- 2) Allocating adequate resources to maintenance and operations activities
- 3) Actively seeking opportunities for system improvements to address community concerns and evolving best practices.

Specific Transportation Policies

3(S).1: Multiple modes of transportation that connect residents to schools, workplaces, shopping centers and recreational areas shall be supported.

3(S).2: Existing transportation systems shall be appropriately maintained and managed.

3(S).3: Combined use of the Green Mountain Transit (GMT) network, the Senior Van, school buses, and other transit services shall be supported as part of an accessible and integrated transportation system.

Goals

3a. Develop and implement a Safe System Approach to more effectively address traffic safety issues.

3b. Evaluate ways to preserve and improve the condition, efficiency, and reliability of the transportation system.

3c Transition from an auto-centric focus to a multi-modal focus that increases attention and investment in walking, biking, and transit use.

- 3d. Investigate how new transportation investments could strengthen the area's economic vitality.
- 3e. Determine feasible and effective ways to address climate protection goals affected by transportation.
- 3f. Collaborate with the community to address traffic impacts on topics such as livability, health, equity, and quality of life.

Actions

Developed by the Public Works Department

- **Action 3.1:** Design and construct a new signalized intersection at Sand Hill Road and VT Route 15.
Lead responsibility: VTRANS, Public Works Department, Community Development Department
Potential funding: VTRANS and federal funds
Time Frame: Medium term
- **Action 3.2:** Design and construct an updated signalized intersection at Susie Wilson Road and VT Route 15.
Lead responsibility: VTRANS, Public Works Department, Community Development Department
Potential funding: VTRANS and federal funds
Time Frame: Medium term to long term
- **Action 3.3:** Develop new Public Works Specifications.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, consulting engineers
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 3.4:** Develop new Transportation and Mobility Plan.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, Community Development Department, consulting engineers
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 3.5:** Develop a new Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, Community Development, Conservation and Trails Committee, consulting engineers, partner with CCRPC
Potential funding: Operating Budget, CCRPC UPWP
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 3.6:** Develop Highway Transportation Management Plan.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short term

4. Housing

General Policy

4. 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.

Specific Housing Policies

4(S).13: The provision of new housing in the community shall be balanced with impacts on the environment and on public facilities and services.

4(S).14: New housing shall be directed to areas identified as suitable for growth, specifically the Essex Town Center and the Susie Wilson Road corridor.

4(S).15: The housing stock shall serve residents of all income levels, ages, and physical and/or mental capabilities.

Goals

4a. There is an ample supply of affordable housing to meet the needs of low and moderate income residents such that housing costs are no more than 30% of household income.

4b. Housing meets the needs of all residents, including in size and accessibility features, and is located in proximity to basic needs such as jobs, schools, health care, and cultural experiences and is accessible by walking, biking, or public transportation.

4c. Housing is of sufficient quality and maintained to ensure the health, safety, and enjoyment of its residents.

4d. All residents, regardless of race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, national origin, pregnancy, disability, or status of citizenship, family, and military service, have access to housing on a non-discriminatory basis.

Actions

Developed by the Housing Commission and the Community Development Department

- **Action 4.1:** Conduct a comprehensive review of housing and demographic data and prepare a “gaps analysis” to identify and quantify the types of housing needed to address specific gaps in the Town’s housing infrastructure.

Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Economic Development Commission, Community Development Department

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Short term

- **Action 4.2:** Explore housing resource development options, including the potential for creating a Housing Trust Fund, to provide financial and other support targeted to address gaps in the housing system.

Lead responsibility: Housing Commission, Community Development Department, Selectboard

Potential funding: N./A

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 4.3:** Engage proactively with housing developers, including potentially recruiting a developer to serve as a member of the Housing Commission.
Lead responsibility: Housing Commission, Community Development Department
Potential funding: N/A
Time frame: Short term to medium term

5. Energy

General Policy

5: Energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy generation shall be taken into consideration during development review and the creation of Town policies and initiatives.

Goal

- 5a.** Actions are taken, and policy is developed in accordance with the State of Vermont 2022 Comprehensive Energy Plan, or as amended, in the commercial, residential and transportation sectors.

Actions

Developed by the Energy Committee

- **Action 5.1:** Appoint and fund an Energy Coordinator position pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 1131 to develop energy implementation plans, coordinate efforts with other government agencies, and encourage residential and commercial energy conservation. The Energy Coordinator shall work in conjunction with the Essex Energy Committee, the Facilities Manager, the Community Development Office, and the Planning Commission to advance the interests of energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission reductions.
Lead responsibility: Selectboard
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Medium term to long term
- **Action 5.2:** Develop an Enhanced Energy Plan for incorporation into the Town Plan
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department, Energy Committee, CCRPC
Potential funding: CCRPC workplan
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 5.3:** Continue to explore energy efficiency, renewable energy, energy storage, and low emission transportation and power equipment options for all Town property, vehicles and facilities. Findings and recommendations should be based on audits of all Town property, vehicles, and facilities.
Lead responsibility: Selectboard, Energy Committee, Finance Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 5.4:** Revise the zoning regulations to incentivize and/or require residential and commercial energy standards to meet or exceed Vermont energy building codes, and to implement effective means of enforcement when codes are not met.

Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Community Development Department, Energy Committee and other partners

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 5.5:** Promote low-emission renewable energy development by evaluating Town- and developer-owned properties for potential energy generation facilities.

Lead responsibility: Energy Committee and other partners

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 5.6:** Develop and implement policies to ensure EV charging is universally available.

Lead responsibility: Energy Committee, Selectboard, Planning Commission

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Short term

- **Action 5.7:** Investigate community vehicle-share programs and supportive regulations.

Lead responsibility: Energy Committee, Selectboard, Planning Commission

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Short term

- **Action 5.8:** Require that all new commercial buildings produce at least 50% of their own projected electrical usage.

Lead responsibility: Planning Commission and Energy Committee

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Short term to medium term

- **Action 5.9:** Adopt standards to ensure tree preservation, tree replanting, and other conservation-based mitigation strategies to combat the effects of greenhouse gasses.

Lead responsibility: Conservation and Trails Committee and Energy Committee

Potential funding: Grants*

Time frame: Short term to medium term

- **Action 5.10:** Promote community solar net metering and sites throughout the Town for potential future use.

Lead responsibility: Selectboard, Energy Committee

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants

Time frame: Long term

- **Action 5.11:** Propose amendments to Energy Committee charter to encompass greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

Lead responsibility: Selectboard, Energy Committee

Potential funding: N/A

Time frame: Short term

6. Flood Resilience

General Policy

6. Land shall be conserved, and development avoided, in particularly vulnerable areas such as floodplains, river corridors, and unstable slopes.

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 by protecting and restoring vulnerable areas.
- 6c. Flood emergency preparedness and response is achieved.

Actions

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

- **Action 6.1:** Construct flow restoration improvements within the watersheds of Indian Brook and Sunderland Brook, which have impaired water quality.
Lead responsibility: Town Public Works Director/Town Engineer, Stormwater Coordinator
Potential funding: Capital Fund, state and federal grants
Time Frame: Short term
- **Action 6.2:** 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 6.3:** Osgood Hill Box Culvert Project, replacement of three flood hazard culverts on Osgood Hill Road and Catella Road, with box culverts
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department
Potential funding: FEMA Mitigation grant, VTTrans and federal funds
Time Frame: Medium term
- **Action 6.4:** Evaluate standards in planning and zoning documents for steep slopes, wetlands, and highly erodible areas.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, Community Development Department, Planning Commission, Conservation and Trails Committee
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Short to Medium term
- **Action 6.5:** Stabilize stream banks, cultivate riparian buffers, and protect river corridors and roadside ditches in critical fluvial areas. Consider remote flood control in the next upgrade

and repair of Indian Brook Dam to allow lowering levels in preparation for absorbing an oncoming rain event.

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, Conservation and Trails Committee

Potential funding: Operating Budget, Capital Fund, grants

Time frame: Short term to long term

- **Action 6.6:** Develop Forest Block and Habitat connector standards at roadways to provide adequate and safe connectors for wildlife while providing adequate stream/river flow.

Lead responsibility: Planning Commission, Community Development Department, Public Works Department, Conservation and Trails Committee

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants*

Time frame: Short term

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

General Policy

7. 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.

Specific Natural Resources Policies

- 7(S).1** While increasing access to and public enjoyment of the Town's natural resources, the rights and concerns of private property owners shall be respected.

Specific Scenic Resources Policies

- 7(S).2:** The Town supports the responsible development of commercial scale (500KW and greater) ground-mounted solar electric generation facilities in only the commercial/industrial zoned areas of Town. Such facilities, as well as wind electric generation facilities, shall not be located outside of commercial/industrial zoning districts and 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 *Town Plan* by reference.

Specific Cultural Policies:

- 7(S).3:** A sense of community shall be fortified by the expansion of arts and other cultural opportunities.
- 7(S).4:** The adaptive reuse of historic structures shall be encouraged.

Goal

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

Actions

Developed by the Conservation and Trails Committee and the Community Development Department

- **Action 7.1:** Deploy the Conservation and Reserve Fund to expand trail networks, preserve resources with high-value ecological significance, and as otherwise allowed.
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails Committee
Potential funding: Operating Budget, donations, special fund
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 7.2:** Expand invasive species management plan, including mapping infestations and regular workshops for residents.
Lead responsibility: Conservation and Trails Committee
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term
- **Action 7.3:** Maintain Street Tree Survey
Lead responsibility: Conservation and Trails Committee
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 7.4:** Conduct public outreach and education to encourage tree planting where ash trees are lost and cannot be replaced in the Town Right-of-Way.
Lead responsibility: Conservation and Trails Committee
Potential funding: Volunteers
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 7.5:** Continue to improve stormwater quality in accordance with 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:** Assess, monitor, and address trails that are experiencing erosion due to stormwater runoff and unstable stream banks.
Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails Committee
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants, bond authorization
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 7.7:** Consider adding additional locations to the Scenic Resource Overlay District in the Zoning Regulations
Lead responsibility: Planning Commission and Community Development Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants*
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 7.8:** Explore developing a tree nursery.

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department, Parks and Recreation Department,
Conservation and Trails Committee
Potential funding: Branch Out Burlington
Time frame: Medium term

8. Forestry & Agriculture

General Policy

8: To support large contiguous Forest Blocks, Habitat Connectors, and agricultural lands shall be protected from fragmentation by development and subdivisions.

Goal

8a. Important agricultural, Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors are protected and improved.

Actions

Developed by the Conservation and Trails Committee and the Community Development Department

- **Action 8.1:** Develop a forest management plan for Mathieu Town Forest. Institute a control and review process to ensure that all existing forest management plans are being implemented and followed.
Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, Community Development Department
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants
Time frame: Short term to medium term
- **Action 8.2:** Undertake a review of existing State and Local land conservation and tax relief programs with the objective of consolidating, streamlining, and promoting these programs.
Lead responsibility: Assessing Department, Selectboard
Potential funding: N/A
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 8.3:** Develop protection measures for identified Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors. In accordance with Act 171 guidance, include consideration of rerouting and/or expanding the proposed recreational trail network to make use of, and to bolster, the network of Habitat Connectors.
Lead responsibility: Community Development Department, Planning Commission, Conservation and Trail Committee
Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants*
Time frame: Short term

9. Local Government Services

General Policy

9: Day-to-day administrative tasks shall be carried out with attention to providing excellent customer service that is equitable, inclusive and welcoming for the Town's residents, businesses and visitors.

Goals

- 9a. A quality level of municipal services and facilities is maintained without levying an undue tax burden.
- 9b. Good working relationships are maintained between municipal staff, elected and appointed officials, and residents and business owners.
- 9c. Technology is used, when practicable, to save money and time, as well as to improve the flow of communication.

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
Lead responsibility: Town Clerk's Office
Funding: Records Preservation Funds
Time Frame: Long term
- **Action 9.3:** Scan and Index Property Transfer Tax Returns
Lead responsibility: Town Clerk's Office
Funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Long term
- **Action 9.4:** Index old court attachment documents
Lead responsibility: Town Clerk's Office
Funding: Operating Budget
Time Frame: Long Term

Essex Free Library

Actions

Developed by the Town Librarian and Library Trustees

- **Action 9.5:** Evolve and grow to meet the ever-changing needs and interests of the community by offering diverse collections, resources, programs, and space for community members of all ages.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 9.6:** Develop and strengthen partnerships with local organizations, schools, and other Town departments.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 9.7:** Increase staffing to enhance services and to ensure that the Library can more easily maintain its current hours without risking the safety of the staff and public.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Short term to medium term
- **Action 9.8:** Secure or create additional library space for the community to meet for library programs, gatherings, and meetings. Find designated spaces for events, quiet study areas, storage, technology, and a growing physical library collection.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term
- **Action 9.9:** Improve accessibility of the Library by providing a main entrance that all community members can use with ease. Improve safety around the perimeter of the current building, particularly along the accessible walkway and entrance.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term to long term
- **Action 9.10:** Increase funding for both physical and digital collection items to better serve the size of the community and to reach the diverse needs and requests of library patrons.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 9.11:** Increase the library programs budget to provide the community with more workshops, classes, presentations, and other enriching events for all ages, and to meet the growing needs and interests of the community.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Ongoing

- **Action 9.12:** Strengthen outreach efforts with schools, preschools, daycares, and other local organizations and institutions.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 9.13:** Establish an outreach program and book delivery service to provide books and library materials to those who have limitations that may prevent them from accessing the Library.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget, Volunteers
Time frame: Short term to medium term
- **Action 9.14:** Continue to strengthen the Library's digital resource collection to support patron demand.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Ongoing
- **Action 9.15:** Consider designating a space for the Library in the new proposed municipal building. Work with the Town to ensure that the needs of the Library and library community are met in the new space.
Lead responsibility: Essex Free Library
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Medium term to long term

Police

Actions

Developed by the Police Department

- **Action 9.16:** Increase resources to address crime, mental health crisis and the increase in traffic volume.
Lead responsibility: Police Chief
Potential funding: Operating Budget
Time frame: Long term
- **Action 9.17:** Plan for and fund replacement of critical communications infrastructure.
Lead responsibility: Police Chief
Potential funding: Operating Budget, Capital Fund
Time frame: Long term
- **Action 9.18:** Develop and implement plans to increase current and future recruitment of a diverse group of officers.
Lead responsibility: Police Chief
Potential funding: Operating Budget

- 987 **Time frame:** Long term
- 988
- 989 • **Action 9.19:** Continue to partner with the community in an effort to inform while receiving
- 990 feedback resulting in increased professionalism and effectiveness of the department.
- 991 **Lead responsibility:** Police Chief
- 992 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
- 993 **Time frame:** Long term
- 994
- 995 • **Action 9.20:** Develop recommendations on how to best address traffic safety issues and
- 996 concerns in the community, which may include the creation of a Traffic Safety Work Group.
- 997 **Lead responsibility:** Police Chief, Public Works, Community Development
- 998 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
- 999 **Time frame:** Short term

1000

1001 **Fire**

1002 **Actions**

1003 *Developed by the Fire Department*

1004

- 1005 • **Action 9.21:** Increase roster of paid on-call firefighters.
- 1006 **Lead responsibility:** Fire Chief
- 1007 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
- 1008 **Time frame:** Ongoing
- 1009
- 1010 • **Action 9.22:** Increase paid staff for weekday coverage.
- 1011 **Lead responsibility:** Fire Chief
- 1012 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
- 1013 **Time frame:** Short term
- 1014
- 1015 • **Action 9.23:** Implement Impact Fees for Fire Service Costs.
- 1016 **Lead responsibility:** Fire Department
- 1017 **Potential funding:** Capital Budget
- 1018 **Time frame:** Medium term
- 1019
- 1020 • **Action 9.24:** Add aerial truck to fleet to meet needs of the community.
- 1021 **Lead responsibility:** Fire Department
- 1022 **Potential funding:** Capital Budget
- 1023 **Time frame:** Long term
- 1024
- 1025 • **Action 9.25:** Replace two service vehicles per rotation schedule.
- 1026 **Lead responsibility:** Fire Chief
- 1027 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
- 1028 **Time frame:** Short term
- 1029

- 1030 • **Action 9.26:** Relocate Fire Station with new Facility that is to current code standards and
1031 provide living quarters for staff to fit the needs of the community for 50 -75 years in the
1032 future.
1033 **Lead responsibility:** Fire Department
1034 **Potential funding:** Bond authorization
1035 **Time frame:** Medium term
1036

1037 **Community Development Department**

1038 **Actions**

1039 *Developed by the Community Development Department*
1040

- 1041 • **Action 9.27:** Create a Development Review Board.
1042 **Lead responsibility:** Selectboard, Community Development Department, Planning
1043 Commission, Zoning Board
1044 **Potential funding:** N/A
1045 **Time frame:** Short term
1046
- 1047 • **Action 9.28** Review Farm and Open Lands Contracts to consider any changes or
1048 improvements.
1049 **Lead responsibility:** Assessing Department, Community Development Department,
1050 Manager's Department
1051 **Potential funding:** N/A
1052 **Time frame:** Medium term to long term
1053
- 1054 • **Action 9.29:** Finish digitizing permits/approvals.
1055 **Lead responsibility:** Community Development Department
1056 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
1057 **Time frame:** Long term
1058
- 1059 • **Action 9.30:** Update Zoning and Subdivision Regulations, including creation of unified
1060 bylaws, updated PUD standards, incorporate ETC NEXT' standards and Forest Block and
1061 Habitat Connector protection standards.
1062 **Lead responsibility:** Community Development Department, Planning Commission,
1063 Conservation and Trails Committee.
1064 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, grants*
1065 **Time frame:** Short term
1066
- 1067 • **Action 9.31:** Investigate the hiring of a second planner related to the transition to a
1068 Development Review Board.
1069 **Lead responsibility:** Community Development Department, Manager's Department
1070 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
1071 **Time frame:** Medium term
1072
- 1073 • **Action 9.32:** Consider increasing Administrative Assistant hours to full time.
1074 **Lead responsibility:** Community Development Department, Manager's Department

1075 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
1076 **Time frame:** Short term

1077 **Parks & Recreation**

1078 **Actions**

1079 *Developed by the Parks and Recreation Department and the Conservation and Trails Committee*
1080

- 1081 • **Action 9.33:** Improve trail maintenance on all town trails especially Indian Brook and
1082 Mathieu Town Forests.
1083 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation Trails Committee
1084 and other partners
1085 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, Capital Fund
1086 **Time frame:** Ongoing
1087
- 1088 • **Action 9.34:** Update trail maps and descriptions and make them available on the Town
1089 website. Investigate adding town trails to commonly used website trail applications.
1090 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails
1091 Committee and other partners
1092 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, Capital Fund
1093 **Time frame:** Short term
1094
- 1095 • **Action 9.35:** Complete a Carrying Capacity Study for Indian Brook Reservoir.
1096 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, University of Vermont
1097 **Potential funding:** Capital Fund
1098 **Time frame:** Short term
1099
- 1100 • **Action 9.36:** Develop adult athletic leagues/pick-up games in the seasonal program line-up.
1101 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, University of Vermont
1102 **Potential funding:** Capital Fund
1103 **Time frame:** Short term
1104
- 1105 • **Action 9.37:** Explore expanding Sand Hill Park as a Recreation Hub, with a new pool, office
1106 and program complex.
1107 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department
1108 **Potential funding:** Capital Fund
1109 **Time frame:** Long term
1110
- 1111 • **Action 9.38:** Conduct a Community/Aquatics Center Feasibility Study
1112 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, consultant
1113 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget, Capital Fund
1114 **Time frame:** Medium term
1115
- 1116 • **Action 9.39:** Discuss new options for Pioneer Park with the nearby neighborhoods.
1117 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails
1118 Committee
1119 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget

- 1120 **Time frame:** Medium term
1121
- 1122 • **Action 9.40:** Update Recreation Needs Assessment
1123 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department
1124 **Potential funding:** Capital Fund
1125 **Time frame:** Short term
1126
- 1127 • **Action 9.41:** Develop and improve trails off Freeman Woods Road and Town owned land
1128 west of VT Route 289, including the completion of the trail network between Mathieu Town
1129 Forest and Forestdale.
1130 **Lead responsibility:** Conservation and Trails Committee and other partners
1131 **Potential funding:** Volunteers
1132 **Time frame:** Medium term
1133
- 1134 • **Action 9.42:** Document and enhance trails at Saxon Hill and EWSD parcel.
1135 **Lead responsibility:** Conservation and Trails Committee and other partners
1136 **Potential funding:** Volunteers
1137 **Time frame:** Medium term
1138
- 1139 • **Action 9.43:** Collaborate with nearby community trails committees; explore the creation of a
1140 Chittenden County Trails Committee to meet quarterly.
1141 **Lead responsibility:** Conservation and Trails Committee and other partners
1142 **Potential funding:** Volunteers
1143 **Time frame:** Short term
1144
- 1145 • **Action 9.44:** Complete plans for developing recreational opportunities for Saxon Hill Park.
1146 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails
1147 Committee
1148 **Potential funding:** Volunteers
1149 **Time frame:** Short term
1150
- 1151 • **Action 9.44:** Research and develop a multi-use path along and across VT289.
1152 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails
1153 Committee
1154 **Potential funding:** Volunteers
1155 **Time frame:** Long term
1156
- 1157 • **Action 9.45:** Create a public non-motorized boat access to the Winooski River along 117.
1158 **Lead responsibility:** Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails
1159 Committee, Public Works Department
1160 **Potential funding:** Winooski Valley Park District, Friends of the Winooski
1161 **Time frame:** Short term
1162
- 1163 • **Action 9.46:** Identify potential locations for public access to scenic views.
1164 **Lead responsibility:** Community Development Department
1165 **Potential funding:** N/A

Time frame: Medium term

- **Action 9.47:** Add a Trails Coordinator to the department staff to focus on grants, proposals, and maintenance plans on town-owned forests and trail networks.

Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails Committee

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Ongoing

- **Action 9.48:** Investigate ways to improve the accessibility of Town parks and trails for people with disabilities.

Lead responsibility: Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation and Trails Committee, Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sports

Potential funding: Operating Budget, grants, volunteers

Time frame: Short term

Municipal Utilities

Sewage Disposal and Water Supply

Actions

Developed by the Public Works Department

- **Action 9.49:** Use the water flow and pressure model to assess and prioritize capital improvements and identify impacts from large development and/or usage.

Lead responsibility: Public Works Director

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Ongoing

- **Action 9.50:** Complete system-wide installation of new water meters.

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Short term to medium term

- **Action 9.51:** Prepare final design plans and specifications and fund water line improvements in the High Service area - VT-117 to VT-15 east of Essex Junction.

- **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Director/ Town Engineer, consultants

Potential funding: Operating Budget

Time frame: Medium term to long term

- **Action 9.52:** Monitor wastewater flows to the Lang Farm Pump Station for potential future capacity increase for the Essex Town Center area.

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department

Potential Funding: Wastewater Funds/System Initiation fees

Time frame: Short term to Medium term

- 1211 • **Action 9.53:** Fort Ethan Allen Gravity Sewer Rehabilitation, slip line all gravity
1212 infrastructure.
1213 **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Department
1214 **Potential funding:** SRF Fund, Capital Fund, Operating Budget
1215 **Time Frame:** Medium term to long term
1216
- 1217 • **Action 9.54:** Fort Lead Service Line Inventory and Replacement.
1218 **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Department
1219 **Potential funding:** SRF Fund, Operating Budget
1220 **Time Frame:** Short term
1221
- 1222 • **Action 9.55:** Fort Ethan Allen Water System Upgrade, complete replacement of the water
1223 distribution system, including all services.
1224 **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Department
1225 **Potential funding:** SRF Fund, Capital Fund
1226 **Time Frame:** Medium term to long term
1227
- 1228 • **Action 9.56:** Develop new stormwater ordinance.
1229 **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Department
1230 **Potential funding:** Operating Budget
1231 **Time Frame:** Short term
1232

1233 Stormwater

1234 Actions

1235 *Developed by the Public Works Department*
1236

- 1237 • **Action 9.57:** Implement Impaired Streams Flow Restoration Plans involving construction of
1238 new stormwater treatment facilities.
1239 **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Department, Selectboard
1240 **Potential funding:** Capital Fund, bond authorization
1241 **Time frame:** Short term
1242
- 1243 • **Action 9.58:** Town of Essex Storm Sewer Rehabilitation, televising and slip lining older
1244 portions of the Town Storm collection system.
1245 **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Department
1246 **Potential funding:** Capital Fund
1247 **Time Frame:** Medium term to long term
1248
- 1249 • **Action 9.59:** Construct Phosphorus Control Plan improvements within the Malletts Bay and
1250 Main Lake Segments, which have impaired water quality.
1251 **Lead responsibility:** Public Works Department
1252 **Potential funding:** VTrans, DEC, Capital Fund
1253 **Time Frame:** Medium term to long term
1254
- 1255 • **Action 9.60:** Grants-in-Aid project identification for gravel road and outlet upgrades and
1256 management of construction

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department

Potential funding: VTrans, Capital Fund

Time Frame: Short term

- **Action 9.61:** Grants-in-Aid project identification for gravel road and outlet upgrades and management of construction

Lead responsibility: Public Works Department

Potential funding: VTrans, Capital Fund

Time Frame: Short term

10. Education

General Policy

10: When those at the Essex Westford School District (EWSD) deepen their commitment to one other and to continuous growth for everyone, then the practices create equitable, authentic, inclusive learning experiences that benefit all students.

Goals

10a. Each student is an engaged and inspired learner.

10b. Each student is challenged by a rigorous, well-balanced, proficiency-based curriculum.

10c. Each student has access to personalized learning and opportunities to pursue individual interests and curiosities.

10d. Each student is prepared for success in college or further study and for employment in a fulfilling career.

10e. Each student cares about and has the knowledge to care for their own health, wellness, and maintains balance.

10f. Everyone belongs, has a role, contributes, feels safe, demonstrates gratitude, and is respected.

10g. Each individual is recognized and accepted for his/her uniqueness and beliefs, there is value in every voice, and everyone communicates honestly and respectfully.

10h. Each student is supported by highly qualified and caring educational leaders, educators, and staff. Growth-mindset is fostered throughout the system.

10i. Student voices are valued, and aspirations are cultivated.

10j. Each member is a contributing global citizen who respects the diversity, seeks to understand different perspectives, acknowledges and values differences.

Actions

Developed by the Essex Westford School District

- **Action 10.1:** Students experience a culture where independence, responsibility, and accountability is fostered and respected.

Lead responsibility: Principal, Superintendent

Potential funding: School Operating Budget

Time frame: Ongoing

- **Action 10.2:** Students are physically active and has access to healthy food choices.

1301 **Lead responsibility:** Principal, Superintendent, Child nutritional staff
1302 **Potential funding:** School Operating Budget
1303 **Time frame:** Ongoing
1304
1305 • **Action 10.3:** Students will graduate with the skills to be successful in college or further
1306 studies and for employment in a fulfilling career.
1307 **Lead responsibility:** Superintendent, Principal
1308 **Potential funding:** School Operating Budget
1309 **Time frame:** Ongoing

Chapter 2: Essex as a Community

For goals to be obtainable and action plans to be realistic, it's important to know the situation on the ground. For that reason, in this chapter, you will read how Essex sees itself as a community as well as learn a great deal of facts & figures about our town. As we've seen throughout, the benchmark Essex residents have set for themselves is a community that is **connected, diverse, inclusive, sustainable**, and a **joy to live in**.

What You Will Read:

This chapter will be divided into sections that relate how Essex residents perceive the town and what the reality is 'on the ground,' so to speak.

The chapter will open by sharing residents' answers to the question "What is your favorite part of Essex?" This can mean a physical place, but it can also mean *which aspect of the community* people like the most.

Following this, we will explore the **history of Essex**, from prehistory to the present day. This will give us a grounding in how both the original inhabitants and recent settlers have seen their relationship with the land and their built environment.

Next, we will discuss the **demographic profile** of the town, highlighting population trends over time, how Essex compares to our neighbors in demographic categories, and what implications that has for our town's future.

In the next section, we will discuss **economic development**, primarily through the lens of facts & figures, answering such questions as "*Who are the largest employers?*," "*How do we attract the industries we want?*," and "*Where in town can we sustainably grow?*"

Naturally this leads to the area of **existing transportation infrastructure**, covered in the next section. This has implications for economic development, of course, but not only that: recall that a prime objective of our residents is to be *better connected, inclusive*, and to have a *sustainable and enjoyable* environment, so this section will not be limited to roadways.

One of the greatest challenges our community and state is facing is **affordable housing**. The next section, therefore, will feature an honest look at our housing stock and its affordability.

The following two sections will look at the related topics of **education** and **childcare**. A sustainable Essex - the kind that residents have stated they want - takes pride in how it nurtures and educates its young, such that they wish to stay in the community. These two sections will provide demographic data on our younger population, the status of our educational offerings, and how childcare availability and affordability affects our community and economy.

We finish with the topics of **energy** and **flood resilience**. These topics - and their connections to climate change - continue to grow in significance as Vermont grapples with the devastating floods of 2023. With that said, residents in town forums indicated their preferences for "bulwarks against climate change," and "regulations and so-called green incentives." These sections will discuss the "on-the-ground" reality of our energy needs, what sources are available, our preparedness for another serious flood, and for address climate change more generally.

1348 **Historic background**

1349 About 12,000 years ago, the last glacier that covered what is now Vermont melted and retreated
1350 northward. Soon after, the nomadic Paleo-Indians moved in to occupy the land. Over the following
1351 thousands of years, the environment continued to change, and Native Americans had to adapt and
1352 specialize with the changing climate. Evidence of Native American settlement in Essex has been
1353 found from as early as 10,000-9,000 years ago. Essex is located in the historic territory of what is
1354 now the Missisquoi band of Sokoki, or Western Abenaki.

1355 Essex was established as a town on June 7, 1763. The first settlers located their homes on the most
1356 fertile farmland along the Browns and Winooski Rivers. The population of Essex in 1786 was 72
1357 when the residents held the first Town Meeting to formalize town government and to levy necessary
1358 taxes. The first school district was not established until 1796.

1359 At various times in the early 1800's, aside from scattered rural residents, there were several pockets
1360 of settlement within the town around Pages Corners, Butlers Corners, Hubbel's Falls and Essex
1361 Center. Each of these areas had particular attractions such as sawmills, potash factories, iron works,
1362 taverns, churches, post offices, etc.

1363 Essex Center began to be established starting in 1794 as the "center" for the town where the first
1364 cemetery and town common were located as well as, churches, stores and other businesses serving
1365 the town. Business and industry in the southern part of town grew around a succession of dams and
1366 mills built along the Winooski River. The area was called Hubbel's Falls, and the first mill was
1367 constructed there by Abram Stevens for Ira Allen.

1368 By 1862 the railroad station and the surrounding Hubbel's Falls area were commonly referred to as
1369 Essex Junction. In its heyday, as many as 35 passenger trains passed through daily, with the railroad
1370 bringing increasing business to Essex Junction. The population grew as well, and in 1892 the
1371 Vermont General Assembly approved the incorporation of the Village of Essex Junction, a village
1372 within the Town of Essex. The 4.65 -square-mile Village had approximately 1,130 inhabitants and
1373 another 1,062 people lived in the remaining 34.78 square miles of the town outside the village. Any
1374 significant residential housing was concentrated in the Village of Essex Junction with some other
1375 small pockets spread throughout the town in areas such as Essex Center.

1376 A dam on Alder Brook in Essex Center was breeched during the 1830 flood and the force of the
1377 water was so great that the course of Alder Brook was changed from discharging in the Browns
1378 River to its current course now flowing into the Winooski River.

1379 Essex was primarily an agricultural community that evolved from essentially subsistence farming in
1380 colonial days to primarily dairy farming into the latter half of the 20th century. In the early 1800's
1381 sheep farming became popular throughout Vermont, including Essex, but essentially ended in the
1382 mid 1800's. The first master comprehensive Town plan was produced in 1967 and at that time there
1383 were 35 farms in Essex, mostly dairy farms located along the alluvial lands adjacent to the Winooski
1384 and Browns rivers. For variety of reasons, primarily market conditions, small dairy farming declined
1385 and by 2023 there were no dairy farms operating in the Town. Although some of the farmland has
1386 been occupied by scattered housing, the majority of the prime soil areas are used for growing crops
1387 for large dairy farms adjacent to Essex.

1388 From establishment of the first school district in 1796 through the early 1900s, there were up to 17
1389 school districts within the town, each with its own schoolhouse or place for education of the youth.
1390 By 1970 the Essex Town school system had two elementary school buildings and a middle school,
1391 the Village of Essex Junction had three elementary school buildings, a middle school and a high
1392 school. The Town of Essex bought into the High School in 1994 and ultimately in 2015, Essex

1393 Junction, the Towns of Essex and Westford voted to form a unified school district and the Essex
 1394 Westford School District (EWSD) opened its doors in 2017.

1395 Vermont experienced a general out migration in the mid 1800's and the population of Essex only
 1396 increased slightly from 2052 in 1850 to 2203 in 1900 with most of it occurring within the Village of
 1397 Essex Junction. In addition to arrival of the railroads in the 1850s, maybe the most significant
 1398 impact on Essex during this period was the construction of Fort Ethan Allen, beginning in 1893,
 1399 that straddled the Towns of Colchester and Essex. With soldiers and civilian support personal the
 1400 population at the Fort was as high as 1,500 in the early 1900's and the Fort's activities had significant
 1401 influence on the social and commercial citizenry for the area. During this time a trolley system linked
 1402 Essex to Burlington, going past Fort Ethan Allen and through Winooski. The trolley system
 1403 operated until 1925. Fort Ethan Allen was deactivated by the army in 1944 and the Air Force took
 1404 control in 1951. In 1964 the Air Force had left Fort Ethan Allen and numerous buildings were given
 1405 to the Towns of Colchester and Essex, the State of Vermont, UVM and St Michaels College, and
 1406 the remainder auctioned off to private concerns. In 1964 the Town of Essex took control of the
 1407 water and sewer systems for the entire fort area that included the iconic masonry water tower.

1408 Aside from events like World War I and World War II, the most significant impact in Essex was the
 1409 flood of 1927. The Flood had devastating effects on most of the river valleys in Vermont, including
 1410 the Winooski River that flowed through Essex. Although water flooded over the dam at Hubbel's
 1411 Falls and virtually through the steel truss bridge below the dam, both held, and the major damage
 1412 occurred to the power generating station that was overrun with flood water. Although the generating
 1413 machinery was severely damaged, the generating building itself stood the impact and the machinery
 1414 was soon repaired and put back into service.

1415 The Village of Essex Center was created in 1949 by an act of the Vermont Legislature after a group
 1416 of local citizens desired to have a reliable potable water supply and fire protection, with appropriate
 1417 fire hydrants. The water system, consisting of a reservoir, water tank and associated water lines, was
 1418 built and managed by the Village of Essex Center and initially there were approximately 55 homes
 1419 connected to the system. The area served covered about two square miles around the immediate
 1420 vicinity of the intersection of Vermont Routes 15 and 128. The first annual report of the Village of
 1421 Essex Center included a checklist of 116 eligible voters within the Village boundaries.

1422 Beginning in 1957 things started to change markedly in Essex when a speculative building
 1423 constructed in Essex Junction by the Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation was occupied by the
 1424 IBM corporation. At its peak in the 1990's they employed an estimated 8,500 employees, the largest
 1425 private employer in Vermont. With fluctuations of layoffs and hirings over the early 2000's these ups
 1426 and downs left the total employees at around 3,000 when in 2014 IBM closed a deal with Global
 1427 Foundries, who took ownership of the plant.

1428 IBM's presence profoundly impacted Essex as the total population grew from 3,931 in 1950 to
 1429 19,587 in 2010. In 1950 30% of the population resided in the Town outside the Village of Essex
 1430 Junction and by 2010 53% of the Town residents were living outside the Village of Essex Junction.
 1431 In 1993 a segment of Vermont Route 289, the Circumferential Highway initially envisioned in 1967,
 1432 was constructed from Vermont Route 117 to Vermont Route 2A sweeping around the Village of
 1433 Essex Junction and through the Butlers Corners area of Essex. Significant growth occurred in this
 1434 area including a hotel, large shopping complex, multi-unit housing buildings, many small businesses
 1435 and service providers.

1436 With its own taxing authority, separate from the remainder of the town, the village was able to raise
 1437 money to support services such as public water and sewer systems, a fire department, recreation
 1438 department etc. not necessarily funded for the town area outside the village. Numerous votes since

the 1950s to either separate or merge the governments of Essex Town and the Village of Essex Junction resulted in maintaining the status quo until 2022 when the residents of the Village of Essex Junction voted to separate from the Town of Essex. With the subsequent approval by the State of Vermont Legislature, the area (+4.65 square miles) formerly known as the Village of Essex Junction became the City of Essex Junction fully effective as of July 1, 2022. With this action the Town of Essex was reduced from +39.43 square miles to +34.78 square miles and the population for the new City of Essex Junction was estimated to be 10,601 with the new Town of Essex estimated to be 11,494.

To learn more about Essex History, a more detailed write up of this summary may be found on the [Town Plan page](#) of the Town's website as well as by visiting the Harriot Farnsworth Powell Historical Museum and the [Essex Community Historical Society's](#) website. Also see the Cultural/Historic and Archeological Resources Section in Chapter 3 for more discussion on the Town's historic resources.

Essex Community

SIDEBAR: Declaration of Inclusion (adopted 2023)

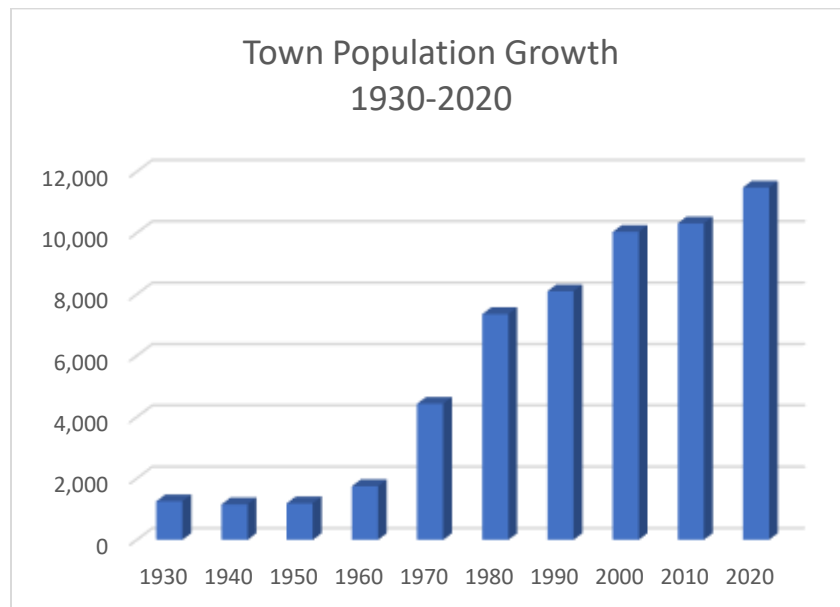
The Town of Essex Selectboard hereby declares our commitment to fostering an inclusive and welcoming place for all residents, visitors, employees, and more. We recognize that people have unique experiences, perspectives and identities that shape their individuality, and it is that diversity that contributes to the richness and strength of our community. We understand that our community is best served when all residents feel included and have a sense of belonging with equitable access to town services and facilities.

To that end, The Town of Essex Selectboard condemns racism, sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, discrimination, religious intolerance, and homophobia, in all their forms. We welcome all people, regardless of ethnicity, color, religion, national origin, gender identity or sexual expression, age, or physical and/or mental capabilities, to participate in governance. We will make every effort to provide a safe and welcoming community for all.

The Selectboard understands that inclusion is not merely a statement but a continuous effort that requires active engagement and collaboration from all members of the community. We commit to regularly review our efforts and policies, engage in constructive feedback, and make adjustments as necessary to ensure that our community is welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all.

Demographic Profile

By 2020, Essex had an estimated population of 11,484. Population in Essex has increased steadily, although the rate of increase has diminished since the peak occurring between 1960 to 1980. During the 1990s population growth fell to 74 persons per year and reached 193 persons per year in 2000. Between 2000 and 2010 the Town added an average of just 28 persons per year however, the growth rate increased notably between 2010 and 2020, with an average of 117 new persons annually.



Source: US Census

1475
1476

1477 Population growth in Essex exceeded that of the state and Chittenden County between 2010 and
1478 2020. Essex added population at an annual rate of 1.08 percent; the State at 0.27 percent and
1479 Chittenden County did so at 0.73 percent. Currently, Essex comprises 7 percent of the population of
1480 Chittenden County. Prior to 1960 the town contained approximately 2 percent of the county's
1481 population. The ratio then increased in the 1970's, 1980's until it hit 6 percent in 1980 and has
1482 remained at approximately that level in the ensuing decades.

1483 Even when growth takes a community like Essex beyond a small-town size, thoughtful
1484 neighborhood planning can retain the core character of small-town life. The concept of community
1485 is linked to social cohesiveness and resiliency, and the essence of a town the size of Essex lies in
1486 neighbors knowing one another, as well as their teachers, local shop owners, and community leaders.
1487 American sociologist Lewis Mumford has praised New England communities for refusing "to grow
1488 beyond the possibility of socializing and assimilating its members." For Essex to thrive in the future,
1489 it is essential to build an inclusive, fair, and just community.

1490 Within Essex, the Essex Town Center, the Susie Wilson corridor, and Historic Essex Center provide
1491 the diversity of services necessary to maintain the Town's strong community bonds as the
1492 population grows and diversifies. [The 2021 ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) supported this vision as it
1493 encourages Essex to strive to further support a wide variety of residential, retail, civic, commercial
1494 and recreational uses. Supporting residents and multi-modal access; reclaiming underutilized space
1495 for housing, business, recreation and a providing a municipal presence through seeking [state](#)
1496 [designations](#) of Village Center for the Historic Center, New Town Center for the Essex Town
1497 Center area, and Neighborhood Development Area for the area in between will help further this
1498 vision.

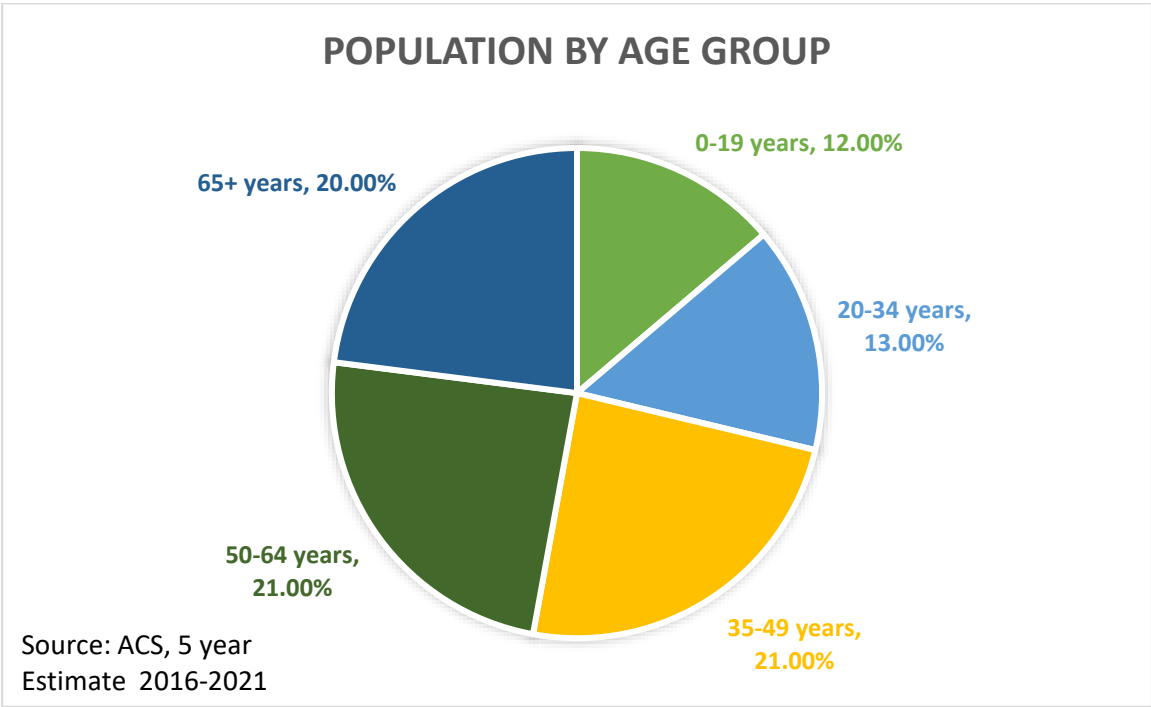
1499 Steady population growth will continue to bring residential development. The existing sense of
1500 community derives, in part, from the balance of rural and urban areas within. Although the Town
1501 has largely retained its rural character, incremental residential development in the countryside
1502 threatens the town's open space. Chapter 3 will take a closer look at development patterns and goals,
1503 but Essex can protect its rural-urban balance by continuing to concentrate development in growth
1504 areas loosely centered around the Susie Wilson Road corridor, the Essex Town Center, and the

industrial portions of the Saxon Hill area, while supporting conservation in the rural areas of Town. As noted above, the Town specially seeks to implement the ETC NEXT Plan.

Looking beyond sheer volume, 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. Likewise, it is equally important to understand the rate of new residents moving into Essex and their demographic makeup. In order to meet the Town resident's desire to have a diverse and sustainable community, encouraging the inflow of new residents from diverse populations is critical to the Town's sustainable livelihood, especially while reflecting on the Town's aging population.

On the whole, the economic vitality of any community depends on the size and diversity of its working population. Essex is no exception to this. Efforts need to be made to ensure the Town maintains a healthy balance in age and diversity in order to build resilience and secure opportunity for future generations. In addition to building the strength of local organizations, "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, this same plan continues by stating that 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)."

The population of Essex trends on the older side. Forty percent of the population is older than 50. Twelve percent is under 19, with thirteen percent 20-34 and the remaining twenty-one percent is between 35-49. This shows that overall, 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. In order to address these demographic challenges, a welcoming attitude of openness and acceptance for new residents needs to remain central to community development activities in this Town plan.



As the Town's population continues to grow, the racial and ethnic diversity of Essex will continue to grow. The fastest-growing groups of people residing in Essex identify as two or more races and/or BIPOC. The statewide population of Vermont is significantly white, with 93% of the population reported as such in 2020 Census. Essex is 92% white and 5% BIPOC or multiple races, making it somewhat more racially diverse than other Vermont communities. In 2022 Essex implemented a stipend policy for all boards, committees and commissions. The purpose of this stipend is to compensate people for their time, as well as offer assistance for childcare, food, transportation, or other needs in order for the volunteers to be able to attend meetings. The Town will increasingly need to be proactive in its public outreach efforts, community events, and municipal operations pursue better connections, inclusivity, and equity.

Economic Development

The Town of Essex has a diverse economy. Employers in Essex now include a mix of large manufacturers and smaller firms in a variety of industries. Though seemingly counterintuitive, the trends make sense when seen considering 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 employers. Post COVID remote workers are increasing, and office occupancy is decreasing.

Economic Sector Breakdown

The Town of Essex has 758 employers ranging from sole proprietors to large manufacturing plants (742) and 16 governmental employers from the federal government to schools in the district. The Town has a well-diversified commercial base employing 5,451 people with an average wage of \$15,875.

Our largest sector is service providers. Essex has 645 companies employing 3,972 workers providing a wide range of services for business to business and to the public. Our wholesale and retail sectors are relatively even in numbers of companies employing a total of 1,128 workers. The wage differential is substantial with wholesale averaging \$28,809 versus \$10,552 in retail which employs two thirds of that specific workforce. The professional and business services sector is dominant for wages. This sector employs 386 in 182 companies with an average wage of \$27,882. Our goods producing sector which encompasses agriculture, manufacturing and construction has 97 companies employing 1,479 workers. Our smallest in this subsector is agriculture with only four privately held businesses. Specialty construction employs 333 workers averaging \$15,274. Manufacturing is evenly split between durable and non-durable goods with 1048 people working at 28 companies averaging \$20,859. Accommodations and food services employs 574 workers with one hotel and the rest in food service. Their average wage is \$7,849. Governmental employment is evenly distributed between federal, state and local governmental operations combined with educational services. Employment in this sector is 446 in 16 entities with an average wage of \$14,784.

Effects of Separation

July 1, 2023, was the official separation date for the Town and City of Essex. The most obvious change to the Town's commercial base was the loss of Global Foundries the largest employer in the state. This change is reflected in the 42% drop in employment and 14% drop in average wages for all employees in town. With the separation, the commercial base for the town is more diversified and able to thrive in all economic cycles. On average, the separation resulted in a 20% decrease in all parts of the commercial base. Some sectors experienced greater changes. Our retail trade dropped 32%. The Town has two predominant retail areas, Suzy Wilson Road, and the Essex Experience. The Essex Experience has grown considerably since July 2023 and is positioned to add more retail

establishments at the time of the writing of this Plan. The Information Supersector which is comprised of data processing, webhosting and other internet support services grew by 27% overall and represents the fastest growing sector of the Town's commercial base.

The Essex Westford School District has long been a leader in the state for excellence in education and for the strong support from the community. The Center for Technology, Essex is a leader in the state for technical and vocational education. It has been an outstanding partner with Essex businesses offering a curriculum that fosters professional development in the areas needed by local business. Separation left this school system intact thus continuing to graduate highly educated and workforce ready students.

Concern for economic development remains strong well after the release of the *Economic Development and Vision Plan*, as demonstrated when the 2024 Town Plan outreach expressed that the emphasis for Economic Development is on creating and sustaining a **variety of local businesses**. Below is a wordcloud that shows the most expressed economic development topics from those conversations.



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 but suffice to say that property taxes pay for services provided by the municipal government. Residential properties make up approximately 75 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. Essex has welcomed more businesses to town since the 2016 Town Plan, where residential properties made up 80 percent of the grand list.

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. More information about the industry targets appears in the [Economic Development Vision and Plan](#).

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.

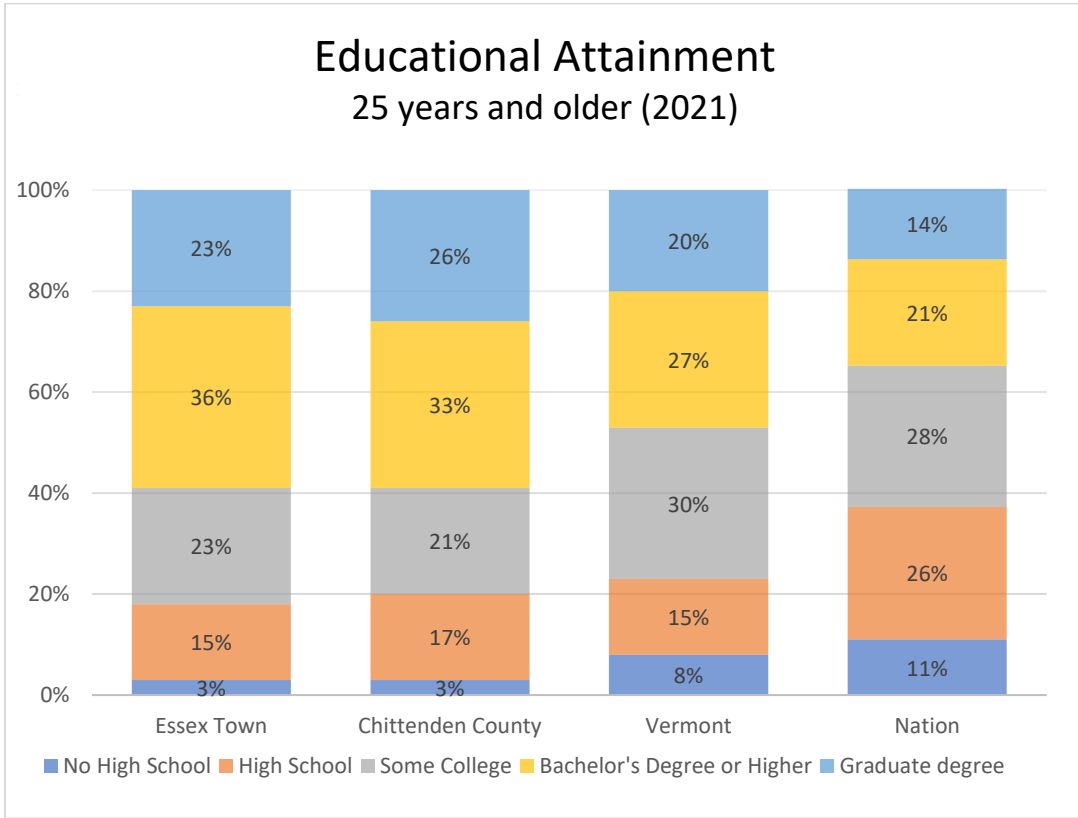
High value-added professional services include services that cater to a customer base beyond Essex and Chittenden County, and therefore bring money into the town and region. This category includes many knowledge-based and design-oriented fields.

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 attract the same money to the region as high value-added professional services, but they 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 its 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.



Source: US Census

The Town also hosts employers with wide **name recognition**. The presence of companies such as IBM, Blodgett Ovens and Keurig Doctor Pepper, Inc. reinforces the perception that Essex can be home to other major employers. It also hints at the tremendous human capital available in Essex in

1631 terms of educated and innovative residents. Essex also features thriving smaller businesses,
 1632 particularly in the growth areas along VT Route 15 and Susie Wilson Road. The Essex Experience,
 1633 located in the Essex Town Center, is a creative hub of over 20 independently owned Vermont
 1634 businesses with the best in class of local and national music, cinema, art, wellness and dining.

1635 In terms of economic challenges, Essex's **transportation network** puts the Town at a disadvantage
 1636 to neighboring communities that have quicker and easier access to major highways such as Interstate
 1637 89. The Circumferential Highway, which was partially constructed but never completed, would have
 1638 improved access to Interstate 89 from Essex. In response, Essex, Essex Junction, Colchester and
 1639 Williston have worked with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and the
 1640 Vermont Agency of Transportation to develop [Circ Alternatives](#), a series of transportation upgrades
 1641 intended to improve transportation networks in the three towns.

1642 Like other Chittenden County towns, Essex has an over-reliance on property taxes and experiences
 1643 relatively high state business taxes and power costs. Unlike some nearby towns, however, Essex has
 1644 not chosen to levy a local option tax.

1645 An **aging population** has many residents approaching retirement age. The replacement of workers
 1646 to sustain the local labor force could be cause for concern for prospective employers.

1647 Lastly, Essex has historically had **limited economic development organization and resources**.
 1648 The Town's [Economic Development Commission](#) has taken a more active role in recent years. The
 1649 Commission's completed the action calling for a staff person to focus on Economic Development
 1650 and working with neighboring communities to our economic base.

1651 Essex should also continue to strive to make permitting and zoning as efficient as possible.

1652 **Recreation and Economic Development**

1653 Essex has an extensive portfolio of recreational offerings. Indian Brook Park is a 740-acre
 1654 community park featuring a 60-acre reservoir, trails, a non-motorized boat launch, picnic areas and
 1655 parking. The Tree Farm Recreational Facility is a privately managed, self-sustaining space funded
 1656 completely through sponsorships and rental fees paid by customers. It provides fields for soccer,
 1657 rugby, frisbee and more. Both facilities attract new residents and keep current residents in Essex.
 1658 Saxon Hill hosts extensive single track mountain biking trails that go over municipal and private
 1659 land. The multiple trails are all maintained by non-profits in collaboration with the Town.

1660 In Vermont, outdoor and forest-based recreation and the associated tourism are major drivers of the
 1661 economy. Outdoor and forest-based recreation brings people into our communities. Trail users,
 1662 both residents and visitors, will visit local restaurants and shops, bringing in tax revenue and creating
 1663 jobs as well. Essex's Saxon Hill Forest and gravel roads are perfectly suited to join other groups in
 1664 Vermont recreation who are planning to build the most innovative hut-supported trail system in the
 1665 United States: a network of 485 miles of new and existing trail that connects 23 Vermont mountain
 1666 biking chapters across public and private lands, linking 27 communities across the state while
 1667 employing and training 330 young adults as they build 30 new huts and five new downtown hostels.
 1668 This legacy project addresses multiple needs and has the potential to conserve up to 214,000 acres of
 1669 unprotected land.

1670 **SIDEBAR: Working for economic development**

1671 The 2010 *Economic Development and Vision Plan* noted that the Essex community – including
 1672 key stakeholders in government, the private sector, and nonprofits – will ultimately be responsible

1673 for facilitating economic development. Essex has several entities working on economic
1674 development issues affecting the community, including the following:

- 1675 • [Essex](#) municipal staff and legislative bodies
- 1676 • [Essex Economic Development Commission](#)
- 1677 • [Essex Energy Committee](#)
- 1678 • [Community Capital of Vermont's Partnership Fund](#)
- 1679 • [Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation](#)
- 1680 • [Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce](#)
- 1681 • Tree Farm Management Group
- 1682 • [Vermont Convention Bureau](#)

1683 **Attracting the Target Industries**

1684 By recognizing the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the community, Essex can take steps to
1685 encourage economic development. The *Economic Development Vision and Plan* laid out a set of high-
1686 priority strategies meant to support the development, growth, and retention of the target industries.
1687 The strategies were grouped into four categories: Business Retention, Expansion and Attraction;
1688 Land Use and Regulations; Sites and Buildings for Economic Development; and Transportation
1689 Investments. Specific details about success measures and benchmarks, milestones and deadlines,
1690 costs of implementation, potential funding sources, and implementing entities can be found in the
1691 [Economic Development Vision and Plan](#).

1692 The Economic Development Commission has further refined priorities for the Essex economy. The
1693 EDC organized economic development priorities under five goals:

- 1694 (A) Develop a marketing identity for Essex that reflects our values, history, aspirations and sense
1695 of place.
- 1696 (B) Maintain Essex's rural character while increasing and diversifying economic development,
1697 emphasizing start-ups, agriculture, home businesses and retail.
- 1698 (C) Foster a culture of innovation, collaboration, sustainable growth, and job creation.
- 1699 (D) Maintain and improve roads, bridges, trails, sewer, water lines, etc. but be mindful of
1700 infrastructure carrying capacity and development demands upon it.
- 1701 (E) Create policies and programs that incentivize the provision of childcare services and
1702 affordable housing and revise those that increase demand for these.

1703 **Knowing Where To Grow**

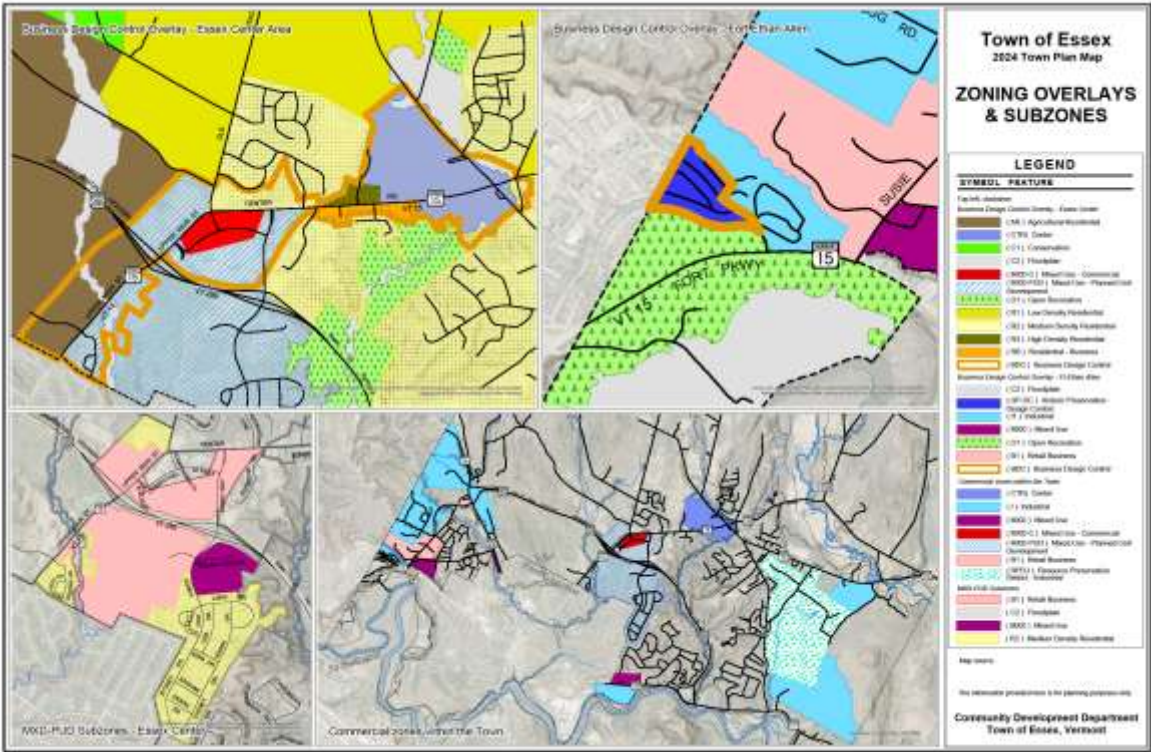
1704 Essex can accommodate additional industrial and commercial properties, with some of the last
1705 remaining undeveloped industrial land in Chittenden County. Much of the land is in the Saxon Hill
1706 area between VT Route 15 and VT Route 117, and on the west side of town near the Susie Wilson
1707 corridor and along VT Route 2A.

1708 The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, in its *ECOS* Plan, has recognized the
1709 importance of the undeveloped industrial land. The Plan calls for reuse of previously developed
1710 land, and development of land that is already served by existing infrastructure, the Plan does not
1711 recommend expanding the amount of land zoned for industrial space.

1712 The bulk of the town's economic activity occurs in zoning districts designated for business, mixed
1713 use, and industrial development.

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MAP 2: Areas for Commercial Development



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Not all economic activity, however, is restricted to commercial and industrial enterprises. The more rural parts of Essex can and do support farming and forestry operations and small home-based businesses.

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Transportation

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Existing Conditions

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The efficient, sustainable, 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 along the Winooski River. Presently, the town has five state highways, bus service, and access to Interstate 89 and rail lines. 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.

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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, Richmond, and Westford.

1733

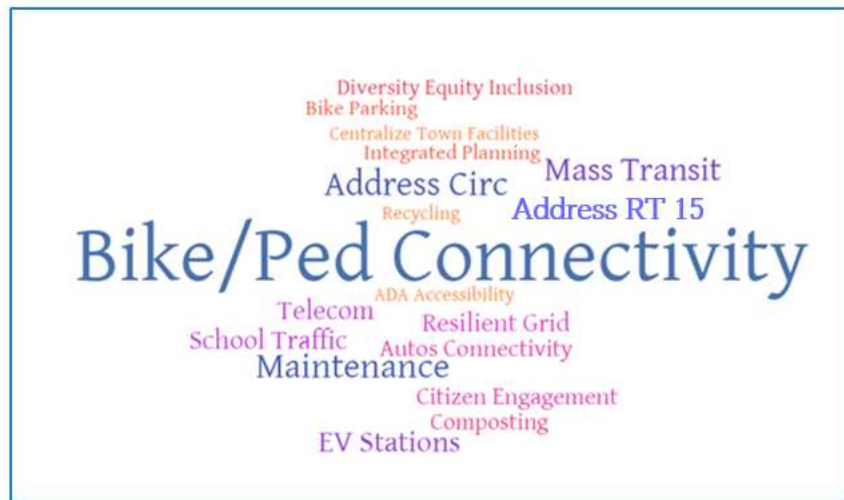
1734

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The state adopted a Complete Streets Policy in 2011, which was incorporated into the [Town's 2017 Standard Specification for Construction](#). Complete streets are designed to consider motorists, transit riders, pedestrians, and bicyclists of all ages and abilities for all state and municipal transportation

projects. This serves as a guide for the Town's future design and implementation of road improvements.

Essex's public roads will continue to be the primary infrastructure element serving the widest variety of transportation modes – cars, trucks, bicycles, pedestrians, and public transit. The Town can expect to see increased use of and desire for paths, sidewalks, and multi-use 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. This was supported by the Town Plan visioning sessions. The below wordcloud illustrates the most discussed concepts related to transportation and other infrastructure.



Public Transit

The primary public transportation service in Essex is bus transit provided by the [Green Mountain Transit](#) (GMT). The regional transit authority extends coverage to Chittenden, Franklin, Grand Isle, Lamoille, and Washington counties. As a GMT member community, Essex has one seat on the GMT Board of Commissioners.

SIDEBAR: GMT Routes & Schedules

The Chittenden County Transportation Authority maintains up-to-date route, schedule and fare information on its website, <https://ridegmt.com/>.

GMT operated three routes in Essex in 2023: the Essex Junction route, the Williston-Essex Combo route, and the Jeffersonville Commuter. As of 2023, all of GMT's buses were wheelchair accessible and equipped with bicycle racks. Essex also receives ADA paratransit service, as a GMT program operated by the [Special Services Transportation Agency](#) (SSTA).

The Town operates the [Senior Van service](#) as a second means of public transportation. Funded through the Parks and Recreation Department budget, the Senior Van provides free transportation to Town of Essex residents, aged 60+. Essex acquired its first senior van in 1984, and a second van went into service in 2005. Total ridership in fiscal year 2023 was 2,052. As a popular and successful service, the Senior Van 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

1767 within Green Mountain Transit’s member communities, communication and cooperation with
1768 GMT and other regional organizations are essential to promote a sustainable economy.

1769 GMT has identified the VT Route 15 corridor between Burlington and Essex Center as a priority
1770 for transit-oriented and pedestrian-oriented development. To make best use of GMT’s resources
1771 and promote future improvements in service, and thus attract more riders, future development and
1772 enhancements of the pedestrian environment should be focused along the VT Route 15 corridor –
1773 particularly in the Essex Town Center.

1774 **Sidewalks, Bike Lanes, and Shared-Use Paths**

1775 Sidewalks, bike lanes, and shared-use paths give residents a safer and more convenient way to walk
1776 and bike to and from shopping centers, jobs, parks, and bus stops. Sidewalks provide safety for
1777 children as they play near their homes and as they walk to and from school bus stops and
1778 neighborhood parks. Five-foot-wide sidewalks are appropriate for pedestrian use, whereas at least
1779 10-foot wide shared-use paths with 2-foot-wide clear shoulders accommodate bicyclists as well as
1780 pedestrians.

1781 Essex has two key resources that provide guidance for where the Town should install sidewalks, bike
1782 lanes, and shared-use paths. The 2014 [Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Town and the Village of](#)
1783 [Essex Junction](#) contains detailed information on the existing sidewalks, bike lanes, and shared-use
1784 paths, and identifies where the community needs new pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Priority
1785 should be placed on updating a Town-only Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in the near future. The
1786 Town needs to prioritize which projects in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan should be funded and
1787 built.

1788 Developers need to install sidewalks in most new developments. To facilitate the construction of
1789 shared-use paths in appropriate locations, the Planning Commission should require that a 20-foot
1790 right-of-way along property frontages be deeded to the Town as part of the subdivision and site plan
1791 approval process.

1792 If a property contains a proposed trail from the Town Plan, the Planning Commission can and
1793 should require landowners to provide trail easements when they develop or subdivide their property.
1794 Many of these easements come in the less populated areas of Essex, where the Town envisions
1795 future trail development.

1796 Because construction costs for new sidewalks, shared-use paths, and trails can be high, most large
1797 projects require state or federal grants. In such instances, the Town typically uses money from its
1798 capital budget to cover a portion of the project cost. Impact fees also need to be developed and
1799 implemented to help pay for the expansion of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

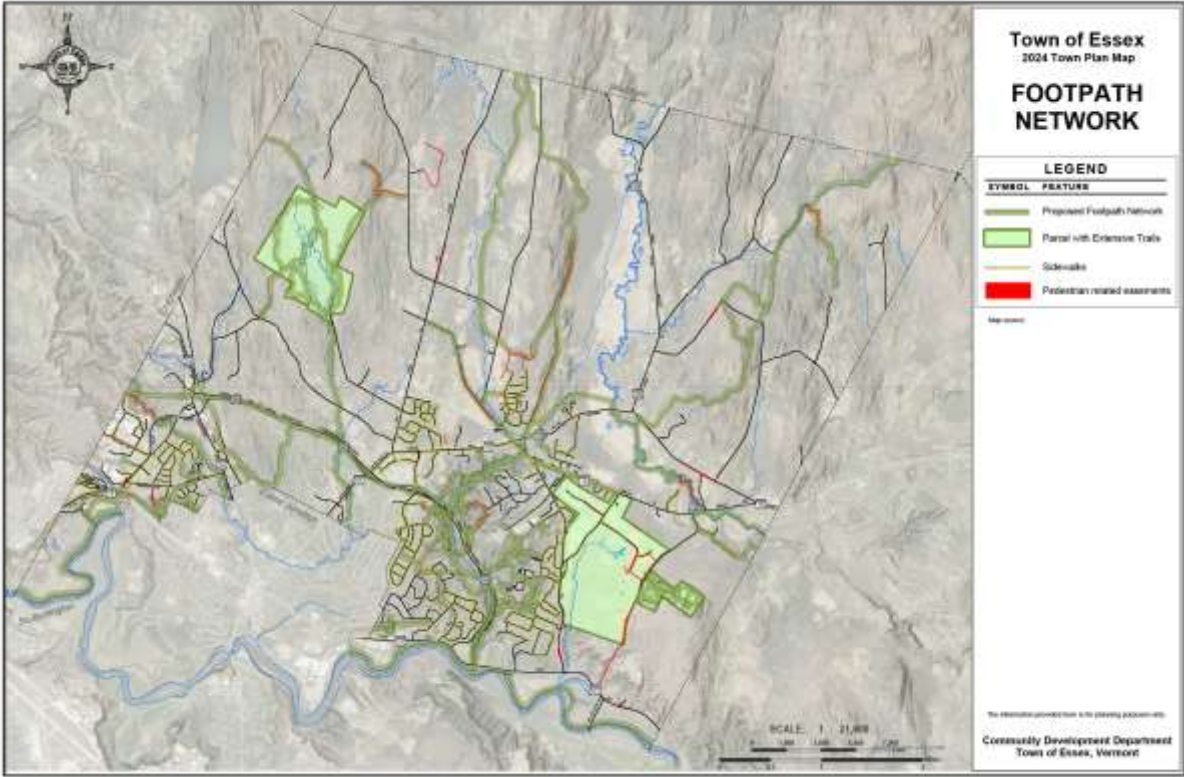
1800 Several projects received state grants for design and construction in recent years, including a paved,
1801 10-foot-wide shared-use path along VT Route 2A between Pinecrest Drive and Old Colchester
1802 Road; a 5-foot-wide sidewalk on Pinecrest Drive between Suffolk Lane and VT Route 2A; A shared-
1803 use path along VT Route 15 connecting Essex and Colchester; and a 5-foot-wide sidewalk on
1804 Towers Road between Clover Drive and VT Route 15.

1805 The top priority shared-use path is to link Streamside Village, which is close to the Town border
1806 with Essex Junction, to existing shared-use path infrastructure within the Essex Town Center. There
1807 is a preferred alternative for this shared-use path along VT Route 15. The community has also
1808 expressed a desire to connect the neighborhoods and schools on either side of the Circ with multi
1809 use path.

1810 The Town Plan serves as the second key resource. The adjoining maps show where the Town would
1811 like to expand a public network of pedestrian, bicycle networks.

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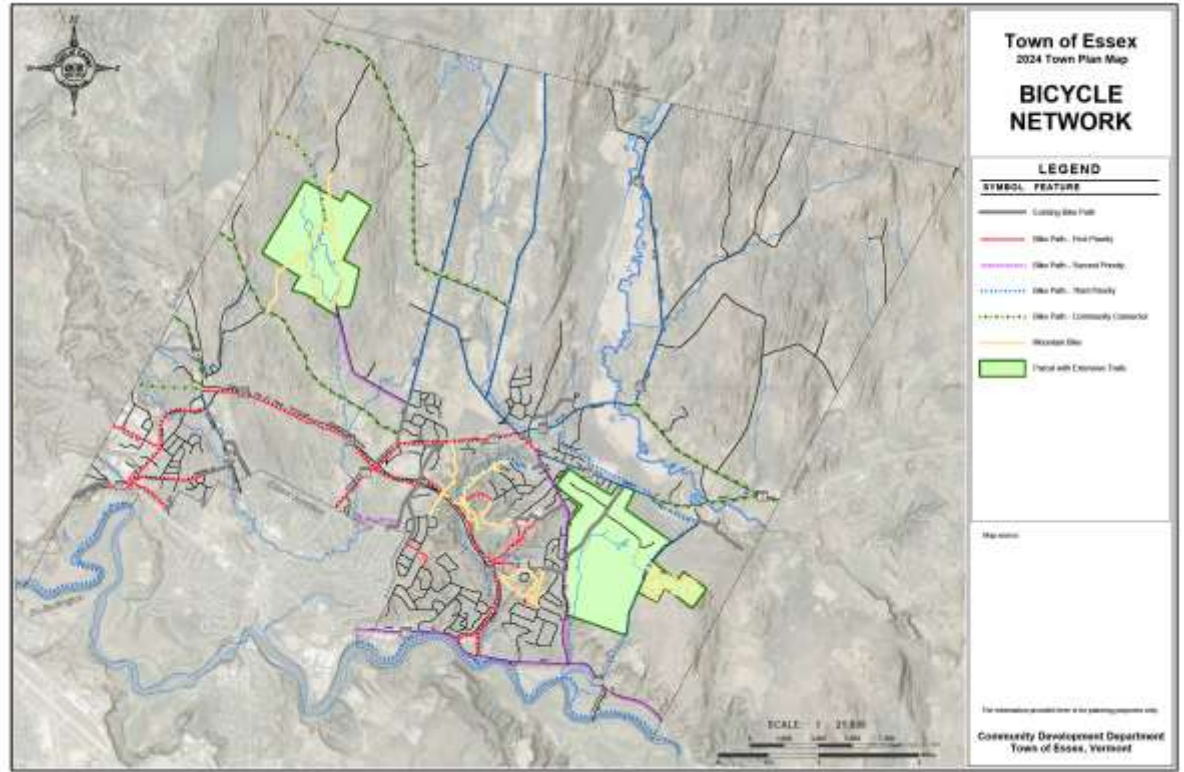
MAP 3: Existing and Proposed Footpath Network



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MAP 4: Existing and Proposed Bicycle Network



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SIDEBAR: Regional Transportation Facilities

Essex residents can access regional transportation options, including planes, trains, ferries, and buses. As of 2023, the following entities offered regional transportation:

- [Burlington International Airport](#) is less than 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 adjacent Essex Junction. Daily freight and passenger service is provided by [New England Central Railroad](#), [Vermont Rail System](#), and [Amtrak](#). Amtrak's "Vermont," which has service from St. Albans to New York City, stops twice a day in Essex Junction. The Ethan Allen Express Amtrak line was recently extended into Burlington. This line extends from New York City, Albany, NY, Rutland to Burlington.
- Two ports on nearby Lake Champlain 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 Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, 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 transportation infrastructure;
- Reducing roadway and intersection congestion;
- Funding needed to improve the availability and quality of alternative transportation modes and infrastructure such as bike lanes, paths, sidewalks, trails, and public transportation;

Transportation System Challenges and Opportunities

Traffic in Essex has increased incrementally. To help schedule road improvements, the Town implemented a [Highway Transportation Management Plan](#) in 2014 that is planned to be updated in 2024 or 2025. 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. All road improvements and rehabilitation events are funded through the current operating and capital budgets. All improvements are planned to use this document, with pavement condition surveys completed on five-year intervals.

SIDEBAR: Major traffic generators

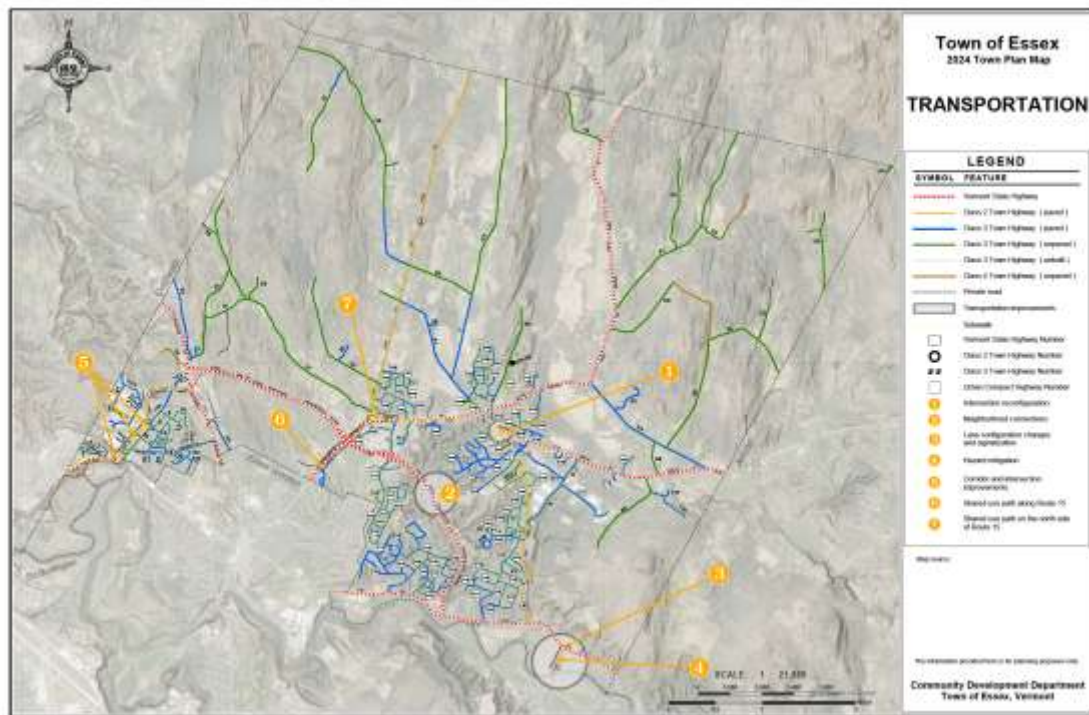
Essex has several locations that generate large amounts of traffic:

- Saxon Hill Industrial Park
- Essex Town Center (Hannaford, Essex Experience, The Essex Resort and Spa)
- Essex Westford School District
- Keurig Dr. Pepper, Inc. and other businesses and industries in the Susie Wilson Road area
- Essex Square Shopping Center and Center Road businesses

The Town and the City of Essex Junction, then the 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. This Plan should be updated to include the Town only and could be included in the Highway Transportation Management Plan as one document.

MAP 5: 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.

SIDEBAR: Definitions of road classes

Arterial: A major street that has a primary function of moving vehicles and a secondary function of accessing land.

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.

Conflicts and congestion can occur when roads and intersections designed for one function, such as residential traffic, are used for another function, such as commercial truck traffic. Future transportation planning and land use 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

- 1886 Essex Way, the town's most recently constructed arterials. As an example, residences and
 1887 businesses along VT Route 15 in Essex Center have driveways every 75 to 100 feet.
 1888 Residents and businesses have made numerous complaints about street access and the
 1889 amount of traffic along VT Route 15.
- 1890 2. **A collector road or local street being used by through traffic.** This conflict occurs
 1891 along Brigham Hill Road, Pinecrest Drive, and Weed Road. Vehicles often use Pinecrest
 1892 Drive, for instance, to avoid congestion at the Five Corners.
- 1893 3. **Structurally inadequate roads being used to meet a higher functional requirement**
 1894 **(for instance, gravel roads acting as collectors).** Local examples of streets that see
 1895 more traffic than they can structurally handle include Brigham Hill, Discovery, Indian
 1896 Brook, Lamore, Lost Nation, Osgood Hill, and Sand Hill roads.
- 1897 4. **Existing roads that were not designed to meet functional requirements but have**
 1898 **evolved from older routes of travel.** These roads often have sharp curves and poor sight
 1899 distances. This type of problem occurs on Lamore, Lost Nation, and Old Stage roads.
- 1900 5. **Intersections that have become choke points because of inadequate designs to**
 1901 **accommodate the movement needs mandated by the functional classes of**
 1902 **intersecting roads.** A number of intersections in Essex fail to meet movement needs of
 1903 vehicles and pedestrians. Earlier transportation management plans have made progress in
 1904 resolving intersection problems, but many intersections still need fixes to improve local
 1905 access and more quickly move regional traffic through busy corridors during rush hours.
 1906 Several of the problem intersections are being redesigned, including the following:
- 1907 • *VT Route 15/Sand Hill Road* – Under design by VTRANS (2025 construction)
 - 1908 • *VT Route 15/Susie Wilson Road and the Susie Wilson/Kellogg Road corridor* – VTRANS
 1909 (design underway)
 - 1910 • *North Williston Road/VT Route 2A* – VTRANS plans are currently on hold for this
 1911 project.

1912 Upcoming Transportation Improvements

- 1913 Upcoming transportation improvements for Essex fall under several categories: Circumferential
 1914 Highway Alternative Projects, Town Center roads, and Development Connector roads.
- 1915 The [Circumferential Highway Alternative Projects](#) came about after the State of Vermont decided
 1916 not to complete the Circumferential Highway. A regional task force spent two years evaluating and
 1917 recommending projects to reduce traffic in Colchester, Essex, and Williston. All the improvements
 1918 will be paid for entirely with state funds, federal funds, or both. Implementation will occur over 2 to
 1919 8 years. The following list summarizes the projects approved for future construction in the Town of
 1920 Essex.
- 1921 • **Intersection of VT Route 15 and Sand Hill Road:** Reconfiguration, signal installation,
 1922 pedestrian crossing, signal integration with other signals within the corridor (2025
 1923 construction)
 - 1924 • **VT Route 15/Susie Wilson Road/Kellogg Road:** Corridor and intersection
 1925 improvements to include improved bicycle access, added lanes, improved signals. This
 1926 improving bicycle access without limiting traffic will be complicated because the corridor has
 1927 limited available additional ROW. (VT Route 15/Susie Wilson currently in design)

- 1928 • **Intersection of VT Route 117 and North Williston Road:** Lane configuration changes
1929 and signalization (scoping completed, currently on hold)
- 1930 • **VT Route 117/North Williston Road hazard mitigation:** Signage, culvert changes, better
1931 gate control for flooding, advance warning devices
- 1932 • **VT Route 15/Old Stage Road to Essex Way:** Shared-use path on the north side of VT
1933 Route 15

1934 **Town Center Roads**

1935 A plan for **Town Center roads** was discussed in the [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#). The proposed street
1936 network covered three areas: Butlers Corners and Lang Farm; historic Essex Center; and along VT
1937 Route 15. At the time of writing the 2024 Town Plan, the Town began work on an [Official Map](#),
1938 that would include the desired network of interconnecting roads, sidewalks, shared-use paths and
1939 other infrastructure improvements in the core of the Essex Town Center as envisioned in the ETC
1940 NEXT Plan. Additionally, this map will be instrumental in helping the Town seek a New Town
1941 Center state designation through the state's [Designation Program](#), as an Official Map is requirement
1942 of this state designation.

1943 **Development Connector Roads**

1944 Within neighborhoods and subdivisions, **development connector roads and bike and pedestrian**
1945 **connections** epitomize the concept of transportation alternatives which were strongly supported by
1946 the public during the outreach for developing the vision for this Town Plan. Multiple accesses to
1947 and between subdivisions can improve traffic efficiency in a subdivision layout as well as the major
1948 road networks. Connected roads also provide better access for emergency vehicles. The [Official](#)
1949 [Subdivision Regulations](#) require two access points for subdivisions with 50 or more residences, and the
1950 Planning Commission encourages multiple access points for all residential developments. When
1951 appropriate, the Planning Commission encourages developers to dedicate rights-of-way for future
1952 road connections to adjoining parcels. The Town's regulations discourage dead-end roads and cul-
1953 de-sacs because of high maintenance costs and inefficient traffic movements. However, many large
1954 developments do have dead-end and cul-de-sacs and are not connected to other neighborhoods.
1955 These issues should be examined, and further policies should be developed to discourage this in the
1956 future.

1957

Map 6: Community Facilities



1958

1959 **Education**

1960

Essex takes pride in its strong school system and other educational offerings.

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Essex is fortunate to be located within easy commuting distance to numerous colleges, including [Champlain College](#), [Community College of Vermont](#), [St. Michael's College](#), the [University of Vermont](#), and [Vermont State University - Vermont Tech](#). Indeed, many entities, including the Town's Parks and Recreation Department, also offer numerous and varied opportunities for adult education, including evening programs at the Center for Technology. Essex. However, when discussing the education of the Town's children, it's important to note the importance of Essex Town being a part of the Essex Westford School District, as will be discussed in greater detail below. Essex Westford School District

1969

1970

1971

On November 3, 2017, the communities of Westford, Essex Town and Essex Junction voted 'yes' to form a unified school district known as the Essex Westford School District. This created a new, unified form of governance for what had formerly been three different school districts.

1972 **WHO IS THE EWSD?**

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These three communities unified to provide enhanced and expanded educational options for all students. The Essex Westford School District (EWSD), is designing opportunities that meet the unique needs of all learners. The EWSD vision, shaped with the help of community members, students, and staff is "Growing hearts and minds, for a better today and tomorrow: every day, every way, every one." This sentiment guides work to support both emotional and academic growth, with engaged and inspired learners.

1979 Students are taught a proficiency-based curriculum and supported by dedicated teachers and staff.
 1980 Nearly 50 percent of EWSD staff live in one of the three communities that they support.
 1981 Each student must be prepared for success in college, further study, or employment when they
 1982 graduate; these students in EWSD classrooms today will be the leaders of tomorrow. EWSD
 1983 students learn outside of the classroom through experiences like internships, and each school is
 1984 heavily involved in community service activities, such as food drives, fundraisers, and community
 1985 appreciation days.
 1986 EWSD serves approximately 4,500 students PreK through 12th grade across three communities:
 1987 Essex Town, Essex Junction, and Westford. EWSD maintains a total of 10 schools, three of which
 1988 serve the Town of Essex only: Essex Elementary School (K-2), Founders Memorial School (3-5),
 1989 Essex Middle School (6-8), and two that are shared by the whole district: Essex High School (9-12)
 1990 and the Center for Technology (10-12).

1991 EQUITY IN EWSD

1992 Studies show that there are barriers for some students in reaching their goals; indeed, can predict
 1993 which students will have greater challenges based on certain characteristics. For example, many
 1994 students who are eligible for special education, or face financial challenges, are Black, or do not
 1995 speak English. These students are also more likely to not be reaching their goals yet. The educators
 1996 at EWSD seek to act to reduce barriers so the promise of education can be open to everyone.
 1997 In the EWSD, educational equity means that every child receives whatever they need to develop
 1998 their full academic and social potential. Equity is the foundation of the [Continuous Improvement](#)
 1999 [Plan \(CIP\)](#). The Vermont Agency of Education requires Vermont public schools to have a
 2000 continuous improvement plan, which is built on the belief that all education systems can improve.
 2001 The district seeks to understand which practices are contributing to all children succeeding and
 2002 which practices are creating barriers.

2003 FACILITY PLANNING AND PROJECTS

2004 The aging of the district's buildings, systems, and infrastructure is a growing concern. The average age
 2005 of their school buildings is now 65 years old and no major construction and/or renovations have
 2006 taken place for the last 15 years.

SCHOOL FACILITIES	YEAR BUILT
Essex Community Educational Center (EHS & CTE)*	1969
Essex Middle School*	1968
Albert D. Lawton	1957
Westford School	1967
Founders Memorial School*	1978
Thomas Fleming School	1912
Summit Street School	1951
Hiawatha School	1957
Essex Elementary School*	1951
*Town Schools	

2007 **FACILITIES CONDITION ASSESSMENT**

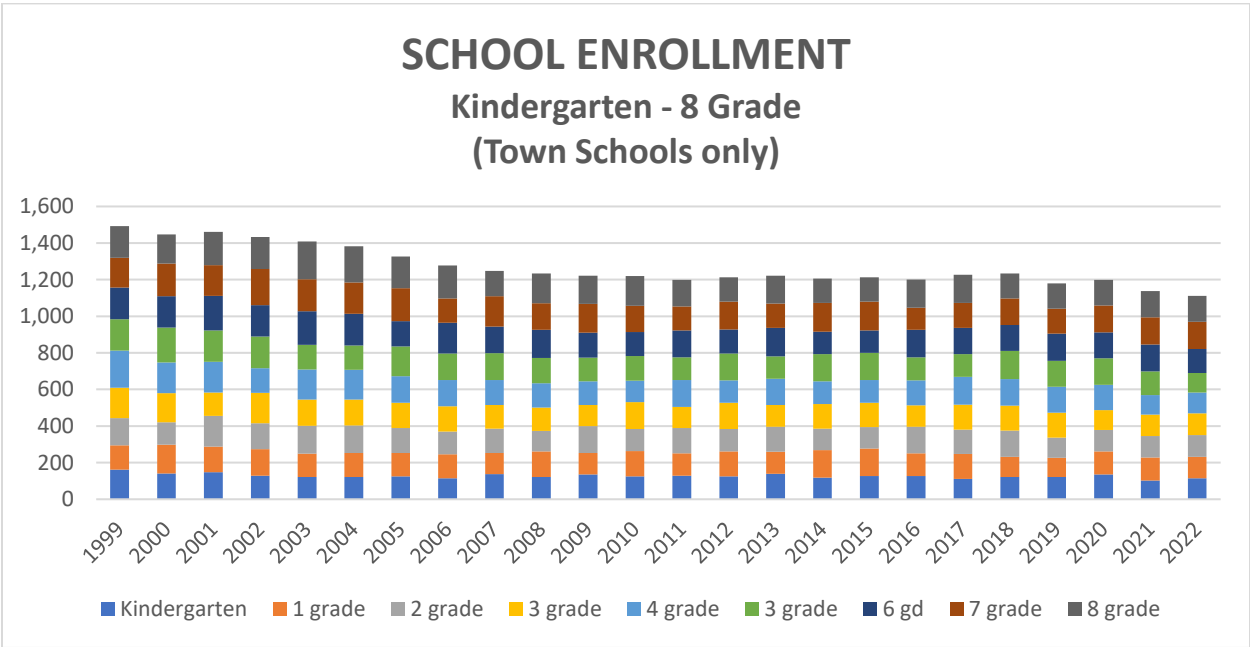
2008 By 2018 it had become clear that much of the district’s fixed and real assets were reaching the end of
2009 their lifecycle. Budget requests were spiking and identified needs were well beyond that of an annual
2010 budget. In April 2019 voters approved transferring \$365,000 of carry-over fund balance to the
2011 existing Capital Reserve Fund to launch a comprehensive long-range facility planning study, a
2012 Facilities Condition Assessment (FCA).

2013 The result of the study was to recognize that simply to maintain current infrastructure at its current
2014 level would require \$54.2 million. But education has not stood still in the 45 years since the
2015 construction of Founders Memorial School, the most recent school to have been built. Accordingly,
2016 the EWSD School Board has realized that a continued commitment to public education will require
2017 community engagement around the present-day instruction of students and an honest assessment of
2018 what that calls for in terms of infrastructure spending.

2019 **NEXT STEPS AND STATE OF VERMONT EFFORTS**

2020 Decades have passed and generations have gone through the school system since the last investment
2021 in a new school building occurred inside the boundaries of Essex Westford School District.
2022 However, EWSD is not the only one wrestling with these issues. In 2021 the Vermont General
2023 Assembly required the Agency of Education to perform a similar inventory and conditions
2024 assessment of all school facilities in Vermont. Overall, Vermont’s school facilities as a whole have a
2025 high Facility Condition Index (FCI) of 71.4% (higher percentages mean a greater need for
2026 replacement or upgrades). Some systems were higher than others; windows, elevators, local heating,
2027 cooling and ventilation (HVAC), and temporary buildings had FCI higher than 75%. Mid- to low-
2028 FCI categories (below 74%) included solar power, electrical and technology systems, fire and safety
2029 systems, and central heating and cooling. The FCI reported for Essex Westford School District was
2030 75.4%. The second phase of Act 72 will now mean an in depth and comprehensive FCA for all
2031 schools. A final report will be prepared for the legislature, in the Fall of 2023.

2032

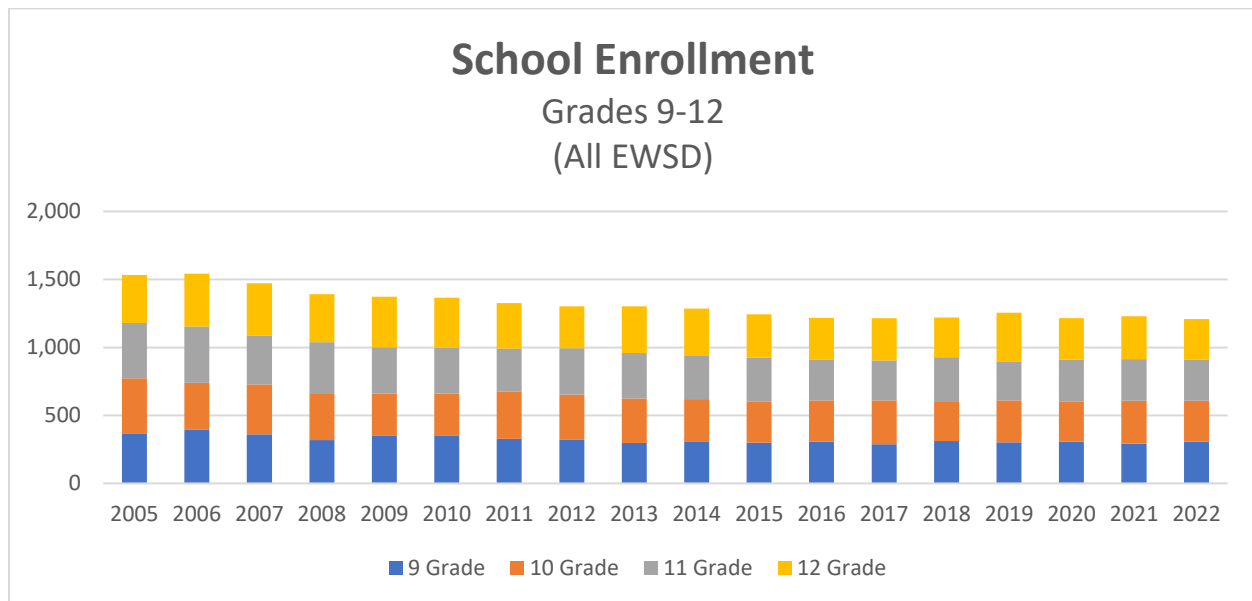


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2035

Source: Vermont Department of Education



Source: Vermont Department of Education

SIDEBAR: ESSEX EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

Essex Westford School District

A school's capacity is determined by several 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 2023, the Essex Westford School District does not anticipate the need for additional classroom space, although, as discussed, the facilities are aging and the need for upgrades are apparent. 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.

Essex Elementary School – Located on Bixby Hill Road, this 58,300-square-foot building has 30 classrooms, a gym, a cafeteria and kitchen, a learning center, and two large common rooms that can be used for larger assemblies. The facility housed 350 students (pre-K – second grade) and 81 full-time staff as of October 2023. Essex Elementary School sits on 13 acres.

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, a cafeteria and kitchen, and a learning center. As of October 2022, there were 340 students (grades 3-5) and 67 full-time staff members.

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 classrooms, one computer lab, a gym, a 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. The middle school had 422 students (grades 6-8) and 61 full time staff as of October 2023.

Essex High School and Center for Technology, Essex – Both are located on Educational Drive in the same complex in Essex Junction. 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, a lighted track, a football field, tennis courts, an indoor ice-skating rink, a gymnasium, a 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

2068 instructional space. As of October 2022, total enrollment at EHS was 1208, with 203 staff members.
2069 These numbers include students from the entire EWSD.

2070 The Center for Technology (CTE) – Co-located with Essex High School, provides comprehensive
2071 technical programs for students 16 years and older, including adults enrolled in evening programs.
2072 CTE offers the following programs: Automotive Technology, Building Technology (Residential
2073 and Systems) Childhood Education and Human Services, Computer Animation and Web Design,
2074 Computer Systems Technology, Cosmetology, Dental Assisting, Design and Creative Media,
2075 Engineering and Architectural Design, Health Professions, Natural Resources (Agriculture and
2076 Mechanical), Professional Foods and 5 Sections of PreTech. In 2022, 357 students, from 21
2077 different school districts across the state of Vermont, attended CTE, with 66 staff members.

2078 **Bellcate School**

2079 Essex is also home to the [Bellcate School](#), a specialized educational facility, supporting youth with
2080 special learning needs. With a maximum student population of 30 students, ranging from 11-22
2081 years old, they specialize in individualized programs for each child. The Bellcate School is in Saxon
2082 Hill.

2083 **Housing**

2084 Existing housing in Essex ranges from large, single-family homes to condos to large apartment
2085 buildings. The number of households has approximated the population increase, although since the
2086 mid-1900s Essex has seen a gradual decline in the number of people living in those homes. In 1960,
2087 an average of 3.65 people lived in a household; in 2021, the average Essex home had 2.34 people.

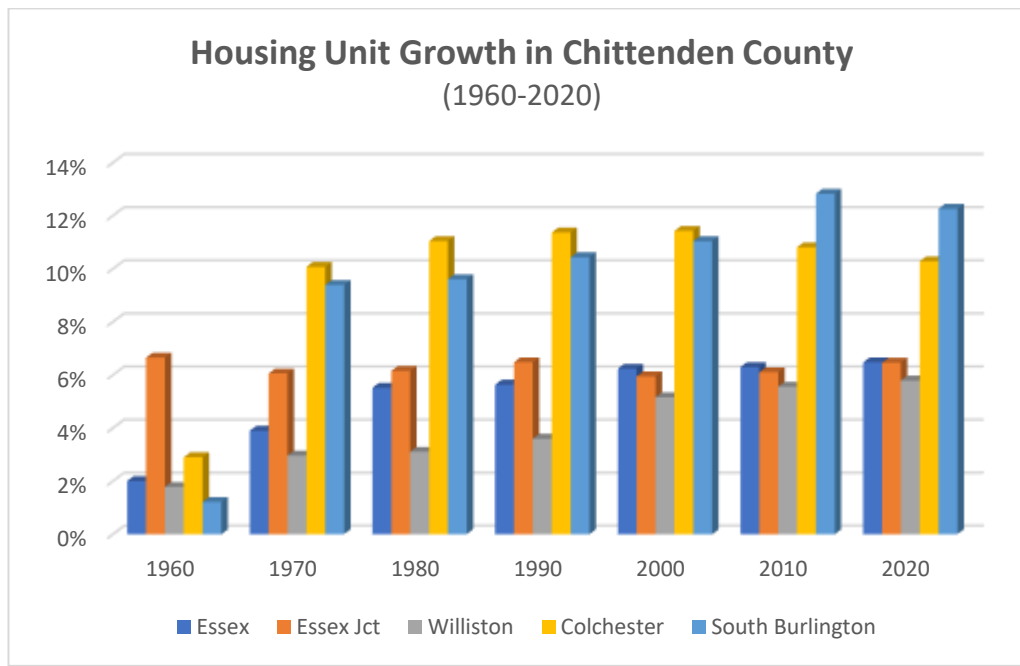
2088 The trend reflects a shift in the types of housing being built in Essex. In 1967, single-family homes
2089 comprised 91 percent of all the dwellings built in town. Recent construction, however, has brought
2090 an influx of multifamily housing, including condominiums, townhouses, and congregate facilities. Of
2091 the 268 building permits issued from 2013 through 2022 for new dwelling units, 52 percent were for
2092 multi-unit, congregate or accessory dwelling units. The trend toward non-single-unit housing will
2093 likely continue. With a limited amount of land within the sewer core, the Town can expect to see a
2094 greater number of multi-family housing buildings. Taller buildings and greater densities will help
2095 achieve a pattern of compact development within the sewer core. The more rural parts of Essex
2096 outside the sewer core can expect to see a greater proportion of single-unit dwellings.

2097 The expected development patterns have played out in recent housing trends. The Planning
2098 Commission approved 27 subdivisions between 2015 and 2022. Of the 14 projects inside the sewer
2099 core, all but five featured multi-family or congregate housing. Outside the sewer core, only one of 13
2100 projects included multi-family dwellings; the rest of the subdivisions were for single-family homes.

2101 The total number of housing units in Essex increased from 4,137 in 2010 to 4,799 in 2020,
2102 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The average annual growth rate during the same time of 1.5
2103 percent was ahead of Chittenden County (1.2 percent) and the rest of the state (0.4 percent). Of the
2104 surrounding towns of Colchester, Essex Junction, South Burlington, and Williston only Essex
2105 Junction (1.8%) and Williston (1.6%) had a higher average annual growth rate from 2010-2020.

2106 Regionally, the Town's percentage share of the housing stock of the county has remained steady,
2107 with 7 percent in 1960 and 6 percent through 2020. This is consistent with the growth seen in Essex
2108 Junction and Williston. South Burlington (12%) and Colchester (10%) currently have seen their
2109 share of housing increase at much higher rates.

2110



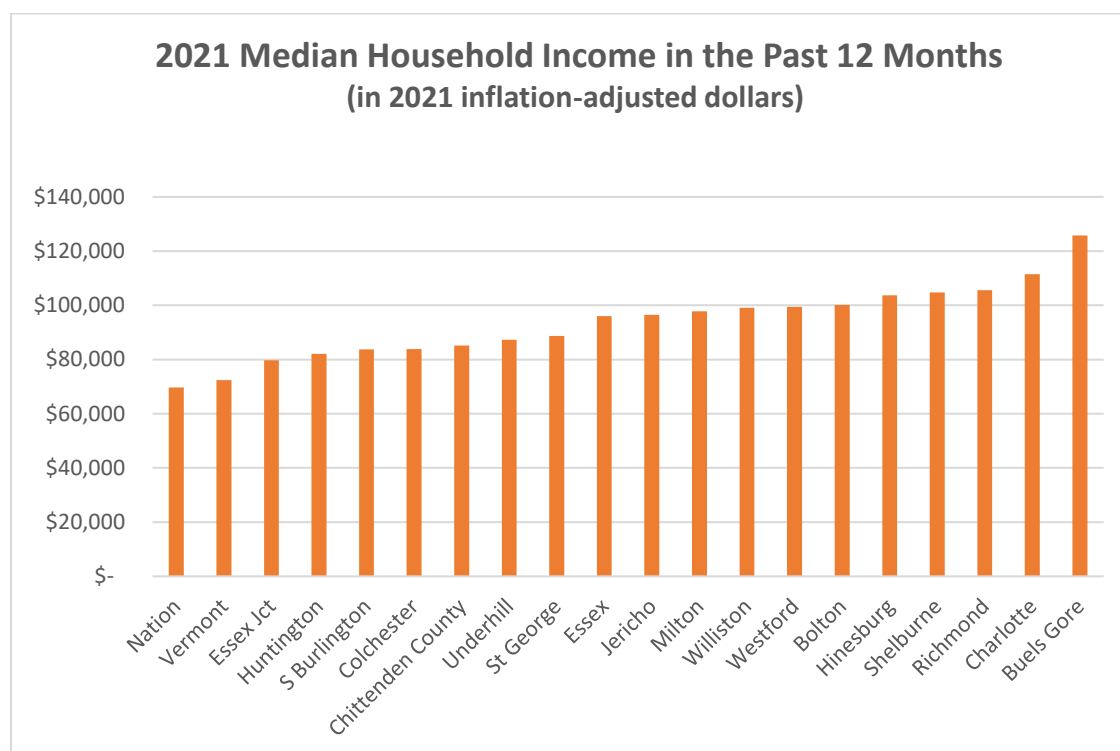
Source: US Census

Housing affordability

The Town wants to ensure that residents can afford to live in Essex. In recent years, the Planning Commission has heard from residents and nonprofit organizations advocating for better support for housing issues including affordable housing and micro-housing, a catch-all term for tiny houses, micro-apartments, and micro-units.

“The lack of housing in Chittenden County threatens Vermont’s economic health,” the [ECOS Project Building Homes Together 2.0](#) wrote in 2022. “Both large and small employers are struggling to find housing for their employees. Systemic inequity has exacerbated housing challenges within the County for some low income and BIPOC households that lack financial resources to compete in the homeownership and rental market. The impact is Far Reaching – The shortage of housing has continued to have negative impacts in the region from economic development to public health.” As a general rule, a household should spend no more than 30 percent of its income on housing costs. The median household income in Essex in 2021, as estimated by the American Community Survey, was \$96,045 – more than the median earnings in the county, state, and nation and right about in the middle of all Chittenden County town’s median income level. The average assessed home value in Essex was \$321,000 in 2013. The [Vermont Housing Data’s Home Mortgage Calculator](#) indicates that a household earning the annual median income of \$96,045 can afford a home costing \$293,500, which makes a home valued at the average assessed amount at 30 percent of a median income household’s income. The ratio of home value to income in Essex at 3.34 was lower than those of the county, state, and nation, which were 4.44, 3.75, and 4.04, respectively.

Although the median income in Essex is above about half of the county, state, and nation, the town is not immune to poverty. The American Community Survey estimated that in 2021, 7.2 percent of Essex residents had 12-month incomes below poverty levels. Comparatively, Chittenden County had poverty rates of 10 percent and Vermont had poverty rates of 10.3 percent.



Source: US Census

2137
2138

2139 Project-based affordable housing, offered through a specific government-subsidized housing
2140 program, is based on a variety of standards but is usually related to the Area Median Income (AMI).
2141 Depending on the project, eligible households may be limited to those earning just 30 percent of the
2142 AMI, 50 percent of the AMI, or up to 80 percent of the AMI. Moderate income housing is
2143 affordable to households having between 80 percent and 120 percent of AMI.

2144 The Town has 239 “affordable” rental units across 5 different housing facilities in 2023; an increase
2145 of 68 units from 2015, according to the [Vermont Housing Finance Agency](#).

2146 Essex has incentives in its [Official Zoning Regulations](#) to encourage more affordable housing –
2147 developers are allowed to build more homes on a property if some of the units are considered
2148 “affordable” – but developers have rarely used the density bonuses. Most of the affordable units
2149 built in recent years have been incentivized through federal subsidy programs.

2150 Essex studied affordable housing in 2019, when an [The Town of Essex and Village of Essex](#)
2151 [Junction Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan](#) (ANA) was adopted. One of the
2152 recommendations of the ANA was to establish a [Housing Commission](#), which was established in
2153 2020. The Commission originally was established a joint commission with the City (then Village) of
2154 Essex Junction. In 2023 the commissions officially separated.

2155 The Needs Assessment states that “The impacts of the region’s housing shortage are not limited to
2156 individual household economics – the lack of financial stability and reliable living situations can limit
2157 local spending power, discourage investment in the area, and impact public health. In addition, many
2158 households have settled in homes further from the nexus of jobs and destinations in the Burlington
2159 metro area. This has not only increased traffic congestion and household commuting expenses, but
2160 it has also contributed to urban sprawl and a lack of community connections.” The top Needs
2161 Assessment recommended actions are show in the sidebar.

2162 Recommendations

2163 There are several strategies identified in the Essex Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan that
2164 can be used to improve housing options:

- 2165 • **Revise the Land Use Regulations** in ways that support affordability such as:
 - 2166 ○ Supporting the use of accessory dwelling units;
 - 2167 ○ Reducing the required amount of parking for new developments; and
 - 2168 ○ Making the development review process simpler.
- 2169 • **Reduce Development Fees for Affordable Housing Projects** - This strategy is essentially
2170 a local subsidy activated at the time of development. Revenues that would otherwise go into
2171 the municipality's general fund or, in the case of impact fees, capital funds for specific
2172 projects, are instead used to offset the cost of developing affordable units.
- 2173 • **Secure Designation(s) from the State Designation Program** - These designations can
2174 provide technical planning assistance for municipalities, infrastructure grants, and eligibility
2175 for tax incentives for developers.
- 2176 • **Establish a Housing Trust Fund** – The creation of a local Housing Trust Fund (HTF)
2177 could provide a dedicated source of subsidies for affordable housing projects, in addition to
2178 providing a source of local match funds to leverage larger funding sources.
- 2179 • **Partner with Housing Developers and Non-Profits** – Partnerships between
2180 municipalities and housing developers, both for-profit and nonprofit, on affordable housing
2181 projects can potentially achieve affordable housing goals at a lower cost than through
2182 municipal regulation. Such partners include [Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity](#),
2183 [Cathedral Square](#), [Evernorth](#), and the [Champlain Housing Trust](#). The Town should also seek
2184 out grant opportunities to support affordable housing.

2185 To advance the above recommendations, the Town's Housing Commission will:

- 2186 • Advise the Selectboard, Planning Commission, and other municipal boards and committees
2187 on the housing needs of the community, including review and consultation of policy and
2188 zoning changes related to housing;
- 2189 • Maintain and analyze the community's demographic and housing stock information and
2190 provides periodic updates on housing issues to elected officials;
- 2191 • Work to educate the public on housing topics and develop partnerships with developers,
2192 non-profits, state agencies, and social service organizations to advance the community's
2193 housing goals.

2194 Childcare

2195 The availability of adequate childcare facilities for working parents is widely considered a critical
2196 ingredient of a healthy community. Not only is childcare an essential part of a community's social
2197 infrastructure, support for such facilities is increasingly considered an important economic
2198 development strategy.

2199 Essex has 2,316 children who are 14 and younger and could potentially need childcare, according to
2200 the 2021 American Community Survey. 3.3 percent of Essex's 2021 population was younger than 5,

2201 8.3 percent was between the ages of 5 and 9, and 8.8 percent of the population was between the ages
2202 of 10 and 14.

2203 Childcare options in Essex include registered and licensed family child care homes, center based
2204 child care and preschool programs, and school age programs including after school care and summer
2205 camps. Childcare programs are regulated by the [Vermont Department for Children and Families](#)
2206 (DCF). Providers must register with the state, whether they operate out of a private home or run a
2207 commercial child center.

2208 The [DCF Bright Futures Child Care Information System](#) reported that 17 licensed programs
2209 (including school programs) and four registered homes in the Town were providing childcare as of
2210 August 2023. The facilities had a total capacity for 1103 children. This is a significant increase in
2211 capacity from 2015, where there were six licensed programs (including afterschool programs) and
2212 five registered homes were providing childcare as of May 2015, for a total capacity for 364 children.

2213 The existing childcare programs seem to have no capacity available, indicating that Essex might not
2214 be adequately served by existing childcare facilities.

2215 Most zoning areas in Essex allow registered and licensed child care homes and center based child
2216 care and preschool programs. The [Official Zoning Regulations](#) contain a full list of zoning districts
2217 that allow childcare facilities.

2218 Local school districts are dedicated community partners in providing young children with preschool
2219 and early care learning experiences, as well as educational after-school care options for young
2220 students. [Essex Westford School District](#) partners with the [Greater Burlington YMCA](#) to provide
2221 after-school care through an Extended School Program at Essex Elementary School and Founders
2222 Memorial School. Essex Elementary School also hosts a branch of Champlain Valley Head Start,
2223 providing preschool education to children from low-income families.

2224 The [Essex Parks and Recreation Department](#) offers a number of half-day and full-day summer camp
2225 options for elementary and middle-school aged students.

2226 **Sidebar Box for Health Equity**

2227 **A Vision for a Healthy Community**

2228 The Town of Essex has a vision to support the health and well-being of all its residents and visitors
2229 by fostering an active, inclusive, connected community where healthy habits and lifestyles are
2230 reinforced by the built environment and the Town's policies and regulations. Part of achieving this
2231 vision is to better understand the links between the built environment and health, especially the
2232 impacts of land use patterns and transportation options.

2233 **Health Equity**

2234 In early 2023, the Vermont Department of Health provided a presentation to the Planning
2235 Commission on the topic of Health Equity and how it could be incorporated into the Town Plan.
2236 Health Equity considers a broad range of ways that various community aspects impact health
2237 outcomes such as job opportunities, healthcare access, affordability, social connectedness, and access
2238 to healthy foods.

2239 Supporting health-related topics is not new for Essex; the town has infrastructure that encourages
2240 active lifestyles, like parks and trails, and the Parks and Recreation Department provides year-round
2241 recreational opportunities for all age groups. However, it is a new approach to address Health Equity
2242 holistically to better understand how the Town can leverage its policies, regulations, and actions to
2243 improve conditions in the community.

2244 **Planning Process**

2245 As recommended by the Vermont Department of Health in their 2013 guide [Active Living & Healthy](#)

2246 [Eating](#), municipalities can take the following steps to develop a plan to address health concerns and

2247 incorporate healthy community design principles:

- 2248 - Collect and analyze information;
- 2249 - Define a vision for the community;
- 2250 - Establish goals and objectives;
- 2251 - Create an implementation strategy;
- 2252 - Adopt the plan;
- 2253 - Implement the plan; and
- 2254 - Evaluate the outcomes.

2255 To conduct this planning effort, a Toolkit has been provided in the guide. Additionally, staff from the

2256 Department of Health can assist the Town in the development of its Health Equity plan.

2257 **Energy**

2258 Since 2017, Vermont has been working toward a goal of obtaining 90 percent of its energy from

2259 renewable resources by 2050. When the [Comprehensive Energy Plan](#) was released 2022, 23 percent

2260 of Vermont’s energy came from renewables.

2261 Topics related to energy conservation, climate change, and resiliency were important topics to the

2262 participants of the Town Plan visioning sessions. The key concepts are shown in the wordcloud

2263 below.



2264

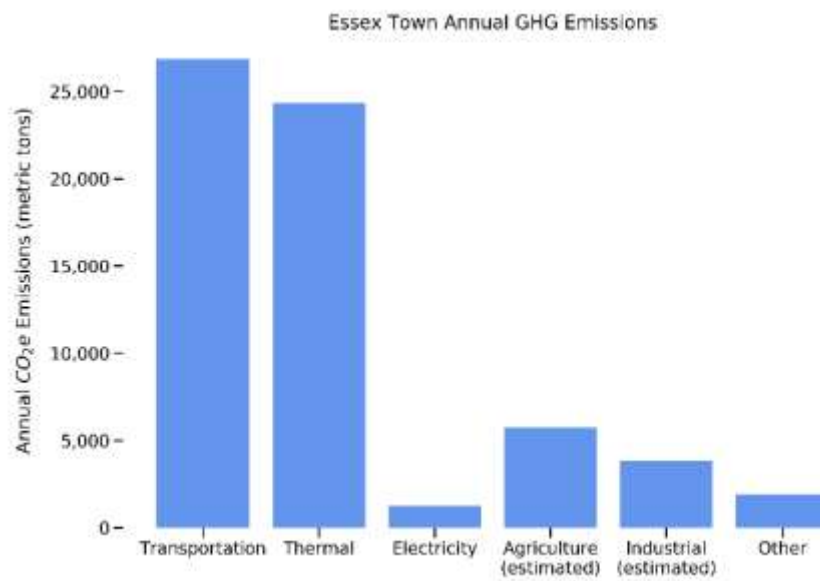
2265 Led by its [Energy Committee](#), Essex is striving to match the state’s 90 percent goal. The Essex

2266 Energy Committee has taken the position that, “For Essex Town to achieve the 90 percent

2267 renewables level of success for the overall betterment of our community, we must develop and

2268 implement plans, which aggressively change the way in which we view energy from the standpoint

2269 of cost, use and conservation.”



2270

2271 Energy use in Vermont falls into three general categories: transportation, commercial and industrial,
 2272 and residential. Transportation accounted for 38 percent of energy use in the state in 2012, the year
 2273 with the most recently available data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Commercial
 2274 and industrial operations accounted for 32 percent of energy use and residential energy use made up
 2275 the remaining 30 percent.

2276 With the 2014 closure of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant, which accounted for 70 percent
 2277 of the electric power generated within the state, Vermont will remain overly dependent on energy
 2278 sources produced outside of the state.

2279 The state's Comprehensive Energy Plan makes many policy recommendations to move toward the
 2280 goal of 90 percent renewables. The recommendations aim to foster economic security and
 2281 independence, safeguards environmental legacy, driving-state innovation and job creation, and
 2282 increase community involvement and investment. The plan prioritizes improvements in energy
 2283 conservation and efficiency and the development of sustainable, local sources of energy.

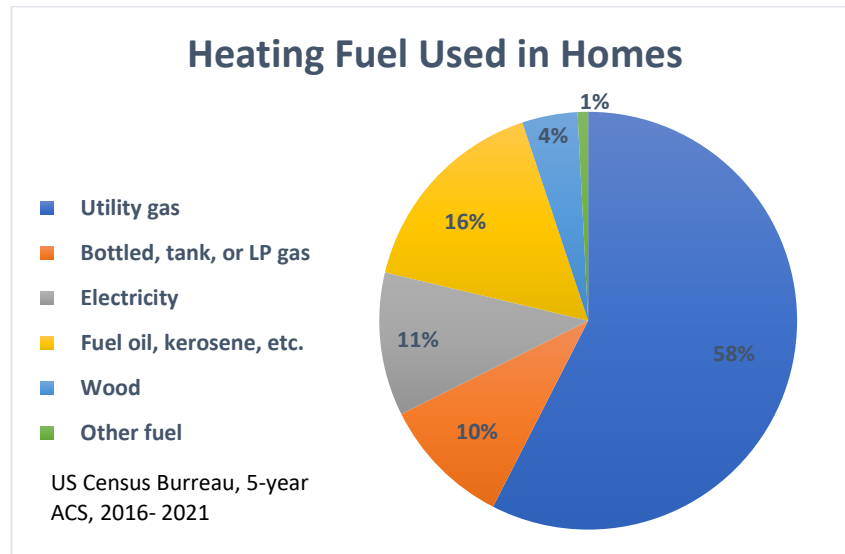
2284 Essex will take a similar approach. The Town has yet to develop its own comprehensive energy plan,
 2285 but the Energy Committee has identified four areas that have the most influence over energy use:
 2286 buildings, community, transportation, and government. The Energy Committee has recommended
 2287 multiple projects in each area. Completing the projects will lead to energy savings and an improved
 2288 quality of life for all residents of Essex through financial savings and less pollution.

2289 **Buildings**

2290 The building inventory in Essex includes government buildings, residences, and commercial
 2291 structures. Town-owned structures range from the new, energy efficient Essex Police Station to
 2292 historic, inefficient buildings such as Memorial Hall. With a goal of saving tax dollars by improving
 2293 energy efficiency of Town-owned structures, the Town should conduct an overall energy assessment
 2294 and retrofit plan for all municipally owned properties.

2295 Residential energy costs are often overlooked due to the current low cost of natural gas and the
 2296 stable cost of electricity. Residential incentives, improvements in zoning regulations, and energy
 2297 education should be at the forefront of energy planning in Essex. Through regulations and
 2298 incentives, the Town should also encourage commercial property owners to invest in energy
 2299 conservation measures, rather than letting heating, cooling, and lighting costs fall to tenants. The

state has [Residential Building Energy Standards](#) and [Commercial Building Energy Standards](#) that establish a minimum level of energy efficiency in new and renovated buildings. The Town should investigate incentives to encourage builders to exceed the basic energy standards by a minimum of 10%.



Source: US Census

Community

Essex residents can improve energy use and improve the community by taking steps to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, supporting the Locavore farm-to-table movement, and installing forest management plans for relevant properties. Additionally, Essex should revisit the concept of a community net metering solar array by conducting an engineering study looking at Town owned land and work with Essex's existing Solar Net Metering Partner to increase its solar capacity. Essex should also be evaluating achievement of net-zero or a suitable standard for its new municipal building being planned for property near Butlers' Corners. The Town may also have an opportunity to lease land off Old Stage Road for utility scale solar development, a project that could have both beneficial financial consequences for the Town, as well as substantially advancing progress towards the 90% by 2050 goals.

Transportation

Promoting compact development, providing more options for walking, biking, and public transit, and encouraging more effective use of automobiles can reduce energy use in the transportation sector. Essex should also explore regulatory changes to facilitate the installation of electric vehicle charging stations as part of development review. [Drive Electric Vermont](#) has information on the use of electric cars. Essex may also have an opportunity to look at a trolley connection off Old Colchester Road – this should be explored as a potential new mode of transportation for the Town.

Government

As the primary source of regulation and enforcement in Essex, as well as a source of guidance for the community, the Town government can champion energy reform and efficiency. In recent years, the Town has upgraded lighting to LED in the municipal office building, the Essex Free Library, all of the Public Works buildings and fire department building. Essex needs to prepare for energy-related issues beyond its control. As the Town and state take steps to improve efficiency, reduce consumption, and incorporate more renewable energy into the mix, large-scale renewable energy

sites such as solar farms may wish to locate in Essex. Though the community could take pride in locally-produced, renewable energy, other Vermont towns can attest to the controversy that can arise when wind turbines are placed atop ridgelines or solar arrays fill previously undeveloped fields.

The [Vermont Public Utility Commission](#), rather than the Town of Essex, issues permits for electric transmission and electric generation facilities. As a result, energy projects can easily bypass local regulations. The Town must work to identify areas where it wants large-scale energy projects to locate, as well as the areas that should be off-limits to such projects. Some siting standards appear in the Aesthetic Resources section of Chapter 3; the Town may wish to work to incorporate these siting standards into a Town-based enhanced energy plan (developed in coordination with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission), as the Public Utility Commission and Act 250 will look to comprehensive plans for some guidance.

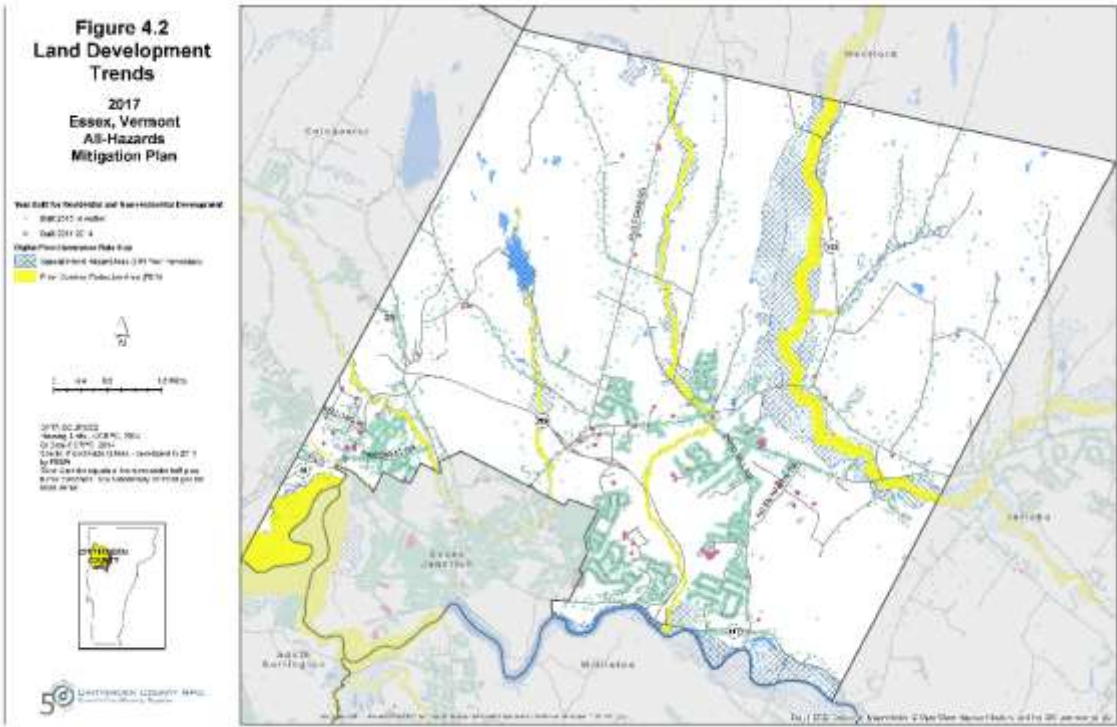
Another important effort the Town can take towards addressing climate change is to be conscious in purchasing decisions for replacement of the light duty vehicle fleet and tools with electric wherever possible, and to at least evaluate whether larger electric vehicles as to their feasibility. Given the Town's annual expenditure on gasoline, this effort poses the potential to reduce the Town's costs, while also helping to achieve the goals set forth in the Global Warming Solutions Act. A further step to help with Essex's overall carbon / GHG footprint would involve consolidating multiple functions into a single building. As with replacing vehicles and tools with electric versions, building consolidation promises benefits for energy efficiency, reduced costs, and overall improvement in Essex's environment.

Many of the energy goals referenced in this section of the plan will be developed as part of creating an Enhanced Energy Plan in coordination with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission. Further development and refinement of these goals will benefit from hiring an Energy Coordinator as stated above, especially given the coordination required among multiple levels of government, community institutions, and residents to make a meaningful impact in this important area.

Flood Resilience

Essex and the rest of Vermont have learned in recent years just how much devastation floods can cause. When Tropical Storm Irene in 2011 and the storms of July and August 2022 hit, massive amounts of rain inundated the state's rivers and streams, flooding downtowns and washing out roads and bridges. Fortunately for Essex, the storms had minimal impact in the town. Other storms, however, showed that Essex is not immune to flooding. Rainstorms in May 2013, for instance, washed out parts of VT Route 15 and Weed Road. With several significant rivers and brooks and numerous smaller streams flowing through town, Essex needs to be ready for future floods.

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



2372

2373 **Hazard Mitigation Plan**

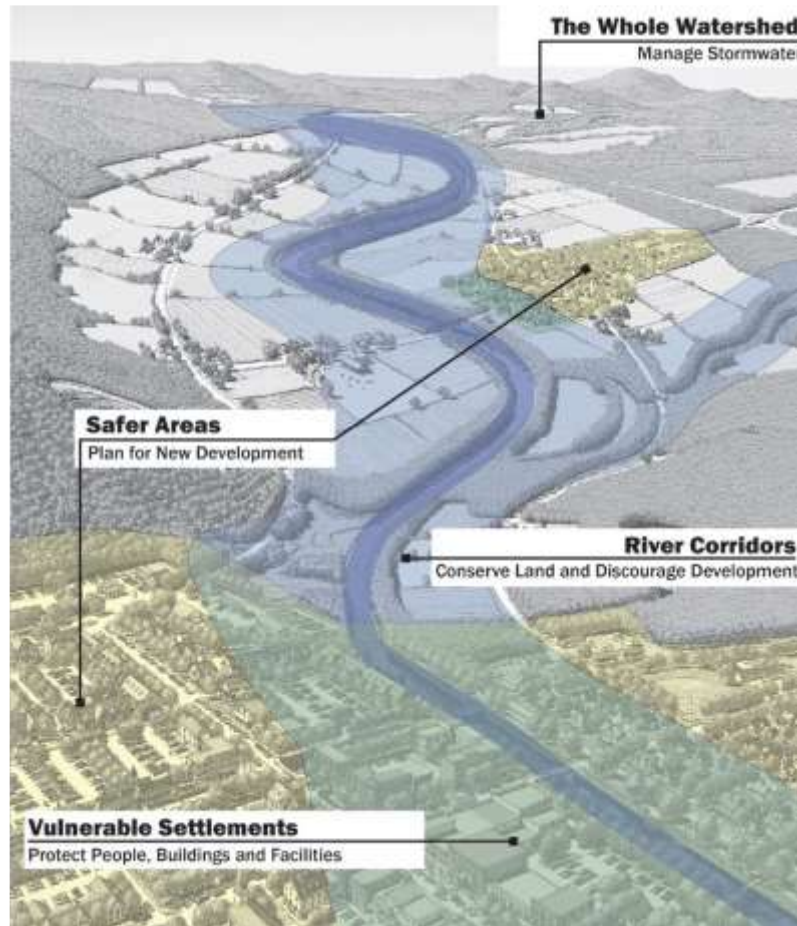
2374 To respond to flooding and other potential disasters, the municipalities in Chittenden County
2375 worked with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission to adopt a [Hazard Mitigation](#)
2376 [Plan](#). The first of which was adopted in 2011 and most recently updated in 2022. Among other
2377 natural, technological and societal hazards, the plan identifies severe winter storms, fluvial erosion
2378 and severe rainstorms as significant natural hazards for Essex. An Annex to the 2022 *Mitigation Plan*
2379 was developed specially for Essex. The Annex identifies and maps floodplains and other areas at
2380 risk.

2381 As of 2022, 17 residences and six commercial or industrial structures were located within the 100-
2382 year floodplain in Essex. Bridges and culverts can help control the flow of water during flooding,
2383 and the *Mitigation Plan* calls for continued implementation of erosion and landslide mitigation
2384 projects where roads regularly incur damage from extreme rain events continued upgrading of
2385 culverts and ditching along roads to mitigate against repeated damages from stormwater or spring
2386 snowmelt, and stormwater management project, and continued implementation of flow restoration
2387 plans for Indian Brook and Sunderland Brook. Additional recommended fluvial hazards mitigation
2388 measures include increased use of rain barrels and gardens, updating river corridor regulations,
2389 updating rural road construction standards, and improved enforcement of development in flood
2390 hazard areas.

2391 Essex is already taking some actions to address flooding concerns. For example, the Town has an
2392 Emergency Operations Plan that provides directives for emergency preparedness and response
2393 planning and a Stormwater Management Plan, which identifies stormwater mitigation projects. The
2394 Town also maintains a culvert inventory and has identified and replaced many of the deficient
2395 culverts. Furthermore, the [Official Zoning Regulations](#) protect vulnerable areas by heavily restricting
2396 development in floodplains and on slopes greater than 20 percent, and by requiring buffers next to
2397 wetlands and streams.

Disaster Recovery and Long-Term Resilience

Following Tropical Storm Irene, the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) Office of Sustainable Communities and the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) (FEMA) partnered to provide the State of Vermont with requested flood planning and preparation assistance. The Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development maintains a [Community Resilience](#) webpage with resources to assist Vermont communities to plan and recover from flooding. The state and EPA recommend improving flood resiliency in four areas: River Corridors, Safer Areas, Vulnerable Settlements, and the Whole Watershed.



Policy options can enhance flood resiliency in four areas: River Corridors, Safer Areas, Vulnerable Settlements, and the Whole Watershed.

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

2420 detail on these hazards. Essex has a capital improvement program for buyouts or relocation of
2421 damaged structures, and FEMA may have after-the-fact funds available for buyouts if an emergency
2422 is declared. The Town's [Official Zoning Regulations](#) protect rebuilt structures but do not allow new
2423 construction in floodplains.

2424 The Indian Brook dam, which was constructed in 1957, is classified by the Vermont Agency of
2425 Natural Resources (ANR) as a high hazard dam. Several homes are located downstream that could
2426 be impacted if the dam were to be breeched. The dam's integrity is monitored regularly, including a
2427 yearly inspection by the state. The most recent inspection rated the condition as poor. ANR received
2428 a FEMA grant to have a select group of dams in the state be studied and the Indian Brook dam, the
2429 only municipal dam, was one of the seven dams selected. As a recipient of this grant and with a
2430 completed study, gives Essex a step up in receiving additional grants for repairs and maintenance. It
2431 also positions the Town to update the dam's Emergency Action Plan and Operations and
2432 Maintenance Plan from their last completion in 2012. **Safer Areas** exist to accommodate new
2433 development in locations that are less vulnerable to flooding. Essex plans for and encourages new
2434 development in Safer Areas through its Future Land Use Map and Zoning District Map, which
2435 direct growth away from areas prone to floods.

2436 In **the Whole Watershed** areas, the EPA guide calls for the implementation of stormwater
2437 management techniques to slow, spread and infiltrate floodwater. Essex has proactively managed
2438 stormwater for a number of years through the [Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System](#) (MS4)
2439 permit program, which requires stormwater management efforts locally and throughout watersheds.
2440 Other ongoing efforts in the town include the management and regulation of roads, driveways and
2441 parking lots through the [Official Zoning Regulations](#) and [Standard Specifications for Construction](#).
2442 The Town can explore watershed-wide stormwater management efforts, many of which are
2443 identified in the Indian Brook and Browns River studies. The Town can expand its own green
2444 infrastructure requirements and adopt tree canopy protection measures, vegetated buffer
2445 requirements, and tighter restrictions on development on steep slopes.

Chapter 3: How We Relate to the Land

In thinking through how Essex should relate to our natural environment, residents wanted to prioritize a **sustainable working landscape** that could provide both food security and economic diversity, as well as to preserve and promote **biodiversity** in those areas of town where development would not occur. Residents also valued the **preservation of open space** and views. For that reason, the first part of this chapter will elaborate on Essex's current *natural resources*.

That said, commercial, residential, and industrial development - referred to collectively as "**the built environment**" - must also be considered as a way in which we relate to our natural environment. If we look back again to residents' input, we find the following theme: "... residents wanted the development review process to consider the broader impacts of development on the community as a whole, as well as to **pay attention to the aesthetics of development**." For that reason, the second part of this chapter will elaborate on Essex's current *aesthetic* and *cultural resources*.

If we view these types of resources together - that is, *natural*, *aesthetic*, and *cultural* - we gain the necessary context to plan for future growth as well as conservation of both the natural and built environment.

What You Will Read:

This chapter will be divided into sections that pertain to each kind of resource named above. Further, since each resource contains multiple categories, the current state of various categories will be described in detail.

So, under **NATURAL RESOURCES**:

- We open the section with an evaluation of Essex's **geology**, which for our purposes can be summarized here as *topography*, *bedrock*, and *soil*.
- Following this, we will explore current **water resources** in Essex, which can be further divided into *groundwater* and *surface water*.
- Next, we will inventory both **forest** and **agricultural lands**, with a view to providing context for what "preservation of open space" means.
- Finally, we will discuss the impact of **invasive species** on the natural environment in Essex.

Under **AESTHETIC RESOURCES**:

- We will examine our **natural scenic resources**, which refers in this context to areas of town from which we can view significant natural features such as (but certainly not limited to!) mountain ranges.
- Then we will look at our **landscaped scenic resources**, which refers in this context to those areas of town where development has interacted well with the roadside by, for example, judicious use of landscaping the pre-existing natural landscape, or aesthetically pleasing planting of trees or flowers.
- Finally, we will look at **building aesthetics** and the relation that a well-built building can have to both our natural and landscaped resources, as well as how buildings can interact with each other to make a pleasing visual experience.

2485 Under **CULTURAL RESOURCES**:

- 2486 • We will offer an inventory of our current stock of **historic buildings**, with special attention
2487 paid to Essex Center and Fort Ethan Allen. You will learn the historical context for these
2488 buildings and how their form and function interact, as well as what uses exist within these
2489 structures that provide meaningful cultural experiences for the town.

2490 In keeping with the overall theme of how Essex relates to its different types of land, the remainder
2491 of the chapter will consist of an explanation of how the town is divided into different *planning areas*
2492 and how those relate to Essex's Zoning Districts. The boundaries of planning areas and zoning
2493 districts are a vital tool for planners - and the residents who give planners vital input - to set which
2494 uses are most appropriate in which part of town, and also to set which sort of buildings may be
2495 more aesthetically suited than others in a given area of town.

2496 **Natural Setting**

2497 Generally speaking, Essex can be divided into a northern, more rural section and a southern, more
2498 developed section. The northern half of town is marked by three hilly areas that run in a north-south
2499 direction, each separated by river valleys. The hills on the west extend into Colchester, Milton and
2500 Westford. Indian Brook Reservoir, a 60-acre reservoir, sits among the western hills. On the eastern
2501 side of town, hills extend to Westford and Underhill. A narrower ridgeline sits in the middle of
2502 town. Forests cover much of the hillsides, providing large blocks of habitat.

2503 In the valleys between the hills, Alder Brook and the Browns River flow through land that has been
2504 mostly dedicated to agriculture and residences. Other significant waterways in Essex include Abbey
2505 Brook, which flows out of the northeastern hills into Browns River, and Indian Brook and
2506 Sunderland Brook, both of which flow through the western side of Essex into Colchester.

2507 The southern half of town is flatter and contains the bulk of Essex's neighborhoods and commercial
2508 and industrial areas.

2509 **Natural Resources**

2510 A description of a community's natural resources is a fundamental element of a comprehensive plan.
2511 By recognizing its natural features – topography, slope, geology, soils, water resources, agricultural
2512 and forest lands – a town can protect those resources and ensure a high quality of life for its
2513 residents.

2514 Essex's 22,166 acres (or 34.63 square miles) feature a diverse natural setting complete with river
2515 valleys, large forests, and many hills. The presence and locations of those natural resources have
2516 guided development throughout the history of Essex and will continue to do so well into the future.

2517 Below are the top themes related to natural resources and conservation that were discussed during
2518 the Town Plan visioning sessions.



Wildlife Wetlands
Historic Water Quality Education
Biodiversity
Scenic Views
Invasives
Regulations
Forest Management

2519

2520 **Geology: Topography, Bedrock, Soil**

2521 Essex's landscape – its topography and soils – was shaped by glaciers that traversed the area and the
 2522 ancient lakes and seas that covered low-lying parts of town. Combined, topography and soil
 2523 determine the suitability of land for development.

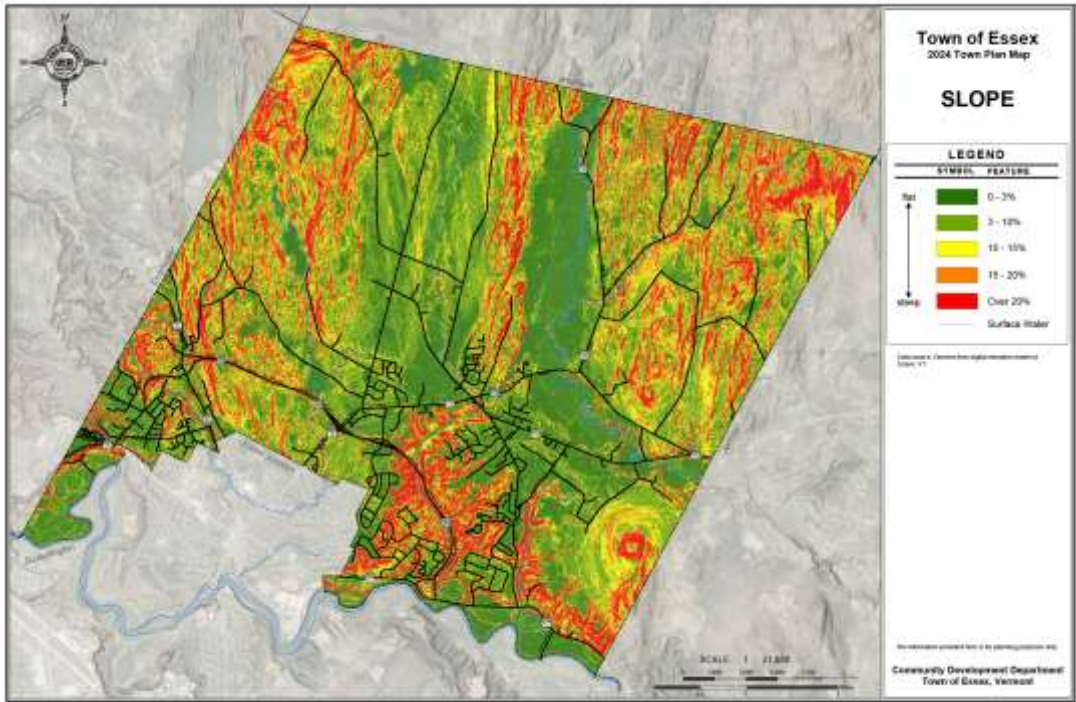
2524 Essex ranges from a low elevation of 170 feet in the southwestern part of town to a high point of
 2525 1,330 feet in the northwest corner of town. The floodplains of the Winooski River, Browns River,
 2526 and Alder Brook represent the flat areas of town, although steep ravines surround Alder Brook as it
 2527 flows into the Winooski River. The Brigham Hill area in northwest Essex and the high rolling hills in
 2528 northeast Essex also contain areas with steep slopes. Ideally, development should occur on land with
 2529 slopes of 10 percent or less, which creates minimal restrictions for construction and septic systems.

2530 **BOX: Suitability of slopes for construction**

- 2531 • **0 - 3%:** Suitable for almost all types of construction but may require drainage
- 2532 improvements
- 2533 • **3 - 10%:** Most desirable for construction due to minimal restrictions
- 2534 • **10 - 15%:** Suitable for low density housing on large lots with some consideration for
- 2535 erosion control and stormwater runoff.
- 2536 • **15 - 20%:** Construction becomes expensive, and erosion and runoff problems are likely;
- 2537 slopes are unsuitable for most septic systems. Construction is discouraged.
- 2538 • **20% and steeper:** Construction shall be avoided due to the likelihood of environmental
- 2539 damage.

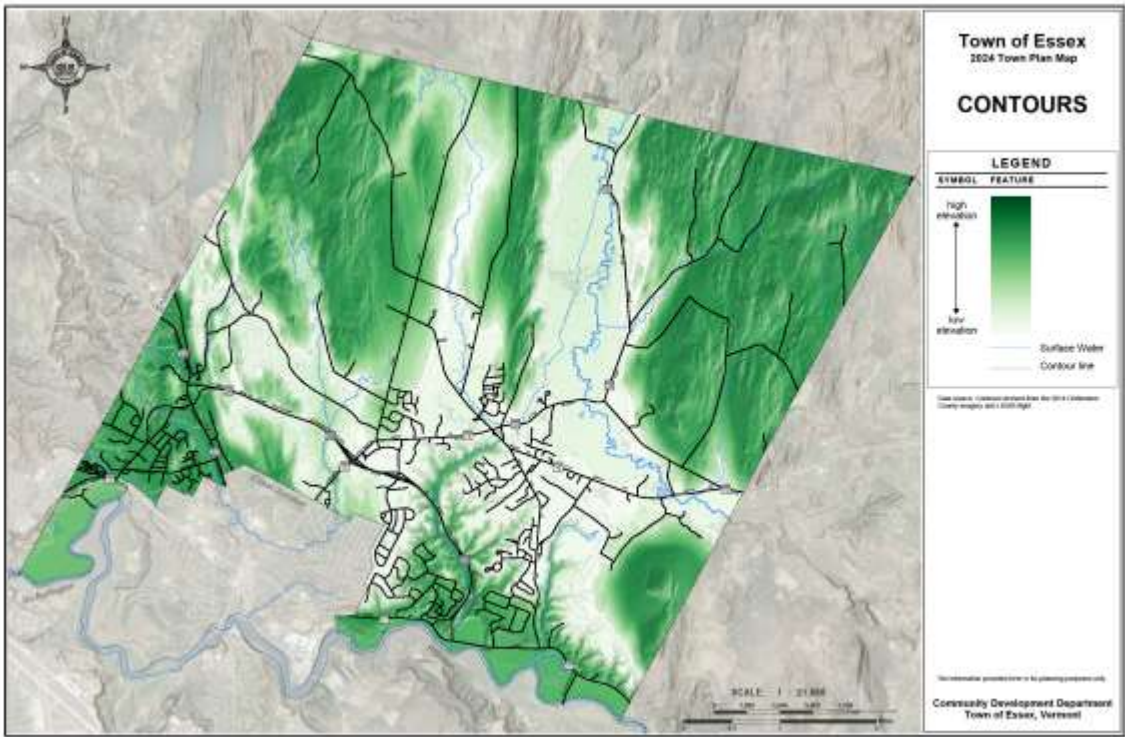
2540

MAP 8: Slope



2541
2542
2543

MAP 9: Contours



2544
2545
2546

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 adjoining map shows the general soil patterns for the town and indicates areas that are suitable or unsuitable for septic systems.

MAP 10: Soils

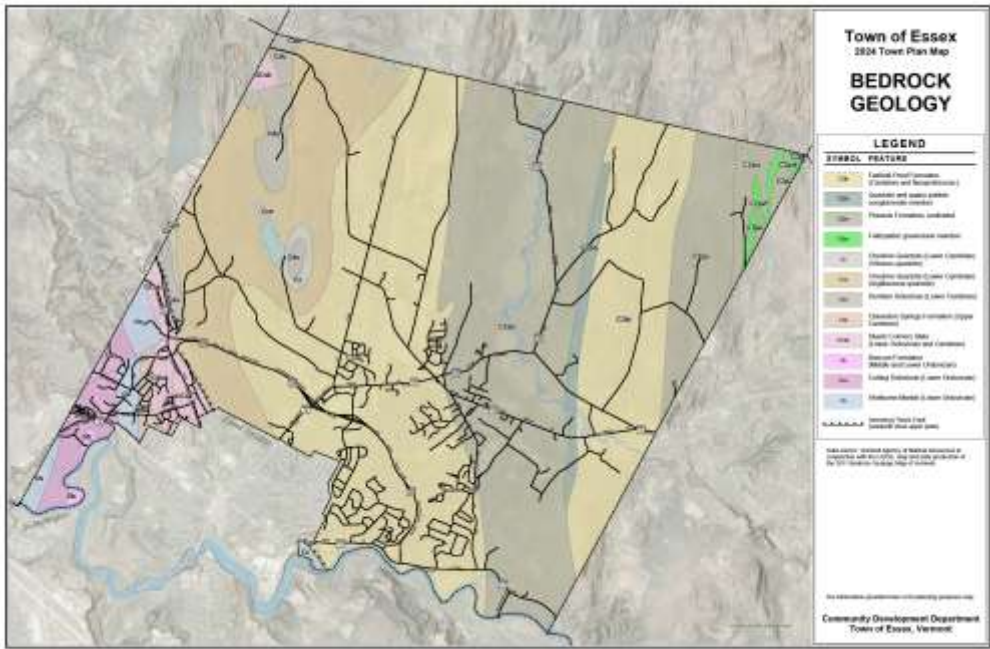


Predictably, most development in Essex has occurred in the flatter parts of Town. Municipal sewer serves many of these areas, although some neighborhoods within the sewer core still rely on septic systems.

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.

2566

MAP 11: Bedrock Geology



2567

2568 Two thrust faults run southeast to northwest through the southwestern quadrant of Essex, near Lost
2569 Nation Road and VT Route 2A. No record of movement along the faults exists, so seismic danger
2570 seems minimal. A deep layer of porous carbonate sits beneath the fault, allowing ready movement of
2571 water and facilitating the aquifer recharge process.

2572 Rock, sand and gravel are capable of being mined and quarried. The Saxon Hill area has and continues
2573 to undergo sand extraction, and in 2014 and 2015 the Planning Commission approved a project to
2574 quarry ledge on Old Colchester Road. According to the Vermont State Geological Survey, Essex does
2575 not have any known mineral deposits. The Town regulates extraction through its [Official Zoning](#)
2576 [Regulations](#), but the Town should plan for and be better prepared to regulate future mining and
2577 quarrying operations for rock, sand, and gravel.

2578 **SIDEBAR: Noteworthy sand and gravel deposits**

- 2579 1. Northern part of Osgood Hill Road
2580 2. Weed Road and Sleepy Hollow Road
2581 3. Old Pump Road near the Jericho town line
2582 4. Area around Colonel Page Road, Chapin Road and Tower Road
2583 5. VT Route 15 near the Jericho town line to Weed Road
2584 6. Southeastern quadrant of the Town of Essex including the area around VT Route 2A, VT
2585 289, Sand Hill Road and Saxon Hill.
2586 Some of the deposits are located in environmentally sensitive areas.

2587 Source: [Vermont Open Geodata Portal, Sand and Soil Deposits](#), 2022

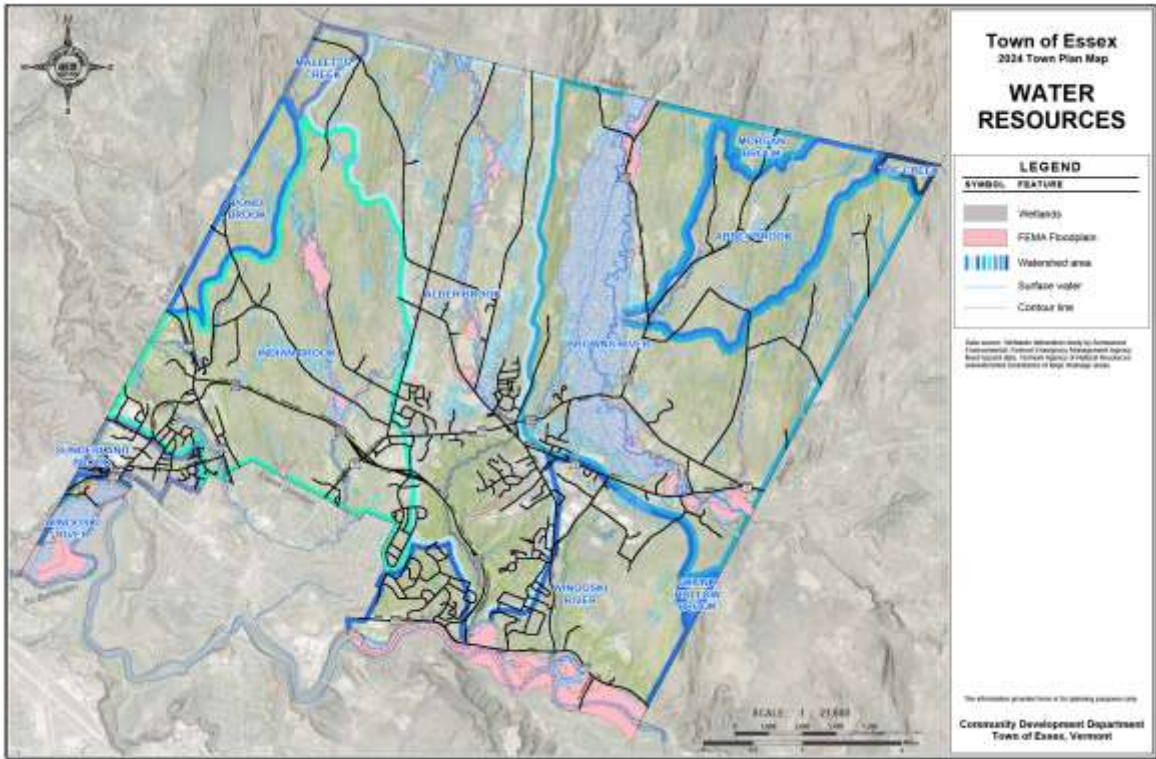
2588 **Water Resources**

2589 Water resources in Essex are classified as groundwater or surface water. Groundwater sits below the
2590 earth's surface and comes from precipitation that infiltrates into the soil and bedrock instead of
2591 evaporating or running off into ponds, streams and rivers. Information about the quality and supply
2592 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 12: 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 Winooski 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](#).

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

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

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

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

In the aftermath of 2011's Tropical Storm Irene, the state required municipalities to include a flood resiliency section in their municipal plans. While Essex escaped the devastation wrought on many other parts of the state by Irene and the widespread flooding of July 2023, the town has suffered from its share of flooding events, including the May 2013 storms that led to washouts on VT Route 15 and Weed Road. As these storm events are becoming more common, the Town needs to prioritize developing resilient infrastructure.

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 (FEH) areas. – 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. The Town should update its zoning regulations to specify that wetlands buffers also apply to vernal pools.

Forest Lands

Nearly 13,000 acres, half of Essex is forested, yet forest fragmentation from development is a major threat. The largest forests in Essex stretch north from the northeastern and northwestern parts of town into Colchester, Westford, and Jericho. The largely unbroken woodlands serve as prime habitat. Also identified are Habitat Connectors that contain smaller forested areas, wetlands, and rivers and streams. These connectors make important linkages between the larger Forest Blocks, but do not provide the level of ecological functionality that Forest Blocks have. In areas where there are large gaps between current Forest Blocks and or Habitat Connectors, the creation/restoration of additional Habitat Connectors should be considered.

It is critical to avoid fragmentation of large blocks of significant wildlife habitat and to maintain connectivity between habitat blocks as corridors for wildlife migration.

Benefits of Protecting Forests

Essex's forests provide large habitat blocks for wildlife and offer:

- Ecological benefits
- Economic potential through timber harvests
- Recreation via 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
- Hunting opportunities

Ways Forests are Protected in Essex

When development is proposed in locations that could negatively affect habitat blocks, various design guidelines and regulations are in place to ensure that the impacts are adequately mitigated. Additionally, there are some optional programs that landowners can participate in that support land conservation efforts and can reward landowners with tax reductions or other benefits. Some of the key ways that forests are protected are listed below:

Zoning & Subdivision Regulations

Zoning and subdivision regulations are the primary ways that the potential impacts on habitats from proposed development are reviewed and mitigated. The regulations vary depending on the zoning district and the specific environmental conditions and context of the site proposed for development. During the review process associated improvements can be considered such as enhancements to wildlife corridors, provisions for recreation trails, and other ecological aspects such as riparian protections.

Conservation Reserve Fund

The voters of the Town implemented the [Conservation Reserve Fund](#) in 2018 to further the permanent protection of land in Essex for the public good, particularly those parcels or parts of parcels that prevent sprawl or contain valuable natural or recreational resources. Funding recommendations are provided to the Selectboard by the Conservation and Trails Committee for consideration and approval. This fund was used once to offset the tax burden associated with protecting a property in 2019 for approximately \$4,600. As of 2023, this fund has amassed about \$74,000. Town staff should work with the Conservation and Trails Committee to achieve annual funding recommendations for the Selectboard so that the fund can be utilized as intended.

Farm and Open Lands Contract

The Town's Farm and Open Lands Contract (FOLC) program also helps protect open land, of which is mostly forested, and farms by providing local tax breaks for enrolled properties. Essex has 5 parcels enrolled in the Open lands portion of the program, with a total of 469 acres enrolled. More information about Essex's FOLC program and Vermont's Current Use program may be found in the Agricultural Lands section of this chapter.

State of Vermont Use Value Appraisal Program (aka Current Use Program)

The [state of Vermont's Use Value Appraisal](#) program – also known as Current Use – helps protect agricultural and forestland by providing tax breaks for properties that actively farm or maintain forest or wildlife management plans. Thirty-nine parcels in Essex participated in the state's Current Use forestry program in 2023, with a total of 2,353 acres enrolled.

Act 171

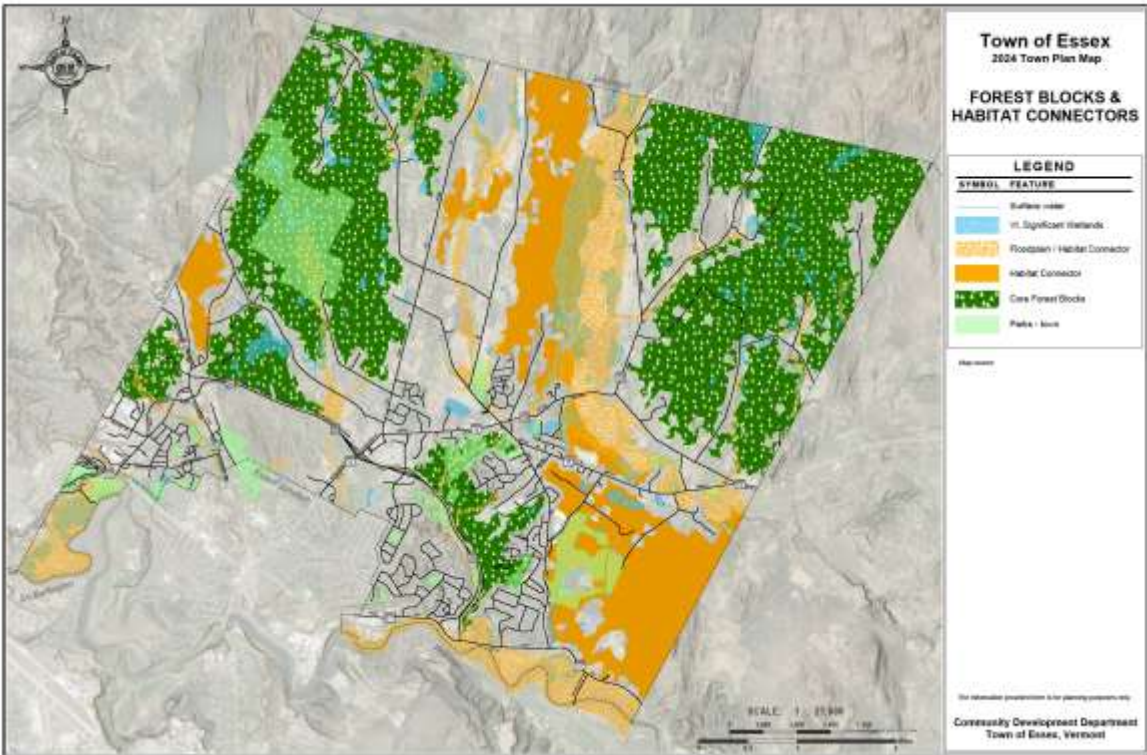
Act 171, enacted in 2016, requires town and regional plans to identify areas of important forest blocks and habitat connectors, and to minimize the impacts of development in those areas.

There are three main goals the Town has regarding Act 171:

- Maintain and improve the ecological integrity of intact forest blocks.
- Maintain and improve forest blocks that are large enough to support working forests.
- Maintain and improve the functionality of habitat connectors.

Act 171 encourages conservation and stewardship of natural resources, natural areas, wildlife corridors, waterways, floodplains, scenic areas, open land, forest blocks, steep slopes, and sensitive areas. With Essex contributing to the protection and restoration of these natural areas, and by working with current landowners and surrounding towns to protect these areas, Essex can do its part to support conservation in the state of Vermont.

MAP 13: Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors



Nearly 24,000 forested acres statewide have been identified, through the state's Biofinder mapping system to have significant value and should be conserved and/or protected. The map above shows the Essex Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors that were identified to have significant value and should be protected. Act 171 guidance provides for the inclusion of recreational trails within the Habitat Connectors; this provides an exciting opportunity to rethink the proposed trail network to make use of these corridors to provide trail connections and to upgrade the areas along existing trails to improve the habitat connectivity of those areas.

Recommendations

1. The Town should continue to use a variety of regulatory and non-regulatory strategies to minimize future fragmentation of forest blocks and maintain or improve connectivity between the forest blocks. Special attention should be given to deploying the Conservation Reserve Fund to expand trail networks, preserve resources with high-value ecological significance, and as otherwise allowed.
2. Undertake a review of existing State and Local land conservation and tax relief programs with the objective of consolidating, streamlining, and promoting these programs.

3. Develop protection measures for identified Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors. In accordance with Act 171 guidance, include consideration of rerouting and/or expanding the proposed and existing recreational trail network to make use of, and to bolster, the network of Habitat Connectors.
4. Essex should coordinate with local municipalities of Milton, Jericho, Colchester and Westford to protect shared forest blocks. For example, the Town could work with a natural resources consultant to identify additional habitat connectors and areas where there are gaps between Forest Blocks and where restoration should occur to fill in those gaps.
5. To protect Forest Blocks, Habitat Connectors and preserve Essex's rural countryside, the Town could seek adoption of a conservation overlay district, other stricter regulations, partnerships with the Vermont Land Trust or The Nature Conservancy, or other means.

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 2022 only five parcels, 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. Although 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. 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, Lawrence Family Farms, and Chapin Orchard – that market and sell their products locally through direct sales, farm stands, farmers' markets, and community supported agriculture (CSA). Also of note are several maple sugaring operations throughout Town.

As noted in the forest section on this plan, the state's Current Use program helps protect forestland and active agricultural land by providing tax breaks for properties that actively farm maintain forest management plans. Thirty-two parcels in Essex participated in the state's Current Use agricultural program in 2023, with a total of 1,006 acres enrolled. This compared with twenty-five parcels that had farm acreage enrolled in the Current Use farm program in 2014 with a total of 930 acres of farmland enrolled. The Town's Forest and Open Lands Contract program (FOLC) helps protect farms by providing local tax breaks for enrolled properties, has four parcels enrolled in the farm portion of the program, with a total of 1,089 acres enrolled. More information about the forestland portion of the Current Use and FOLC programs may be found in the Forest Land section of this chapter.

Much of the farmland remaining in Essex coincides with floodplains, particularly in the Browns River Valley and along the Winooski River. The Essex floodplains are some of the most fertile soils in Essex, however, the downside is they flood, which has become more frequent in recent years. Flooding is more of a short-term concern; the flooding is what makes the soils fertile. The Town should continue to maintain or improve the existing zoning restrictions in the floodplains to 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 Town recently allowed residents to have up to six to 12 chickens on a lot in areas where farm animals are prohibited. Participants of the Town Plan visioning process expressed strong support for local agriculture, supporting local farmers, community gardens as well as several other topics. The wordcloud below illustrates the key concepts heard during these discussions.



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, bear, and raccoons. Expanding protections on forest lands and habitat connectors will serve as a way to protect wildlife in Essex.

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, and mammals such as coyotes, fox, mink, moose, and muskrat.

2837 Invasive Species

2838 As described on VTinvasives.org, "Invasive species are plants, animals, and other organisms that are
2839 introduced to a non-native ecosystem and also cause harm to the environment, economy, or human
2840 health." These include a wide range of organisms, though the most common ones are plants (both
2841 on land and in the water) and insects.

2842 Not every non-native species becomes an invasive; for instance, people grow ornamental plants,
2843 raise pets or farm animals, or introduce insects outside their native range. What distinguishes an
2844 invasive species is that it not only survives, but thrives on its own in the wild, often disrupting
2845 existing (native) organisms and ecosystems in the process. This is often because invasive species do
2846 not have a natural predator in their non-native environment, and native organisms have not had
2847 enough time to evolve a resistance or ability to compete with the newcomer.

2848 VTinvasives.org has a wealth of information on invasive species found in our state, including how to
2849 identify them, where they came from (if known), their lifecycle, why they are a problem, and how to
2850 manage their impacts. The Essex Conservation and Trails Committee also has assembled
2851 information on common invasive species found in our town.

2852 What Can Essex Residents do about Invasive Species? First, they can learn how to identify various
2853 invasive species through VTinvasives.org. If invasive species are identified, residents should consider
2854 [reporting it](#), especially if it is a new species that is spreading rapidly. VTinvasives.org also contains
2855 information about how to manage invasive species on our own land or waters. Second, join the
2856 Conservation and Trails Committee for their Spring and Fall Clean-Up Days (typically held on a
2857 weekend in May and September, respectively).

2858 Residents have helped manage forest pests, by signing up for the [Forest Pest First Detectors](#)
2859 [Program](#), managed by the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program. This is a way to learn
2860 how to identify signs of invasive insects, understand their impacts on forests and humans, learn what
2861 to do if you find one, and find out how to get involved in your community's efforts to manage them.

2862 While it would be nearly impossible to prevent an invasive outbreak in large tracts of forest such as
2863 Indian Brook or Saxon Hill, the Town has begun to implement the 2018 [Street Tree Management](#)
2864 [Plan](#). The Town's Capital Projects budget includes a "Natural Resources Management" account,
2865 which has been used for the removal and treatment of street and park ash trees beginning in 2021.
2866 The Town should continue with treatment and removal of the ash street trees in the coming years.

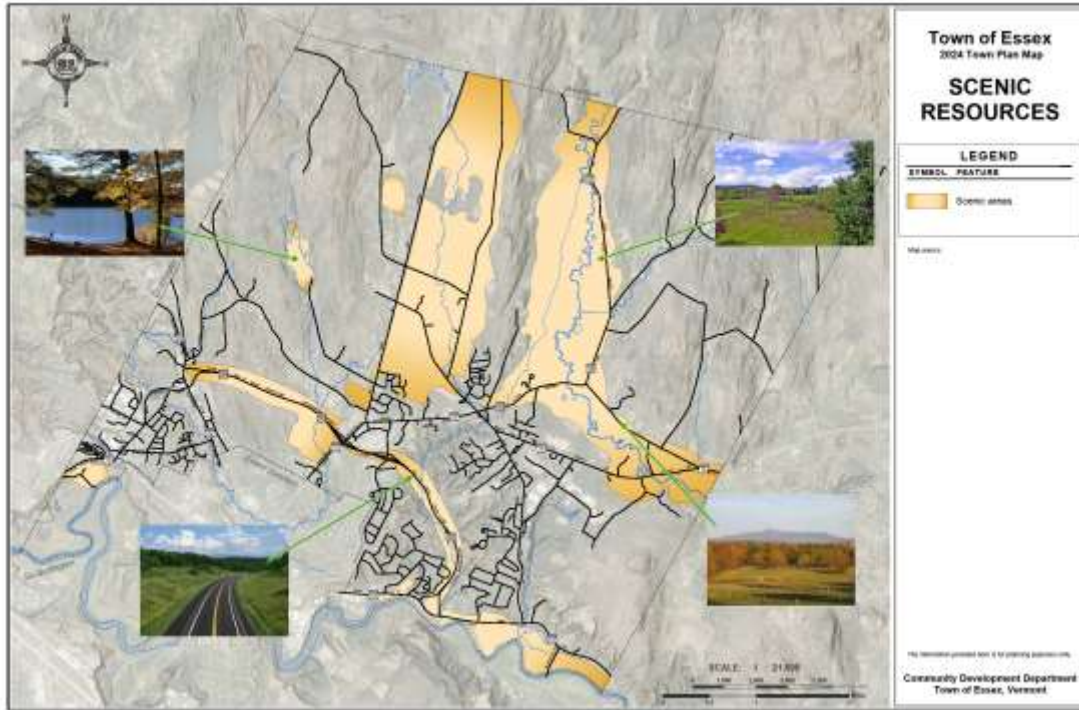
2867 Indian Brook Reservoir has had to deal with aquatic invasives. Eurasian Watermilfoil was identified
2868 in the reservoir in 2001. The Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation describes milfoil
2869 as "a rooted, submerged perennial plant that grows rapidly, producing dense stands. It aggressively
2870 competes with native plant communities reducing biodiversity. Dense mats clog propellers, impair
2871 swimming, restrict boating and fishing accesses, and affect water quality." Populations of the
2872 invasive have fluctuated in the subsequent years, and the Town has used herbicides as well as non-
2873 chemical methods to try to control and remove the plant.

2874 Aesthetic Resources

2875 The visual character of a community helps define its identity and sense of place. Scenic views and
2876 roads, as well as historic buildings and neighborhoods, reflect the cultural development and
2877 character of a town. Scenic resources can include natural features or a mixture of natural features
2878 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 Essex Town Center provide views of farms, rolling hills, forests, mountains, historic buildings, rivers, and streams.

MAP 14: Scenic Resource



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

- Parallel north-south ridgelines running the length of Essex, divided by roads, form the backdrop for views from lower areas and provide high elevations for viewing distant ridges and mid-ground expanses of farmland divided by hedgerows.
- Distant views of Mount Mansfield, Camel's Hump, the Bolton range, and the Adirondacks.
- Large, relatively flat terrain along the Winooski River Valley provides views of mountains in both directions; the long-distance views are not often available in the hillier areas of Vermont.
- Dirt roads through forested hills and steep slopes provide for appealing foreground views.
- Several streambeds and floodplain areas create interesting foreground and mid-ground views, especially when close to farmland.
- Historic buildings and homesteads in rural settings or compact settlements.
- A sense of separation of the developed central part of Essex from surrounding lands and towns. This is especially evident on VT Route 15 leading to Jericho, on VT Route

117/River Road leading to Jericho, Williston and Richmond, and roads heading north toward Westford. These gateways to Essex are visually appealing due to minimal development.

- Flat terrain in the vicinity of Chapin Road, Colonel Page Road, Old Stage Road, and Towers Road is comprised of low-density development, farmland, pasture, and open space surrounded by wooded ridges and hills.

In 2008, the Selectboard adopted the [Essex Open Space Plan](#), which contains a number of recommendations to protect Essex's aesthetic resources. [The Views to the Mountain: A Scenic Protection Manual](#) was developed in 2011, which includes 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 map, which along with a *Scenic Resource Preservation Overlay District (SPRPO)* was incorporated into the zoning and subdivision regulations in 2017. The Planning Commission reviews proposed development located in the *SPRPO* against its standards during its development review.

The town's aesthetic qualities are not limited to designated scenic resources. During the Town Plan public listening sessions, significant support for improving aesthetic qualities, especially between the Essex Town Center and Historic Center along Route 15 was expressed. Residents have also called for better landscaping along roads and on individual properties. [The ETC NEXT Plan](#) supports establishing an identity for this part of Town, which can be realized through tangible elements such as wayfinding, architecture and streetscape, combined with less tangible aspects of creating a "gateway" to the area. The Town should consider implementing these strategies.

Zoning requires that powerlines be buried, but historically this was not the case, and they are visible along many of the Town's roads settled before the zoning rules changed. Burying powerlines along VT Route 15 would serve to improve the spectacular views of Mount Mansfield and would also support the goal of improving aesthetic qualities in the Essex Town Center.

Other areas along state roads are also important to improve aesthetics outside of the Essex Town Center and Historic Center. These areas include VT Route 15 in front of Fort Ethan Allen and past the Historic center to the Jericho border, VT Route 2A at the Colchester and Essex Junction border, VT Route 117 at the Jericho and Essex Junction border, and VT Route 128 at the Westford border and intersection of VT Route 15.

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. In 2022, the Town became a [Tree City USA](#) town, which includes a commitment for the Town to plant new and maintain existing street trees.

The Town should develop an enhanced energy plan, as described in the Energy section in Chapter 2 of this plan. Including stricter siting standards for the location of renewable energy generation facilities in Essex is a priority. Until such standards are in place, the Town will have little say in the siting of renewable energy generation facilities through town and of specific concern are those identified as "Most Scenic" in Appendix 6, Segment Maps, [Views to the Mountain: a Scenic Protection Manual](#) (2011).

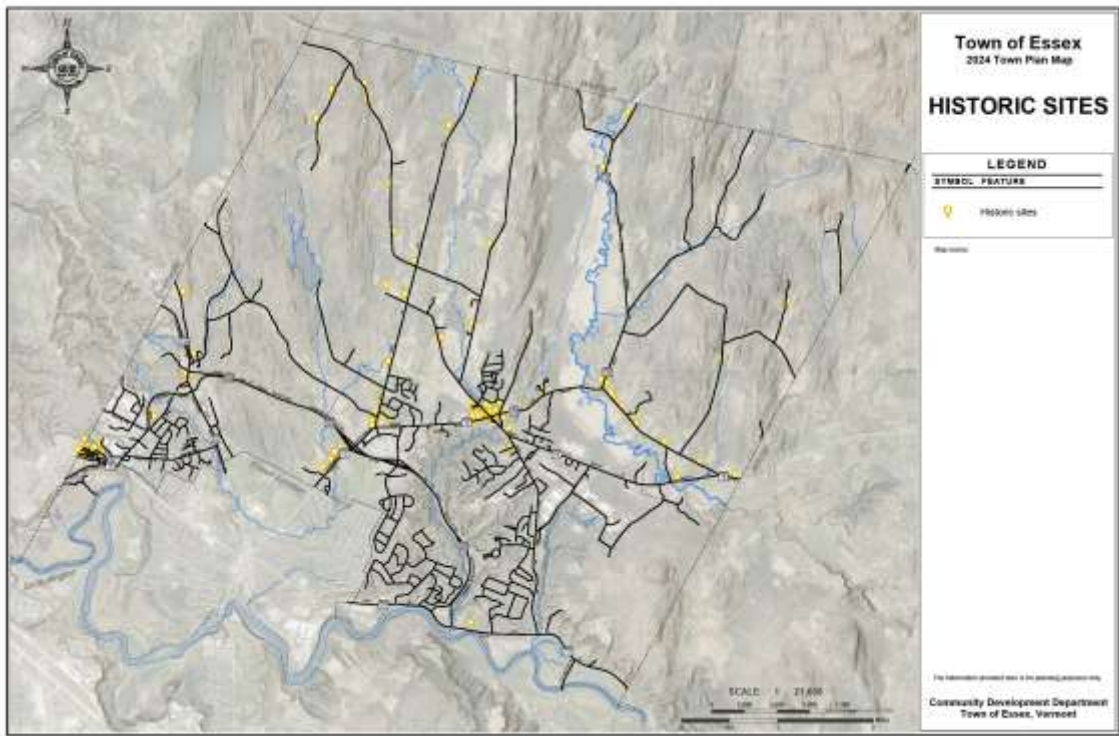
Historic, Archeological and Cultural Resources

Historic Resources

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 86 individual historic sites in Essex. 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. x

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

MAP 15 Historic Sites



The [Vermont Planning and Development Act](#) allows the enabling authority to create a Design Control District for “any area containing structures of historical, architectural or cultural merit.” Unless a design control district is established for a specific area, neither the Planning Commission nor the Zoning Board of Adjustment has any jurisdiction over ensuring that the design and scale of a building is harmonious with its surroundings. To maintain and enhance the cultural heritage of Essex's historic neighborhoods, and to eliminate or minimize substantial character alteration of existing buildings, the Town enforces design control guidelines in the Essex Town Center and Fort

Ethan Allen. The two areas were established as design control districts in 1987. [Historic Preservation and Design Control Standards for Essex Center and Fort Ethan Allen](#), a report prepared as part of the 1991 Town Plan, shall be consulted in the design or review of any project within the historic areas. The Town should update the design regulations in the Essex Town Center (ETC) area, as called for in the [ETC NEXT Plan](#).

Essex has many other historic structures and few tools to protect them from demolition or damage to their architectural integrity, any historic building is at risk.

[The Essex Community Historical Society](#) and Harriot Farnsworth Powell Museum are an additional resource for more information on the historic resources found in Essex. Members of the Society have urged the Town to adopt comprehensive measures to protect historic structures and archeological resources, and the protection measures should be taken into consideration. A [Village Center state designation](#) for Historic Essex Center will make tax credits available for renovation and restoration of historic structures in the designated area.

Archeological Resources

As discussed in the Historic background section of Chapter 2 of this Plan, early Native American settlements have been discovered in Essex. Archeological sites are generally not identified until development occurs on a site. Native America archeological sites have generally been found near a water source and on gently sloping land. This was proven true for Native Americans in Essex, as during the early stages of planning for the Circumferential Highway. Archeological digs unearthed evidence of Native American settlements near Indian Brook, from the Late Paleoindian (10,000 – 9,000 years ago) Period, the Early – Late Archaic Periods (9,000 - 3,000 years ago), and Early – Late Woodland Period (3,000 years ago -the time of European settlement, 1600). Additional evidence of Native American settlement has also been revealed in Saxon Hill. Evidence of early European settlement archeological resources can also be found from the time of European settlement in Essex. Locations can be identified through historical document and map research.

Cultural Resources

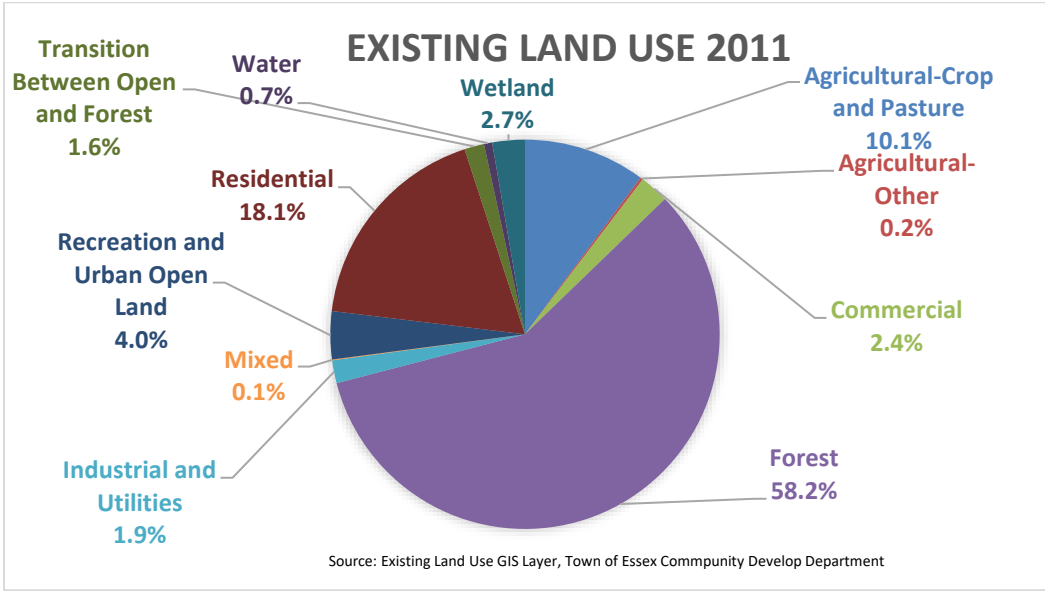
In addition to the built environment, Essex has a strong cultural community. The town is the home of the [Essex Art League](#), one of the largest local art groups in the state. The league's membership is open to any interested Vermonter. Memorial Hall, an historic structure, hosts the [Essex Community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

Land Use and Development

During the Town Plan visioning process, residents and businesspeople envisioned the following as their high-priority items for Essex: affordable housing; a variety of local businesses; a sustainable working landscape that could preserve and promote biodiversity; and bicycle and pedestrian connectivity that could support greater recreation opportunities. Participants also expressed a desire that citizens should provide input into the planning and zoning process. The wordcloud below shows the top concepts expressed during that Town Plan visioning process.



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 two of the denser areas: the Essex Town Center (ETC), located at the intersection of VT Route 15 and 289; and the Susie Wilson Road corridor. Industrial and commercial development has also picked up in the Saxon Hill and Kellogg Road area, which has some of the last remaining undeveloped industrial land in Chittenden County. The ETC, 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 sewernfrastructure can handle denser development than wells and septic systems.



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, as encouraged by the CCRPC and the state. The Susie Wilson Road corridor and Essex 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. Although 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. Industrial land is primarily located in Essex West, Fort Ethan Allen, and the Saxon Hill area. A small portion of developed industrial land abuts Essex Junction along VT Route 117/River Road.

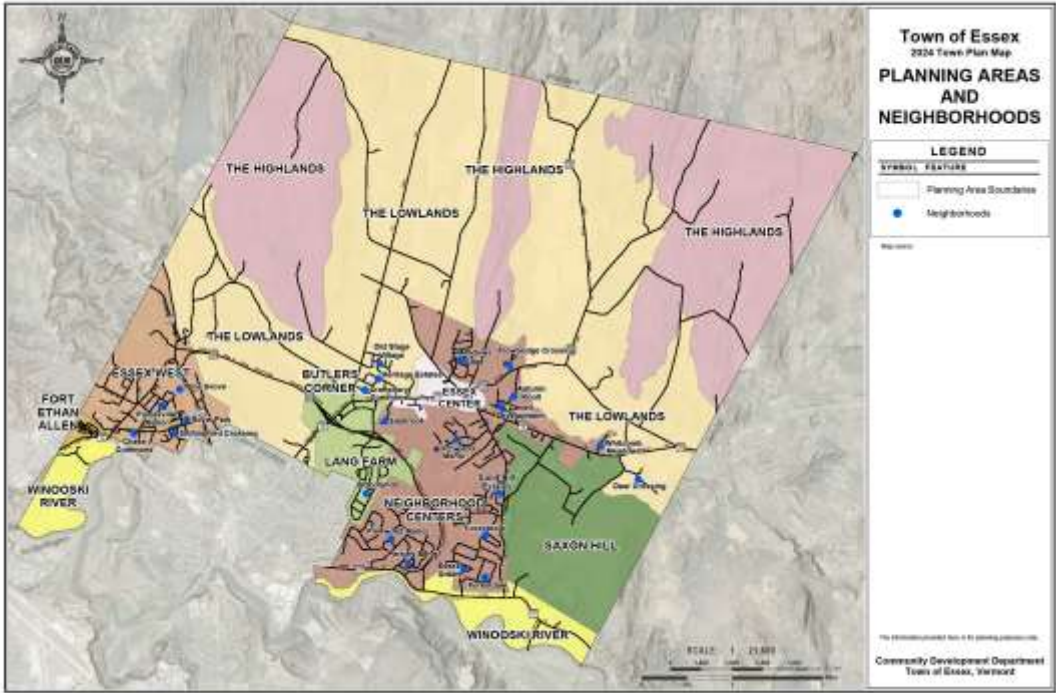
Essex had long conducted its planning with the expectation that the Circumferential Highway would be completed. Since the 2011 *Town Plan*, however, the governor announced that the Circ would not be finished. As a result of the announcement, Essex has worked with Colchester, Williston, the City of Essex 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

Essex is divided 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.

MAP 16 Planning Areas and Neighborhoods

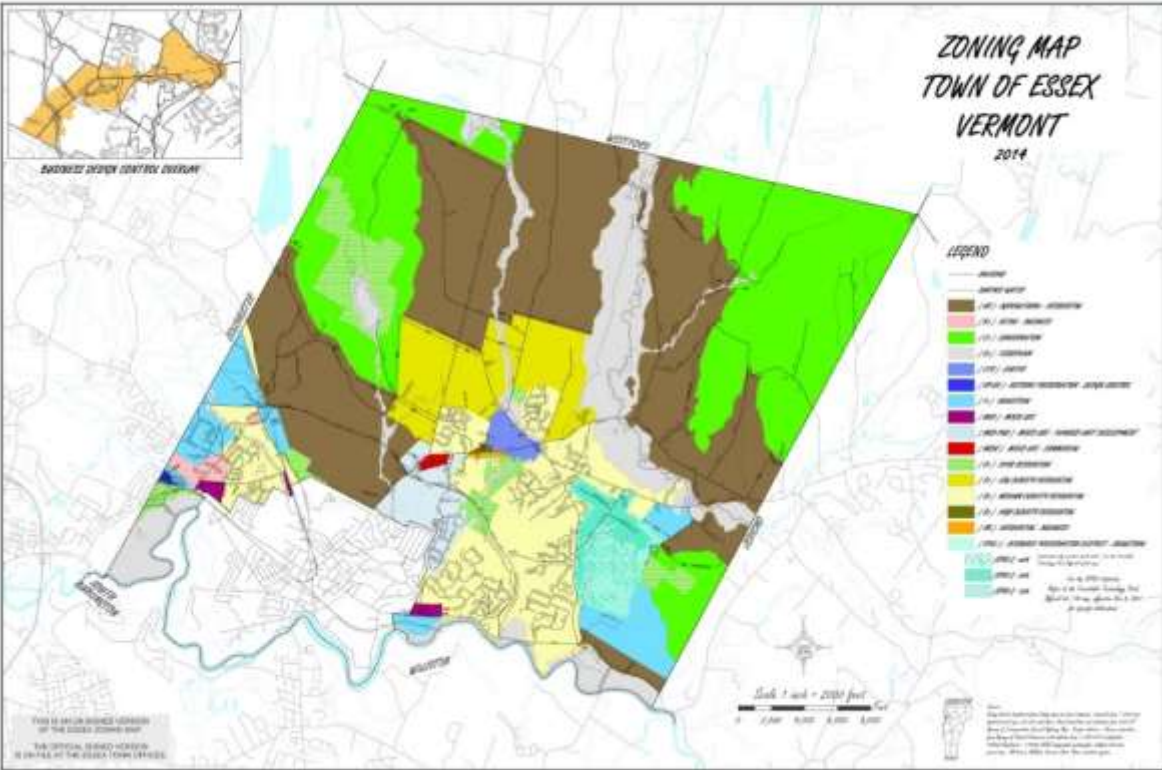


By considering Essex through distinct planning areas, residents and the Planning Commission can approach development and conservation through location-specific means that account for the

unique characteristics found in different parts of town. The rest of this chapter lays out a general description of each planning area and describes the zoning districts found in each area.

SIDEBAR: Zoning Districts and Proposed Land Use

MAP 17: Official Zoning Map



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.

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. Additionally, the Town should explore means to conserve existing Forest Blocks and conserving and expanding Habitat Connectors as described further in Chapter 2.

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. Additionally, the Town should explore expansion of protected floodplain areas to support habitat connections.

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.

3075 Additionally, the Town should explore conserving existing Forest Blocks and conserving and
3076 expanding Habitat Connectors as described further in Chapter 2.

3077 **Agriculture/Residential (AR):** Agriculture/Residential districts exist to protect lands that
3078 have an economic capability for agriculture. Currently, the districts contain some low-density
3079 residential development on lots no smaller than 3 acres but are otherwise undeveloped except
3080 for uses associated with agriculture or forestry. With limited exceptions, the Town has no
3081 plans to develop roads or extend public water and sewer systems into AR districts. Therefore,
3082 only low density residential and recreational development that utilizes existing facilities,
3083 adequately disposes of sewage, and is compatible with the district's purposes and guidelines
3084 should be permitted. Encouraged uses include planned residential developments, as well as
3085 open space projects, conservation efforts, or forms of outdoor recreation that do not remove
3086 the potential of the land for agricultural production.

3087 To facilitate effective use of existing structures, particularly historic structures and farm
3088 structures, the Town should explore additional allowable uses, such as community supported
3089 agriculture and renewable energy production, that will generate some economic return while
3090 not jeopardizing the rural character of the area. Additionally, the Town should explore
3091 conserving existing Forest Blocks and conserving and expanding Habitat Connectors as
3092 described further in Chapter 2.

3093 **Low Density Residential (R1):** Low Density Residential districts are intended to facilitate
3094 residential development in areas adjacent to but outside of the sewer core area. Minimum lot
3095 sizes of 1 acre maintain low densities and ensure that lots are large enough to accommodate
3096 on-site septic systems. Sites may be required to connect to municipal water service.

3097 **Medium Density Residential (R2):** Medium Density Residential districts exist to facilitate
3098 residential development in areas inside the sewer core area. Connection to municipal sewer
3099 service shall be required when feasible or deemed necessary. Densities and lot sizes are based
3100 on the provision of municipal water and sewer services or a property's ability to
3101 accommodate on-site services. Within portions of this zoning district are located within the
3102 [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) area. See below for further future planning for this area.

3103 **High Density Residential (R3):** The High-Density Residential district is located on the north
3104 side of VT Route 15 to the west of the Center District and exists to encourage a wide range of
3105 housing opportunities in an area served by municipal services and facilities and public
3106 transportation. Home occupations and multi-family units on small lots are encouraged to
3107 enable some expansion of uses. Strip commercial development shall be avoided. See below
3108 for further discussion about [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) proposed changes to this district.

3109 **Residential Business (RB):** Located on the south side of VT Route 15 in Essex Center, the
3110 Residential Business district includes properties that are predominantly residential in nature.
3111 The district was established to protect existing residential uses while allowing for limited
3112 commercial uses that will generate minimal traffic and be compatible with neighboring
3113 residences. See below for further discussion about [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) proposed changes
3114 to this district.

3115 **Business Design Control Overlay (B-DC) and Historic Preservation Design Control**
3116 **Overlay (HPDC):** The B-DC and HPDC areas exist to maintain and enhance the rich cultural
3117 and architectural heritage of Essex Town Center and Fort Ethan Allen, respectively, and to
3118 eliminate or minimize substantial character alterations of buildings in those areas. A report
3119 entitled [Historic Preservation and Design Control Standards for Essex Center and Fort Ethan](#)
3120 [Allen](#) (1986) contains standards and guidelines to be used in the review of development

proposals in these areas. See below for further discussion about [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) proposed changes.

Mixed Use (MXD): Located on VT Route 117/River Road and along a portion of Susie Wilson Drive to Pinecrest Drive, 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 MXD-PUD district is located on the border of Essex Junction to Saybrook Drive along VT Route 15, expanding back to the residential neighborhood of the Woodlands. This large tract of land near the Essex Town Center has a combination of residential and commercial development. The Town has recently conducted a comprehensive planning effort, the 2021 [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) for this and surrounding areas, as described further below. Future development in this area should be developed in accordance with the *ETC NEXT Master Plan*.

Mixed Use District-Commercial (MXD-C): The MXD-C district provides land in the Essex 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. As noted above, the Town has recently conducted a comprehensive planning effort, the 2021 [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#). Development in this district should be review in accordance with this Plan. See below for further planning goals for this and surrounding areas, as described further below.

Center (CTR): The Center district, located around the intersection of VT Route 15 and VT Route 128, supports the role of the Historic Town 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 Historic 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 Historic Preservation–Design Control District (HP-DC) and the Business Design Control Overlay District (B-DC) standards and standards in the 2021 [ETC NEXT Master Plan](#). See below for further planning goals for this and surrounding areas, as described further below.

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 also hosts industrial and commercial development and further development can occur if it's economically and aesthetically in keeping with the district's overall goals. Indeed, 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. Residents of Essex as well as public officials are currently at work on clarifying this vision and the result

of that work - if any changes are recommended - will be adopted by reference into the overall Town Plan.

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.

Essex Planning Areas

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 Essex 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 to the west, Gentes Road and the Tree Farm recreation facility to the north, and the Essex Junction to 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/Essex Junction 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 approximately 750 acres of the Saxon Hill area 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. A 90 – acre parcel owned is owned by the Essex Westford School District and leased to the Town is a part of the 60 percent conserved. It contains mountain bike trails that have been managed and maintained for the last 20+ years by Fellowship of the Wheel. An agreement was reached in 2016 between the Town and the owner of much of the land in the RPD-I. This agreement allowed the landowner to proceed with a sand extraction operation in exchange, 245 acres of land was transferred to the Town, to be designated for recreation and conservation. This agreement for the first time formally delineated the 40 percent to be developed and the 60 percent for recreation and conservation. The 40 percent 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. More than a 30 businesses and industries have located in the Saxon Hill Industrial Park since 1977, with more than half of those within the last 10 years.

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, Sleepy Hollow Road, Old Pump 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 Forest Blocks that extend into Colchester, Westford, and Jericho. The Town shall further protect these resources, including these Forests and Habitat Connectors in the Highlands through the careful placement of housing and the establishment of regulatory and non-regulatory protection measures.

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 development patterns 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 [2008 Open Space Plan](#).

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 agriculture, forestry, rural housing, recreation, and resource protection. The established zoning seeks to protect and manage the area's significant natural, scenic, and recreational resources. As also suggested for the Highlands, the Town shall further protect the resources, specifically for Forest Blocks and Habitat Connectors in the Lowlands

and agricultural lands through the careful placement of housing and the establishment of regulatory and non-regulatory protection measures.

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

The 1970 Town Plan was the first to envision a plan for a town center. The Town Plan stated, “the Town of Essex, largely because of the lack of community identity, should aim to develop a town center which will include town administrative facilities, shopping and service facilities and provide for civic and cultural buildings.” The Town Plan noted that a town center should be centrally located, in the same area where most recently the [2021 ETC NEXT Master Plan](#) envisioned a town center.

Through a series of workshops and studies as a part of the 1990 Town Plan, Essex decided to locate a 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. In 2021 a new Master Plan for the area was developed, continuing and expanding that vision from 1971. The [ETC NEXT 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, a better connected and more cohesive community.

The ETC Next areas includes the following areas:

Butlers Corners, the Lang Farm area, and the remaining area along VT Route 15 to Towers Road / VT Route 128. These areas comprise the following existing zoning districts: Mixed-Use District-Commercial (MXD-C), Retail Business (B1, part of the Mixed-Use Planned Unit Development or MXD-PUD), Center (CTR), Residential (R2 Medium Density, R3 High Density, and RB Residential-Business),

The ETC NEXT Plan calls for a realignment of neighborhoods and zoning districts, reflective of the input received during the visioning process. The following are the proposed neighborhoods:

- **Mixed Use South (MU-S)** Neighborhood functions as a sub-regional retail center with growing and diverse residential and mixed residential/commercial uses. Anticipated uses include retail (including locally and regionally serving and entertainment), multi-unit housing, accommodations (hotel) and commercial spaces (professional services, incubator, and office). Target densities in the neighborhood are significantly higher than adjacent zones, reflecting the considerable access afforded by the VT 289 interchange(s) and VT Route 15, transit lines and increased bike and pedestrian facilities.

The proposed form for new development within the neighborhood supports the planned use mix and densities with new structures between two and five stories. As a hub, the MU-S Neighborhood provides connections to existing local and regional pedestrian, recreation and transit systems which are integrated into the fabric of new development. Open spaces incorporate resource protection areas as amenities using green infrastructure, with civic spaces including greens, parks, plazas that support local neighborhoods, public gatherings and events. A [New Town Center](#) state designation from the state’s [Designation Program](#) is recommended for this and the Mix-Use North area to help promote and develop dense, walkable community center.

- 3302 • **Mixed-Use North (MU-N)** Neighborhood functions in concert with the Mixed-Use South

3303 Neighborhood but with greater emphasis on diverse residential and mixed residential /

3304 commercial uses. Anticipated uses include retail, housing (single, duplex and multi-unit),

3305 accommodations (hotel), civic, and commercial spaces (professional services, incubator and

3306 office). Target densities in this neighborhood are higher than existing zoning, with densities

3307 greater than 8 units per acre envisioned, enabled by the considerable regional connections

3308 afforded by the VT 289 interchange, VT Route 15, proximity to the transit line, and

3309 increased bike and pedestrian networks. A [New Town Center](#) state designation from the

3310 state's [Designation Program](#) is recommended for this and the and the MU-S area to help

3311 promote and develop dense, walkable community center.

3312
- 3313 • **Historic Center (HC)** Neighborhood serves as both a reminder of the traditional

3314 settlement patterns within Essex and as a welcoming gateway to the ETC along VT Route

3315 15 from places to the east. The historical architecture found within this neighborhood

3316 should be celebrated and preserved to the greatest extent possible, while allowing the area to

3317 adapt to the changing needs of residents and businesses. Important civic spaces within the

3318 neighborhood should be prominently featured and the pedestrian experience and scale of

3319 new development and improvements should reflect the existing character. Improving the

3320 gateway experience in this neighborhood can serve to calm traffic and establish a design

3321 character that can be borrowed elsewhere in the ETC to enhance visual cohesion. A state

3322 [Village Center](#) designation is recommended for this area to help revitalize this historic area's

3323 structures and encourage further residential and commercial development.

3324
- 3325 • **Neighborhood Commercial (NC)** area is a vital link between the Historic Center and the

3326 Mixed-Use Center neighborhoods. Because of its linearity, this neighborhood's relationship

3327 with VT Route 15 is an intimate one – establishing generous pedestrian accommodations

3328 and setbacks from the roadway is vital. Defining clear crossing points along VT Route 15

3329 enhances bicycle and pedestrian mobility within the neighborhood. Consolidating access

3330 points to existing or new businesses simplifies vehicular movements and reclaims front yards

3331 for landscaping, sidewalks and streetscape elements. Increases in residential density (in the

3332 form of cottage units, duplex, small-lot single-family homes, etc.) will come from infill

3333 development taking advantage of deep lots along VT Route 15 and underdeveloped lands.

3334 Some higher density mixed development is possible along VT Route 15 as the result of

3335 redevelopment but avoiding strip-oriented development is a priority. A [Neighborhood](#)

3336 [Development Area](#) designation from the state's [Designation Program](#) to encourage increased

3337 housing as envisioned for this area.

3338
- 3339 • **Residential:** The existing residential subdivisions in the north of the ETC will continue to

3340 provide single-family homes and condominiums on moderately sized lots. Allowing for

3341 accessory dwellings or duplex conversions will help promote housing affordability in an area

3342 close to services, transit, and civic spaces. Lands on the west side of Old Stage Road south

3343 of Indian Brook Road can expand residential opportunities adjacent to the ETC.

3344 Improvements to connectivity within the ETC will help better integrate these

3345 neighborhoods. New recreational areas within the ETC will provide this neighborhood with

3346 some much-needed active recreation venues. This is currently zoned R2/Medium Density

3347 Residential.

3348 The Master Planning process supports increasing residential density, expanding uses, seeking

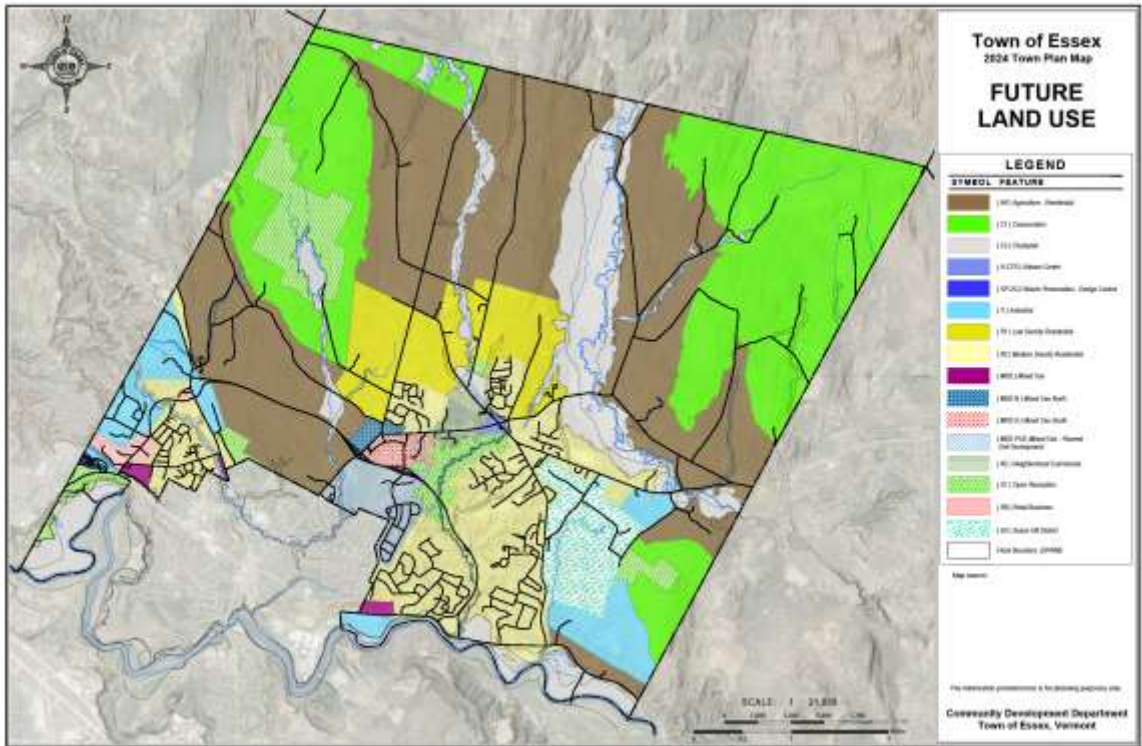
3349 state designations for the Historic Essex Center and the Mixed-Use South and North areas,

and defining and supporting the individual character of the neighborhoods for the Essex Center/Essex Town Center area to support further development of a distinct center that is better connected and more cohesive. The Town should update the standards in the Zoning Regulations as suggested in the ETC NEXT Master Plan to meet these goals.

Land Use in Outlying Areas

Much of the Town's land use planning is focused on directing new development toward the Essex Town Center and other planning areas within the sewer service area. A complementary planning goal is the prevention of excess development on rural land outside the municipal service boundary. The Essex Town Center area, Susie Wilson Road area, and existing residential areas, development should be clustered and multi-unit dwellings discouraged. Such development patterns reinforce the concept of compact settlement surrounded by countryside, create more contiguous open space, and preserve significant views. Additional protection measures shall be considered for the identified Forest Blocks and identified and additional desired Habitat Connectors. More discussion on forests and connectors may be found in Forest Land section of this chapter. The Town should consider additional analysis to address possible expansion of the sewer core area that enhances the Essex Town Center. If the analysis occurs, it must consider the consequences of additional growth and sprawl.

MAP 1: Future Land Use



Chapter 4: Serving the Community

For all of the policies, goals, and action steps - as outlined in the previous chapters - to become a reality, Essex needs to continue to have professional personnel who perform those functions beyond the reach of private citizens working independently. This chapter will therefore focus less on the *'what'* of those things Essex residents want from their government - again, these were the topics of the previous three chapters - and more on the *'who'* provides them and *'how'* they are provided.

What You Will Read:

The chapter will begin with a quick answer to the question *"How did we get here?"* for Essex's town government. You'll read about the history of Essex's town government, the source of its legal authority, and - perhaps most importantly as we look forward - the changes to government within the town in recent years such as the separation of Essex Junction and charter changes that changed the responsibilities of town boards & commissions. After that introduction, we will go through the various departments of town government and how they are funded.

Those departments are:

- 1) Assessing Department
- 2) Community Development Office
- 3) Finance Department
- 4) Town Clerk's Office
- 5) Information Technology Department
- 6) Parks and Recreation Department
- 7) Essex Free Library
- 8) Fire Department
- 9) Police Department
- 10) Community Justice Center
- 11) Public Works

In addition to these departments, there are other functions provided by local government through agreements with other agencies or non-profits. Viewing a summary of these functions - whether provided by the town or another agency - is an excellent way to discover who will be putting the goals in the Town Plan into action!

Local Government

The government of Essex derives its authority from a combination of Vermont statute and a charter. The Town of Essex adopted its [charter](#) in 1763, with voters accepting a redrafted charter in 1971.

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. Essex is also responsible for water and sewer utilities, fire

protection, regulation of elections, zoning enforcement, and maintenance of Town roads and stormwater infrastructure.

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.

SIDEBAR: Regional partners

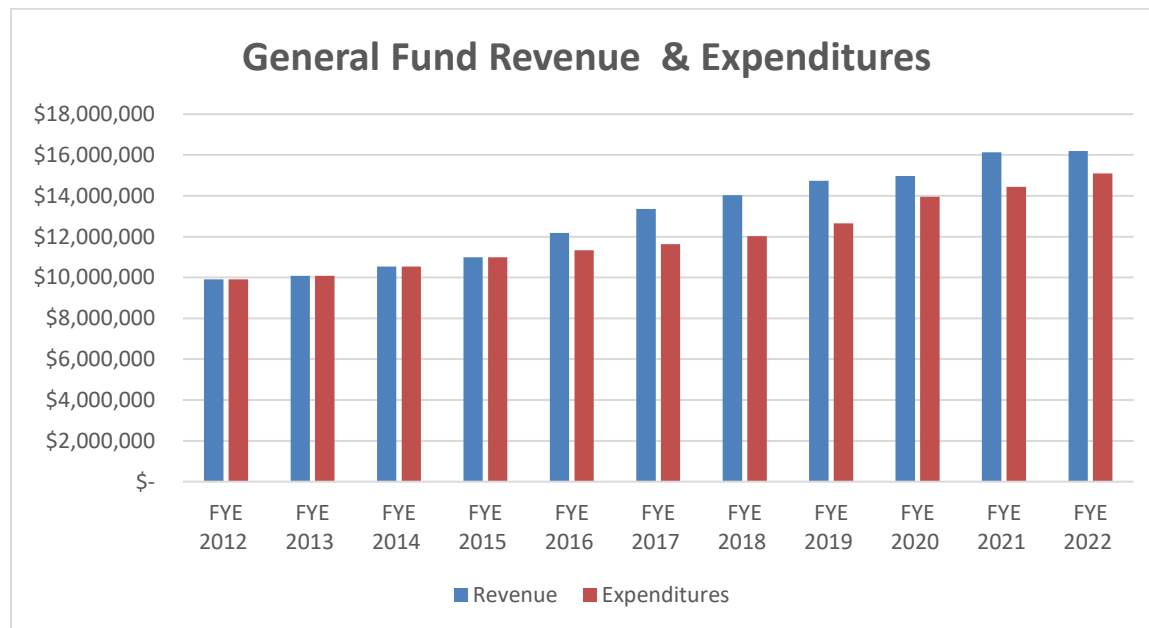
In addition to its municipal government, Essex actively participates in or provides funding to a number of regional governmental entities, including the following:

- [Champlain Water District \(CWD\)](#)
- [Chittenden County Communications Union District \(CCCUD\)](#)
- [Chittenden County Court System](#)
- [Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission \(CCRPC\)](#)
- [Green Mountain Transit \(GMT\)](#)
- [Chittenden Solid Waste District \(CSWD\)](#)
- [Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation \(GBIC\)](#)
- [Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce \(LCC\)](#)
- [Town Meeting TV/Center for Media & Democracy \(CCTV\)](#)
- [Winooski Valley Park District \(WVPD\)](#)

Fiscal Overview

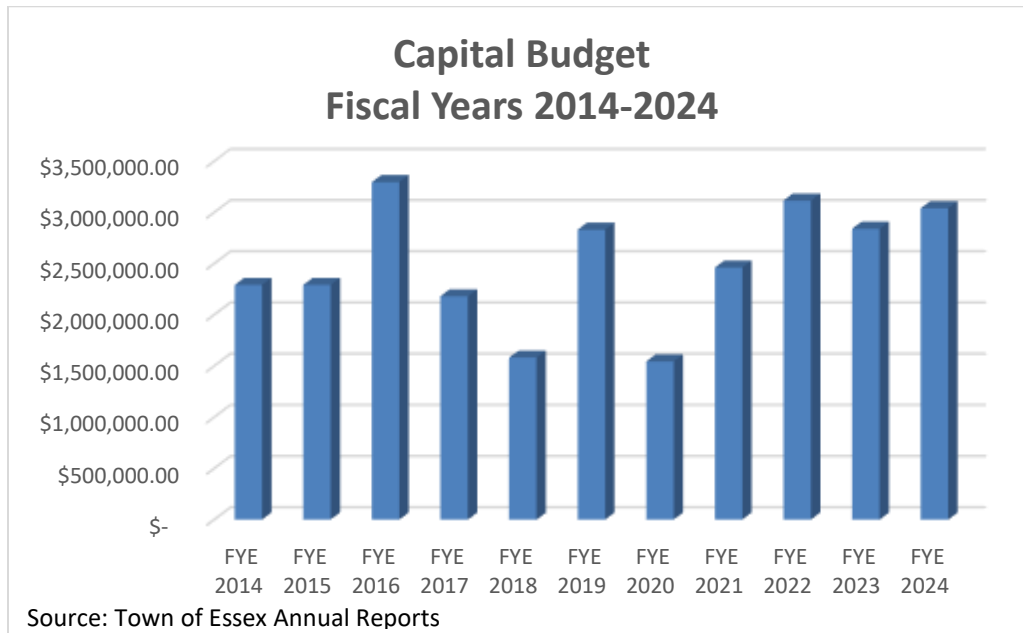
Property taxes account for most of the Town's revenue and pay for the numerous services provided by local government and schools.

In the 10 years between fiscal year 2012 and fiscal year 2022, the Town saw annual expenses increase by an average of 4.4 percent. In fiscal year 2022, the Town had general fund expenditures of \$15.09 million.



The Town has also had a capital budget since 1994. Between FY2007 and FY2023, the capital tax rate has been 2 cents. In FY2024, with the separation of the Village of Essex Junction, the Town lost 41 percent of the tax base that was contributing to the capital tax. As a result, the capital tax rate

3437 was increased by a penny to 3 cents, which will allow the Town to keep up the Town's
 3438 infrastructure.
 3439

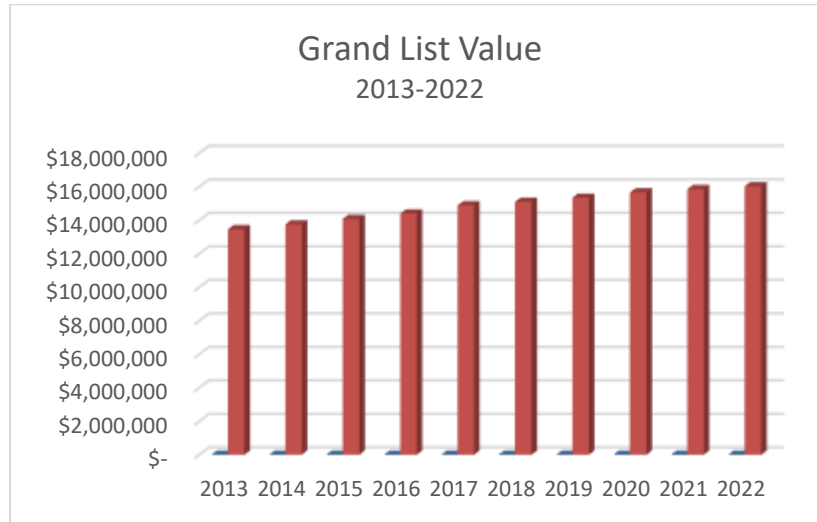


3440
 3441 Municipal taxes include the Town's general fund, capital fund, highway tax, and local agreement rate.
 3442 Tax rates vary each year based on the size of the budget and the value of the grand list, which
 3443 represents 1/100th of the value of property in Essex.
 3444 The total tax rate includes municipal and school taxes. As a result of the separation with the Essex
 3445 Junction, the town the Grand List decreased by 41% from 2022 to 2023, resulting in a rise of the tax
 3446 rate. Municipal taxes – the Town's general fund, capital fund, highway tax, and local agreement rate
 3447 – comprised 29 percent of the total tax rate in 2023; the school tax rate represented the remaining 71
 3448 percent of the total tax rate in 2023.

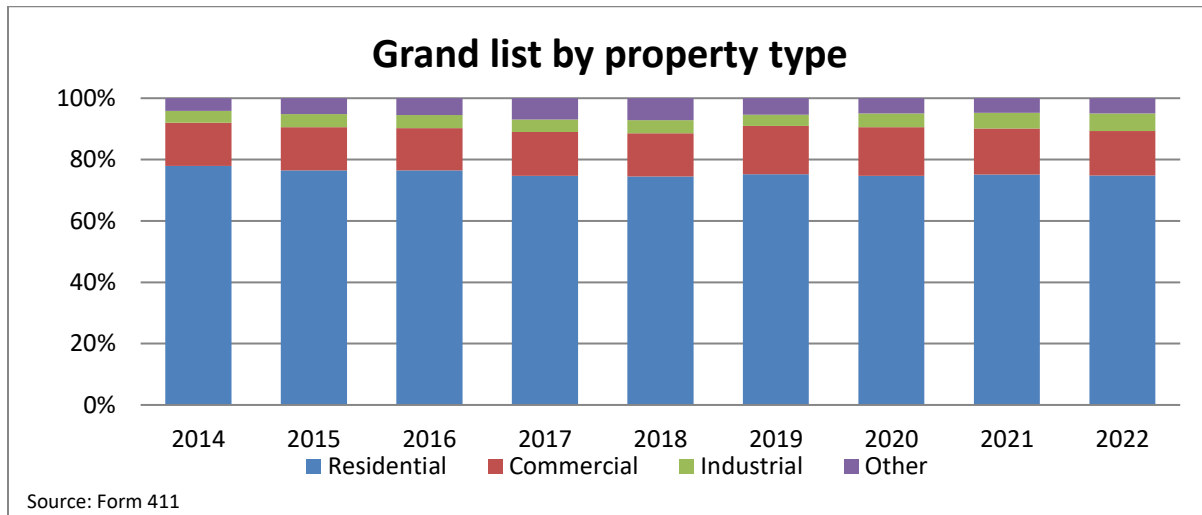
Tax Rates				
(2015-2023)				
	Residential Tax Rate	Commercial Tax Rate	Municipal Share of Tax Rate	School Share of Tax Rate
2015	2.042	2.015	24%	76%
2016	2.067	2.051	24%	76%
2017	2.051	2.086	24%	76%
2018	2.062	2.180	24%	76%
2019	2.078	2.233	24%	76%
2020	2.158	2.312	23%	77%
2021	2.206	2.361	23%	77%
2022	2.175	2.297	25%	75%
2023	2.373	2.484	29%	71%

3449

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 was able to keep its commercial and industrial tax base for municipal costs, but a portion of that tax base was shared with the entire state to pay for state-wide educational costs. In that way, growth in a community's commercial and industrial tax base benefits the entire state and has a much smaller financial benefit for the community. With school costs representing a high percentage of overall municipal expenditures, the 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. That would reduce the proportion of municipal taxes paid by residents, as well as bring more jobs close to home. The grand list grows in two ways. First, the value of new development, additions and renovations are added to the grand list each year. Second, appreciation of property values causes the grand list to grow. Property value officially appreciates only when adjustments are made through Town-wide reappraisal. Between reappraisals, grand list growth reflects only new development, additions, and renovations. The Town's last reappraisal took place in 2007. Since the reappraisal, the grand list has averaged growth of 1 percent +/- per year through 2022, indicating a steady rate of development in the Town. The Town is currently undertaking a new reappraisal, which will conclude by June of 2025.



As of 2022, residential property (homes, mobile homes, apartments, and condominiums) made up 75 percent of the grand list. Commercial properties accounted for 15 percent of the grand list, and industrial plants 4 percent. All other property types – utilities, farms, undeveloped land – made up the remainder of approximately 5 percent.



3473

3474 The Town has enacted impact fees to cover some or all of the capital costs of new public facilities
 3475 needed to serve new development. Funds generated by impact fees must be used for the designated
 3476 capital expenditures within a specified period of time. Impact fees reduce the burden of funding new
 3477 capital facilities, which otherwise falls on the remainder of the grand list.

3478 The Town's [Capital Plan](#) identifies capital improvement needs, proposed funding, and potential
 3479 funding sources.

3480 The has established enterprise funds for sewer and water facilities. These funds cover capital and
 3481 operating costs by charging water and sewer customers for the services. The enterprise fund
 3482 operations derive no revenue from the general tax base.

3483 **Municipal Office Building**

3484 The municipal office building, located at 81 Main Street, provides 8,000 square feet for the Town
 3485 Manager's office, Real Estate Assessment, Community Development, Finance, Parks and
 3486 Recreation, IT, and the Town Clerk. Renovations related to federal Americans with Disabilities Act
 3487 (ADA), an expanded vault, new entry stairs, new ceilings, new HVAC equipment, some
 3488 reconfigured walls, new lighting, new windows, and expanded conference room, and a new roof.
 3489 More recently, the Town Clerk's area was retrofitted with a larger countertop and cabinet area to
 3490 better serve the public and the lighting was upgraded to LED lighting. The Police Department
 3491 moved from 81 Main Street into a new building at 145 Maple Street in 2014.

3492 The Current office space at 81 Main is undersized for current staffing levels and needs, including the
 3493 need of more than one meeting space. It is also located in a different municipality, the City of Essex
 3494 Junction. Both the Parks and Recreation Department and the Library need more programming
 3495 space. The Senior Center is located within the City of Essex Junction and will need to be relocated,
 3496 reimaged, or both. Residents were asked about how to spend the American Rescue Plan Act funds
 3497 received by the Town and the majority of the respondents supported using the funds for a special
 3498 project, such as a new Town municipal building. At the time of writing of this Town Plan, the Town
 3499 is investigating a location in the Essex Town Center to house a new municipal office building and
 3500 Fire Station with funding to purchase coming from ARPA funds. Funding sources for the actual
 3501 construction of the facilities has yet to be determined.

Town Departments

Assessing Department

The [Assessing Department](#) maintains property information records that includes, ownership, property value, physical attributes of taxable properties, sales information, and tax maps. The information is available to other Town departments, outside agencies, and the public.

The Assessing Department determines the grand list value by appraising and assessing all taxable real estate in Essex. The last reappraisal occurred in 2007. Every year, the State of Vermont Department of Taxes conducts an Equalization Study with every municipality. The Equalization Study's purpose is to assess how close the grand list assessed values compare to 100% of Fair Market Value, which is derived from the past three years property sales history. This analysis is done by utilizing a CLA (Common Level of Appraisal) as well as a COD (Coefficient of Dispersion). The CLA is a statistic that measures the general status of the valuations of property in a grand list. If the CLA falls below 85%, the State mandates the municipality to conduct a reappraisal. The COD tells us the equity of the valuations for all property in the Town. A COD below 10% is considered good, but as the number approaches 20% it can trigger a mandatory reappraisal order from the State of Vermont. Because the town has not conducted a town-wide reappraisal since 2007, and because the Town's CLA (Common Level of Appraisal) is at 78.35% as of December 23, 2022, the town decided to proceed with a town-wide reappraisal for all properties, prior to a mandate. As of December 23, 2022, the Town's COD is 11.83%. The initial stage of the reappraisal project began in June 2023 and will be completed by the end of June 2025.

Community Development Department

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

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

In 2022 the Town hired a part time Economic Development Coordinator. The health officer also resides in the Community Development Office.

Finance Department

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

Information Technology (IT) Department

The Information Technology Department provides Town departments with technology solutions and support. The Department strives to provide timely support, and stable secure technology systems to address the needs of various Town departments; so, they can in turn provide Essex Town residents with vital services. This includes but not limited to servers, cloud services, phones, GIS, printers, firewalls, switches, websites and local computers. The IT department consists of three staff, including GIS mapping services.

Town Clerk's Office

The [Town Clerk's Office](#) serves as the hub of the municipal office building, providing a variety of services to residents and generating revenue for the Town. The policies and actions of the Clerk's office are mandated by state statutes. Residents can pay their taxes or utility bills in person in the Clerk's office. The Clerk's office prepares many licenses for the Town of Essex including marriage, dog, fish and game, and liquor licenses. The Clerk's office records and prepares certified copies of all vital records, land records and survey maps for the Town. Residents 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 residents buy new homes or refinance the homes they have. Town Clerk staff support the [Cemetery Commission](#), who is responsible for the Town's burial grounds, including Mountain View Cemetery and the historic Essex Common Burial Ground, establishing fees, determining rules and regulations for the use of the cemetery and overseeing the income. The Town's Clerk office also supports the [Board of Civil Authority and Board of Abatement](#). The Board of Civil Authority is a quasi-judicial 21-member board consisting of fifteen Justices of the Peace, the Selectboard members and the Town Clerk. The Board's duties are serving as an election official and assisting on Election Day and sitting on tax appeals and serving as members of the Board of Abatement. The Board of Abatement is responsible for hearing tax abatements.

SIDEBAR: Dogs in Essex

All dogs owned in the Town must be registered with the Town Clerk before April 1 of each year. Dogs can roam off-leash 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 Middle School. The number of registered Essex voters in 2022 is 8,842 and 5,710 of those registered voted in the general election in 2022.

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," Essex Parks and Recreation (EPR) has responsibility in six areas: Recreation, Park Maintenance and Development, Trail Maintenance and Development, Senior Transportation, Aquatics, and Cemetery Maintenance.

Essex residents appreciate 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. While the needs assessment is still relevant, it has been over ten years since it was last updated. The Parks and Recreation Department intends on updating the assessment in 2024 or 2025. As part of this needs assessment, there should be an investigation of ways to improve the accessibility of Town parks and trails for people with disabilities.

The Town Plan outreach sessions expressed five overall themes about what the Town can be. One of those themes was around recreation. Regarding recreation, the common theme was

“opportunities,” which can be taken to mean either an increase in the number of opportunities for recreation - such as more connections between trails in the town - or simply highlighting the current opportunities, such as Sand Hill Park or Saxon Hill. Whether that means more programs or more recreation space, townspeople want more opportunities to recreate in Essex. Below is a word cloud showing the top 10 ideas discussed at these meetings.



The Parks and Recreation Department has supported active lifestyles in Essex since 1972, when the department was created with a part-time staff. Parks and Recreation became a full-time department in 1979. As of 2023, the Department is staffed with seven (7) full-time employees, two (2) part-time employees and approximately 50 seasonal employees in areas of parks, programs and aquatics.

Parks and Facilities

The Parks and Recreation Department maintains all Town-owned land, 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 department maintains more than 19 parks and facilities in the Town.

The adjoining map and sidebar show and describe the parks and facilities in Essex.

[illegible]

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3633 small gazebo pavilion is available to rent for private birthday parties, baby or bridal showers, picnics,
3634 and other similar celebrations, and provides shelter from the elements.

3635 Sand Hill Pool, built in 1979, provides Essex residents with learn-to-swim opportunities, as well as
3636 public swim to residents and non-residents throughout the summer months. In 2023, Sand Hill Pool
3637 taught 396 children public swim lessons, while teaching 868 summer day campers throughout the
3638 summer. We also saw 3,949 daily visitors throughout the summer, in addition to our season pass
3639 holders. The pool has served as the home of the Town of Essex Swim Team for over 40 years,
3640 which had 85 swimmers in 2023 and has held many records and titles over the years. Sand Hill Pool
3641 last hosted the Champlain Valley Swim League meet, most recently in 2018. The pool can no longer
3642 host swim meets, in a six-lane setup with diving blocks, due to national water depth standards,
3643 which the pool no longer meets due to the age of the facility. The Town of Essex Swim Team has
3644 been able to host small dual-meets so long as the swimmers begin with in-water starts in the six-lane
3645 setup. This is not ideal as the meet is much slower and swimmers are unable to improve race times
3646 due to the slower pace and without the allowance of diving from the side of the pool or diving
3647 blocks.

3648 A sprayground element was added in 2010 in place of a small wading pool, featuring an interactive
3649 experience aside from the large swimming pool. This is a great alternative for children and families.

3650 Because of the popularity of Sand Hill Pool, the community has often considered adding an indoor
3651 aquatic center. One of the top nine goals from the 2012 *Recreation Needs Assessment* was to conduct a
3652 feasibility study for a community/aquatics center. Additional space for aquatics and general
3653 programming for all ages and seasons would allow residents to sustain their high quality of active life
3654 throughout the year, and not just during the short Vermont summer. Providing a high quality
3655 aquatics facility also enables the residents and surrounding communities safe recreational water,
3656 which is especially important considering the uncertainty many public waters face with E.coli and
3657 cyanobacteria issues throughout the warmer weather months. The Town must consider creating a
3658 master plan for the future of Sand Hill Pool.

3659 In addition to our outdoor open swim facility with learn-to-swim programs and summer swim team,
3660 the Department also offers indoor learn-to-swim opportunities at The Spa at The Essex Resort to
3661 create year-round swimming. This relationship with The Spa at The Essex Resort allows our
3662 Department to mirror our outdoor programming throughout the year, strengthening a life-long and
3663 life-saving skill and creating consistency and growth with our swimmers and family members. We
3664 have also incorporated aspects of our summer swim team into the indoor schedule to build on
3665 stroke development and grow the program ahead of the next season.

3666 The combination of aquatics at two locations and consistency in curriculum of our programming
3667 only enhances the aquatics division within our department. Dedicated staff are trained and certified
3668 in pool operation, lifeguard certification, and water safety instruction, while focusing on the safety
3669 and well-being of our swimmers and families as they grow comfortable and confident in the water.
3670 A goal for the Department would be to have a primary office complex at Sand Hill Park with an
3671 aquatics facility that matched the need and the demand for programming currently offered and to be
3672 housed in one location with the opportunity to grow based on demand. A location that houses staff
3673 year-round, at a park that provides convenience and a variety of activities, including but not limited
3674 to aquatics.

[Indian Brook Park](#) is the Town's most popular park. The 665-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. Initial renovations to Indian Brook Park took place during 1988. Parks and Recreation continues to enhance the park with trail improvements, signage, tent platforms, and treatment of the invasive species Eurasian milfoil. The Town explores mitigation measures for milfoil on an ongoing basis. The Town monitors and tests for E.coli regularly, working with the VT Dept of Health and communicates any necessary updates to the community.

To combat overuse of the park, the Town began to limit the issuance of new Indian Brook permits to Essex residents in 2013. All park visitors must purchase a permit from Parks and Recreation; with an updated pass membership system in 2021, the Town has issued an average of 2,150 season passes to Town of Essex and City of Essex Junction residents over the last three years. Along with the updated pass system in 2021, paid daily access was allowed for any park visitor who did not have a season's pass (resident) or any non-resident. The average daily passes sold in the last three years was 2,074 for the season. The Town needs to conduct a capacity study and develop a master plan for the park, including trail maintenance and upgrades, forestry management, accessible trails and viewpoints, and overall trail use and pricing modules. A goal for the Department is to create a sustainable budget to maintain the park, that takes the financial burden off taxpayers. Part of this capacity study includes the allowance of dogs at the park and how to create a safe and enjoyable recreation amenity for both park goers and their four-legged friends. Parks and Recreation should coordinate with the Police Department to map zones and trails within the park to improve wayfinding and support emergency response.

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 Westford School District leases the top of Saxon Hill and lands immediately east of Saxon Hill Road to the Town. An agreement was reached in 2016 between the Town and the owner of much of the land in the RPD-I. This agreement allowed the landowner to proceed with a sand extraction operation in exchange, 245 acres of land was transferred to the Town, to be designated for recreation and conservation. The Forest Management Plan for Saxon Hill Town Forest ([insert link](#)) for the Town and School District land and a recreation focused Saxon Hill Forest Management Plan ([insert link](#)) were drafted in 2020. To date, these plans have yet to be implemented.

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. The forest includes a trail that runs through steep ridges and deep gullies. Trails also run through more than 44 acres of abutting forestland at the end of Tanglewood Drive continuing the trail connections to school-owned land, as well as a privately owned parcel, ultimately creating an extensive trail network just east of the I-289 circumferential highway. Alder Brook provides fishing opportunities in Mathieu Town Forest. Trail and wayfinding updates were made in 2019-2020, when Parks and Recreation had a part-time trails coordinator on staff. New mapping was created but remains in draft form. Parks and Recreation staff, as well as Stormwater staff are aware of erosion issues and future trail improvement projects.

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

Other water-based recreation opportunities exist on the Winooski River and Browns River. The Winooski Valley Park District owns [Woodside Natural Area](#), a 58-acre parcel in the southwest corner of Essex off VT Route 15. The park contains trails and a small boat ramp, offering the only public access to the Winooski River in the Town. The Fontaine canoe launch is also located off North Williston Road, on the Williston side of the river. The Town is investigating an additional canoe launch location further to the west, between the Fontaine launch and the border with Essex Junction.

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

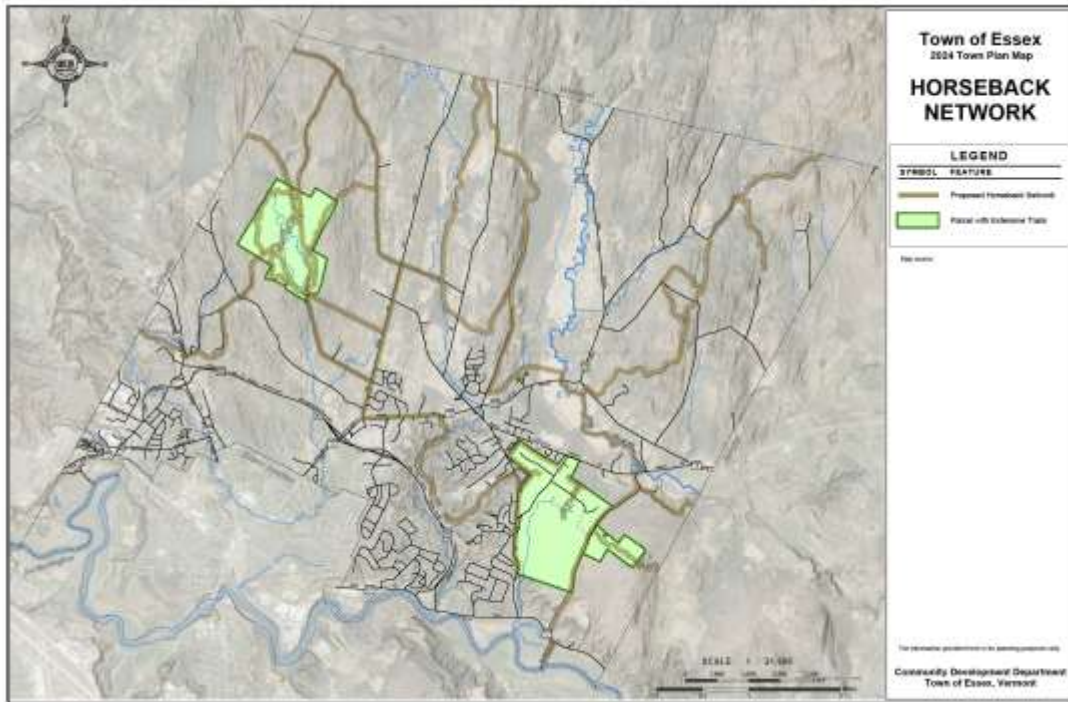
The Town shall pursue opportunities to acquire or preserve open space to support the community desire for passive recreation and conservation. When the Town does acquire land for passive recreation, it should expect to see an increase in activities such as hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing. Currently, Parks and Recreation has two full-time parks staff who are available to respond to the demands of the parks and facilities – the Town may seek to support passive recreation on public open space by collaborating with groups such as local Scout troops, [Local Motion](#), and [Fellowship of the Wheel](#). The Town should add a full time Trails Coordinator to the department staff to focus on grants, proposals, and maintenance plans on town-owned forests and trail networks. This staff member would also be the project lead for updated trail maps, improvement projects, volunteer days and the staff liaison for the Conservation and Trails Committee.

Another popular park, the [Tree Farm Recreational Facility](#), is frequently used by organizations such as Essex United Soccer, Nordic Soccer, the Vermont Soccer Association, Burlington Rugby, the Essex Westford School District, and Essex and the City of Essex Junction recreation departments. New sports and organizations, such as lacrosse, ultimate frisbee and adult soccer leagues, have begun to use the facility for practices and tournaments. Although best known for its 13 fields used for various sports, the Tree Farm also contains a cross-country running trail used by Essex High School and a multi-use bicycle and pedestrian path. Located off Old Colchester Road, the 99-acre property straddles the border between the City of Essex Junction and the Town of Essex, making them tenants in common. The Tree Farm had operated as a state tree nursery until 1995. In its post-nursery life, the property was developed as a regional recreational facility by the non-profit Tree Farm Management Group. After years of leasing the property, the Town and City purchased the Tree Farm in 2010; the Tree Farm Management Group continues to manage the property through 2025. Future management structures between the Town and Essex Junction will need to be determined going forward.

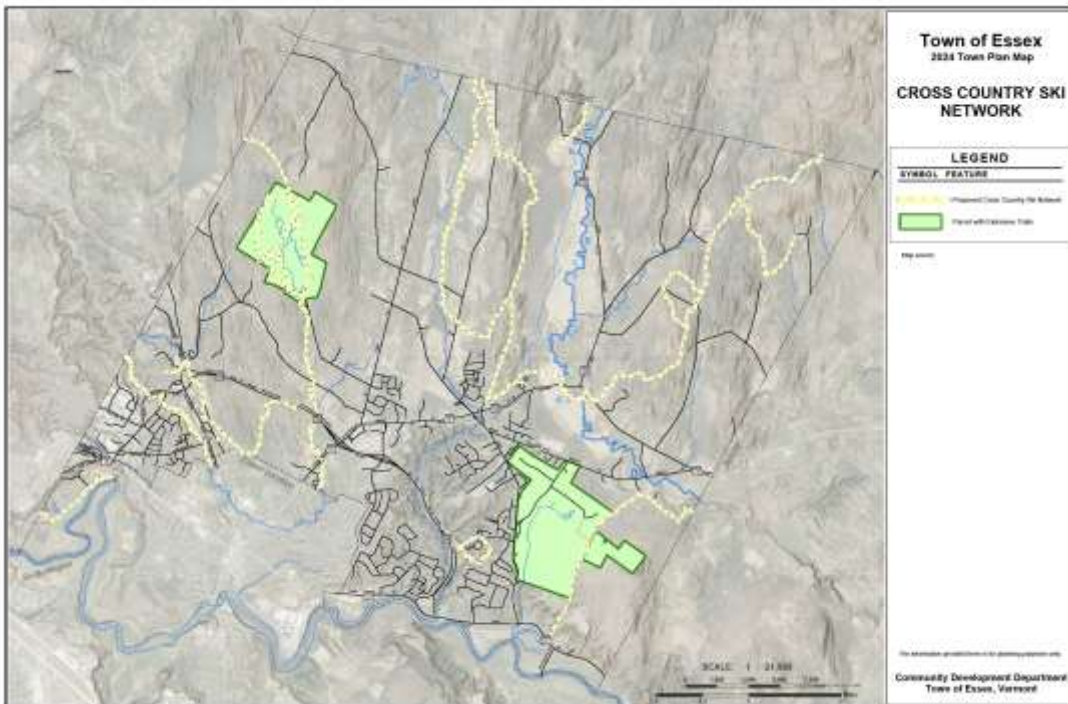
The multi-use path signifies the importance of trails within Essex. Residents want to run, bike, walk and jog, whether for recreation or to travel around the community. Below are maps of proposed and existing trail networks for horseback riders, cross country skiers and snowmobilers. Bike and pedestrian networks and shown in the transportation section of Chapter 2. As noted in that section, the Town intends to update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan in the near future to prioritize the Town's bicycle, pedestrian and trail infrastructure, and ultimately evaluate any new priorities or updated best practices for bike and pedestrian movement and connections. Combined with the

3767 Town Plan, a new Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan will help Essex become even more safe, connected
 3768 and friendly for bicyclists, pedestrians, and all types of trail users as was expressed a one of the top
 3769 priorities during the Town Plan outreach.

3770 **MAP 19: Horseback Network**



3771
 3772 **MAP 20: Cross Country Ski Network**



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3774

MAP 21: Snowmobile Network

3775

3776 Programs and Funding

3777 The Parks and Recreation Department does much more than just maintain the Town's parks and
 3778 natural areas. The department offers programs to meet community needs and interests, programs
 3779 that focus on health and wellness, build family unity and community connections, teach life skills
 3780 and embrace hobbies and interests, and elevate personal growth to try new things. The department
 3781 also promotes community-wide events, including but not limited to, the Spring Scavenger Hunt,
 3782 Transportation Exploration, the Youth Fishing Derby, Enchanted Walk, and the holiday lights
 3783 contest and tour. The Department has moved to an increased online presence with program
 3784 brochure details, apart from seasonal printed mailings. While the department continues to print
 3785 copies in-house as needed, the online presence has provided a broader distribution of what is
 3786 offered, allowing accessibility and interpretation of upcoming classes, activities and events. The
 3787 Department also works directly with local medical offices and the school district to streamline
 3788 information to shared populations with flyer and information packets, such as the Senior Van Rider
 3789 Application.

3790 Volunteers are crucial to Parks and Recreation's sports programs, including fall soccer, the Bolton
 3791 After School Ski & Ride program, Youth Lacrosse and EPR's summer swim team. The Department
 3792 also supports non-municipal organizations such as Essex Town Little League Baseball and Softball,
 3793 Essex Youth Football, and the Essex Town PTO.

3794 The Parks and Recreation Department wants to expand the number and variety of programs. Areas
 3795 of interest that are in high demand revolve around after-school care and general programming, the
 3796 18-55 age bracket and the 55+ community. All of these depend on reliable programming space for
 3797 consistency and the safety of all participants.

3798 Senior Activities and Services

3799 The Parks and Recreation Department has made the aging population of the community a priority
 3800 for many years. In 2014, a part-time program coordinator was hired to focus on the programming
 3801 opportunities for those 55+ residents. By 2016, the staff member became full-time as a Program
 3802 Director of Senior Activities and Services. This staff member concentrates on health and wellness
 3803 opportunities for the 55+ community, as well as offering drop-in activities such as BINGO, bridge,
 3804 mahjongg, knitting, and cribbage, to name a few. The majority of these programs have been held at
 3805 the Essex Area Senior Center, but beginning in 2024, programming will be held at Town municipal
 3806 locations such as the main office building as well as other Town buildings. New programming such
 3807 as Bone Builders, seated yoga, gentle flow yoga and painting classes have started, receiving high
 3808 enrollment rates and interest in upcoming sessions. Additionally, the Program Director has
 3809 prioritized the need for affordable meal options with area restaurants or on-site luncheons, while
 3810 also working with Age Well for grab & go meals on a weekly basis.

3811 Due to the popularity and quantity of programs offered, the department is in need of adequate
 3812 activity space. We primarily use conference rooms for programs, balancing the need for courses with
 3813 the need for municipal meeting space, which is limited. Looking forward, the Department needs
 3814 community room space that has versatility for wellness programs, crafts and drop-in programs, as
 3815 well as luncheons to appropriately serve the 55+ community of the Town of Essex.

3816 Another significant part of this Department pillar is our Senior Van service. We have provided free
 3817 in-town transportation to residents aged 60+ since 1984, working with Green Mountain Transit
 3818 Authority through federal funding for accessible 12-passenger vehicles. Two vans drive more than
 3819 100 miles per day, bringing eligible riders to appointments, prioritizing medical and grocery
 3820 shopping requests. Ridership has increased over the years, even after the pandemic when the service
 3821 was on hold for a short period of time. Ridership is anticipated to continue to grow with the aging
 3822 population as well as the many 55-and-older congregate housing complexes and rehabilitation
 3823 residences in the community.

3824 Parks and Recreation uses the vans for special trips and programs, including the Holiday Lights
 3825 Tour in December, weekly sponsored lunches, and theatre productions, so long as these added trips
 3826 do not interfere with appointment and routine ride requests.

3827 Per a lease agreement with the [Green Mountain Transportation Authority](#), most van maintenance
 3828 occurs in the GMTA garage. Maintenance occurs quickly, but the Town does not have a suitable
 3829 backup vehicle and should consider using funds from the capital budget to purchase a minivan.

3830 Essex Free Library

3831 The [Essex Free Library](#), located at 1 Browns River Road in Historic Essex Center, enriches and
 3832 strengthens the community by providing free access to a diverse collection of books, resources,
 3833 technology, digital items, equipment, and more. The Library provides educational and recreational
 3834 opportunities for *all* community members through a variety of free programs, events, classes, and
 3835 workshops. It promotes an inclusive environment and offers a safe space where people of all
 3836 backgrounds can come together as a community. The Essex Free Library is for everyone.

3837 The Essex Free Library issues library cards, also known as Homecards, to Essex Town residents.
 3838 Homecards can be used at any library in the Homecard system, a cooperative lending program of

3839 twenty-eight libraries in northwestern Vermont. Through the Library's website and online catalog,
3840 www.essexfreelibrary.org, patrons can log into their library accounts to request and renew items.

3841 As of September 2023, the Library houses a collection of 35,817 items, including books, movies,
3842 music, books on CD, magazines, and more. Materials not owned by the Essex Free Library can be
3843 requested from other libraries through the statewide interlibrary loan service. In addition to physical
3844 materials, the Library offers a collection of digital resources. Essex Free Library patrons have access
3845 to thousands of downloadable eBooks, audiobooks, music, videos, and more. Patrons can also take
3846 free online classes and learn a new language using the digital resource, Mango.

3847 The Library offers a "Library of Things," a collection of nontraditional library items that patrons can
3848 check out. These nontraditional items include snowshoes, laptops, hotspots, binoculars, sewing
3849 machines, ukuleles, guitars, a projector, a telescope, and more. The Library also circulates a variety of
3850 museum and local attraction passes that give library patrons entry at free or reduced rates.

3851 Library programs are offered several days each week for patrons of all ages. Programs include
3852 children's storytimes, musical programs, technology assistance, gaming groups, adult and children's
3853 crafts, book discussions, author events, STEAM activities, poetry circles, storywalks, Zentangle, Lego
3854 Club, and presenters and performers throughout the year. Through generous funding from the
3855 Friends of the Essex Free Library, the Library offers an exciting and dynamic reading program each
3856 summer for both children and adults.

3857 The Library is a community distribution center not just for books and media but for other important
3858 resources such as free Covid tests and gun locks. It responds to community needs and collaborates
3859 with other local organizations, nonprofits, schools, and childcare centers.

3860 The Library offers five public computer workstations with internet access, Wi-Fi for visitors with
3861 personal devices, and a printer/copier/fax machine for patron use. Essex Free Library's helpful staff
3862 is always willing to provide book recommendations, reference services, and technology assistance. All
3863 are welcome to enjoy the Library's space and services.

3864 **Public Safety**

3865 **Fire Department**

3866 [The Essex Fire Department](#) has one station located on Sand Hill Road, in front of the highway
3867 garage. The department consists mainly of paid, on-call volunteers who provide fire protection and,
3868 in conjunction with [Essex Rescue](#), emergency medical first response. In FY2024, began paying two
3869 per diem positions to help cover the business day due to declining availability of volunteers.

3870 Fire Department operates on a written mutual aid agreement with the City of Essex Junction Fire
3871 Department to provide dual response coverage to any significant call for service anywhere in the
3872 community. The Essex Police Dispatch Center provides dispatching services, ensuring a coordinated
3873 response of police, fire, and rescue services directly from VT 911. In 2022, the Fire Department
3874 responded to 932 calls for service, 61%279 of which were medical first response calls. Essex Fire
3875 Department also provides mutual aid to Westford for most calls, and to other neighboring
3876 communities when needed.

3877 The Fire Department has no full-time personnel. The department has a roster of about 34 people
3878 who respond to calls when nearby and available. The on-call volunteers receive an hourly wage when
3879 they show up for an emergency call. The Fire Department does pay for some per diem members to

stay at the station on a part-time basis during the weekdays to respond to emergencies and conduct maintenance activities.

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

Police Department

Continuing its tradition of service to the Citizens of Essex, the [Essex Police Department](#) serves both the Town of Essex and the City of Essex Junction. The 2022 separation of the City led to the creation of a long-term Memorandum of Understanding where the Essex Police Department (EPD) will continue to serve both for the foreseeable future. The department currently is authorized 31 Full Time sworn officers, 4 Full Time dispatchers, 1 Full Time Administrative Assistant, 1 Full Time Community Affairs Liaison, 1 Full Time records clerk and in addition, 3 Part Time officers, 4 Part Time dispatchers, 1 Part Time Administrative Assistant.

Many challenges have been faced by EPD and law enforcement overall since 2020. With COVID and the increased scrutiny placed upon law enforcement, EPD has seen the numbers of qualified candidates plummet. While it was an issue before 2020, recruiting and retention of police officers has become a crisis. EPD has been able to maintain a force of employees where the EPD has not seen the very low numbers that other departments have had, yet getting the numbers to full staff has been nearly impossible due to resignations and retirement. The department continues to use contemporary recruiting techniques such as social media advertising, video and attending in and out of state recruiting events to try to mitigate this need.

Crime numbers, while still low in the City and Town, have increased from 2016 with larcenies, and drug crimes seeing the greatest gains. The department has also seen a great increase in calls related to mental health. On almost a daily basis, EPD officers respond to a call for a person in crisis, or a crime related to such. Since 2014, EPD has partnered with Howard Mental Health to employ a Community Outreach Team that specializes in these incidents along with acting as a hub for many other resources such as housing, food insecurity, elderly needs, etc.

Community engagement has become a focus for the department. Engagement with underrepresented groups of citizens has been increased and the department has hosted numerous public events such as National Night Out, Neighborhood Watch, an open house, and Coffee with the Chief. The department has been present at many other events where the EPD meets and speaks with citizens. In 2022, the department converted one officer position to a Community Affairs Liaison who is tasked with public engagement such as attending meetings with civic groups, producing informational documents that advise the public of their department's effectiveness and social media content. Further, EPD is currently participating in the process of creating a Police Community Advisory Board (CAB) as a result of work done by the Essex Building Equity Solidarity and Trust (BEST) group. The CAB will serve an important role as Essex commits to regularly review our efforts and policies, engage in constructive feedback, and make adjustments as necessary to ensure that the community is welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for all.

Essex Community Justice Center

[The Essex Community Justice Center](#) (ECJC) has been in existence since 2003 and serves the communities of Essex and Essex Junction, as well as Westford, Underhill, Jericho, Colchester and Milton. The ECJC is 1 of 4 in Chittenden county, and one of 17 in Vermont, who together provide service to the entire state. The ECJC uses Restorative Justice (RJ) which is a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm created by crime and conflict. While crime is a violation of law – an

act against the state – our primary concern is the physical, emotional, and social impact crime has on people and relationships. Crime harms and affects people – victims, family members, community members, people who commit crimes, and others – it damages relationships, and disrupts peace in the community. The ECJC is funded primarily through a grant from the Vermont Department of Corrections as well as contributions from Essex and Colchester. The ECJC has two fulltime employees, and three-part time employees. Because we are a state grant funded program our annual allocation is subject to the budget being passed at the statehouse each legislative session.

The Essex CJC recruits, trains, and supports community volunteers to provide most of the restorative processes in any given year. The following programs are provided by the ECJC. The ECJC currently has 45 trained community volunteers.

Restorative Justice Panels/Processes

The Restorative Justice Panel (RJP) is a group of trained community volunteers who work together with affected parties and offenders in a Panel Process. The Panel Process supports those affected by crime to seek reparations from the offender and in turn helps hold the offender accountable for repairing the harm they have caused. The majority of cases, youth and adult, come from direct referrals from law enforcement. They may also come from the State’s Attorney’s Office or the Department of Corrections. In these cases, the crime can be addressed through restorative approaches. This alternative saves money that would otherwise be spent on additional law enforcement time, court staff, legal fees and supervision by the Department of Corrections. In both of these cases, if the responsible party completes their panel agreement successfully, they won’t have a criminal record. The panel process holds those responsible for crime accountable for their actions and provides an important opportunity for those affected by crime to share their stories and identify needs for repair.

Victim/Affected Party Outreach and Support for Restorative Justice Panel/Processes

ECJC staff provide outreach and support to community members affected by crimes referred for a Restorative Justice Panel. Affected parties have the opportunity to meet with those who committed the crime, describe the impact, and request action from the offender designed to repair the harm that occurred.

Essex Victim/Affected Party Outreach

In FY22 the Essex CJC began a program of staff doing outreach to victims of serious crime in Essex. The program services individual victims (not businesses), whether or not an offender is caught. Outreach has focused on victims of the following crimes: robbery, larceny, domestic violence, assault, burglary, and sex offenses.

Restorative Reintegration

CJC staff and trained volunteers work with individuals returning to their community after serving an incarcerative sentence. The goals of the program are to assist participants to reintegrate and connect to the community in a positive way, to help reduce recidivism, and to enhance community safety. This is done through one-on-one reentry support for anyone who wants the support. For those who present a higher level of risk we provide Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs). The CoSA Program wraps a circle of trained volunteers around a reentering individual that meets with them weekly for a year. The purpose of CoSA is to ensure that there are no more victims and no more secrets while supporting and connecting the individual to their community, increasing the chances of their success.

Community Engagement

Through its partnerships with local community organizations, the CJC holds public forums and workshops and facilitates community dialogues focused on addressing conflict, crime prevention and community safety.

Rescue Services

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, Essex Junction, 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, and Essex Rescue wants to have funding from the member towns equalized on a per capita basis. 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 City 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.

Public Works Department

The [Public Works Department](#) aims to provide quality, responsive service, address community infrastructure needs, support economic growth and development, protect the public health and safety of all residents in a timely, efficient, and equitable manner. The Essex Public Works Department (PWD) endeavors to enhance the quality of life and safety of all residents, commuters, and visitors to the community by designing, constructing, and maintaining public works infrastructure and providing reliable and effective services throughout the community. The PWD is comprised of 18 full time and 2 part time employees at the time of the writing of this Plan.

The Public Works Administration and Engineering office is located on the Town Common near the intersection of VT Route 15 and VT Route 128. The 700-square-foot office provides space for four employees – the Public Works director, the staff engineer, the water quality director, and the administrative assistant.

The engineering office works with the Community Development Department and the Planning Commission on the development review process with new development proposals that come before the Town. It is essential that new development complies with the engineering and development standards found in the [Essex Standards Specifications for Construction](#) and fits with the community. It is also important to understand that new development not only creates new infrastructure to maintain but also puts additional stress on existing infrastructure. Developing a mechanism to address these impacts through fees will be critical moving forward. PWD plans to fill a construction

engineer staff person in 2024. Additional staff will be required to take on more management tasks as growth continues throughout the community.

The Public Works Garage Complex, which is located off Sand Hill Road, is a 10,000-square-foot facility that houses the Highway Maintenance Department, the Water and Sewer Department, the Building Manager, as well as snowplows, heavy equipment, and maintenance equipment. The Salt Shed, also located within this complex, is in need of immediate replacement. DPW is currently looking into a state grant for the construction of a new larger salt shed.

The Highway Department crew transitions between summer and winter road and sidewalk maintenance throughout the year. The crew is responsible for maintenance of all municipal stormwater infrastructure, tree conservation and tree hazard removal, and street lighting and traffic signals maintenance.

The Water and Sewer Department is responsible for operation and maintenance of the water and sewer infrastructure. Finding and retaining qualified water and sewer operators has been a challenge. This is not unique to Essex, as it has been a real concern throughout the industry.

The Building Manager is responsible for the maintenance of all Town owned buildings. This includes addressing minor and major repairs, installing more energy efficient lightbulbs, and helping plan for new municipal structures, such as the new municipal complex envisioned in the Essex Town Center. With the existing municipal building stock continuing to age there will be a need for a maintenance technician to aid the Building Manager in addressing minor maintenance issues throughout the municipal buildings.

Portions of the Town's infrastructure is nearing its "end of life," with a majority of the water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure over 50 years old. The frequency of reactive maintenance events has increased and will continue to do in the future. It is essential that the financial resources are available for both operating and maintaining existing infrastructure and for the planned replacement of any dated. As the community grows, additional staff will be needed to accommodate the infrastructure needs of the community and the associated state and federal regulation requirements. In addition, the hiring, training, and retention of qualified maintenance personnel will continue to be an issue. This is a problem industry wide and there is no immediate solution for this issue. The Public Works Department will continue to recruit qualified operators but will also seek new opportunities for staffing and continue to work with community partners like the local [Essex Center for Technology](#), and outsource with private contractors to address these needs.

Other Town Owned Buildings

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 the 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. Recently, repairs were made on the slate roof and a kitchenette (food prep area) has been added to the building.

Fort Ethan Allen Water Tower

The first structure built at Fort Ethan Allen in 1893, is the iconic stone Water Tower. The water tower was decommissioned as in 1960. It was opened up to the public once a year to climb to the top and take in the views to Mount Mansfield and the whole Champlain Valley. It was closed in 2009 it was deemed unsafe due to the condition of the stairs. In 2016 the Essex Historical Society received approval from the Selectboard to solicit donations and apply for grants for repairs to the Tower and soon after, funds for repairs were included in the Capital Budget. In 2023 the slate roof and windows were repaired, and the weathervane was replaced using some of these funds. Further restoration for the stairs and masonry will be pursued in the coming years.

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 City of Essex Junction's sewage treatment facility. Per an agreement signed in the early 1970s, the plant treats wastewater Essex Junction, the Town of Essex, 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	2023 Capacity
<i>Essex Junction</i>	1,220,000 gpd	1,070,000gpd
<i>Town of Essex</i>	1,000,000 gpd	1,100,000 gpd
<i>Williston</i>	530,000 gpd	1,130,000gpd
TOTAL PLANT CAPACITY	2,750,000 gpd	3,300,000 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. The Town has assigned or allocated 402,164 GPD of sewer allocation throughout the sewer core leaving approximately 196, 324 GPD of reserve capacity that is currently not allocated. These volumes are reconciled on an annual basis to keep current.

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.

There has been a significant number of upgrades of the existing collection system, and new construction of infrastructure due to development. Although there still remains a number of existing

residential dwellings within the Sewer Core that are currently serve by onsite systems. The previous Town plan referred to sections of Susie Wilson Road and Pinecrest Drive being in need of gravity sewers due to the significant number of onsite septic failures. Although no project has been constructed, through new development, key elements of the future collection system within this service area have been constructed without the use of Town funds.

Additionally, the Town has identified portions of the Essex Town Center within the existing Eurowest development and undeveloped lands to the north of VT Route 15 that will require more sewer capacity as future development occurs. There are sewer studies currently underway to help identify options to increase capacity within the existing infrastructure and maximize the effectiveness of new installations as development occurs.

MAP 22: Water and Sewer Service Areas



Water Supply

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

The Town has two principal service areas: 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. Additionally, there are areas within the Town Center that have been identified as areas to grow, that require the installation of new waterlines, specifically along the north side of VT RT 15, (Upper Main Street), from Billie Butler rive, to Essex Way. Not only a critical link to increase flows within the Town Center but will allow development north of VT RT 15. This project is expected to go to construction in 2025.

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 in the coming years. There has been a significant push at both the State and Federal level to update older water systems. As a significant part of these updates is the EPA lead service rule, requiring all lead services within municipal water systems to be identified, and a plan to remove them. The Town will be concentrating design and construction efforts moving forward on older portions of the municipal system to come into compliance.

Stormwater

Rather than a central stormwater system serving the entire town, Essex has a collection of independent culverts, catch basin systems with interconnected pipes, stormwater detention basins, and stormwater treatment practices. Not including road cross culverts or soil discharge systems, the Town has more than 195 separate catch basin/piped discharge stormwater systems and 1853 total catch basins, including 519 private catch basins, and 88 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 2018, 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 for flow and phosphorus.

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

- 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 most recent NPDES Phase II MS4 permit in 2018 required a revised [Essex Stormwater Management Plan](#), which was approved by the Selectboard and accepted by the State in 2019. The document identifies Essex's strategy for meeting the permit requirements and is a component element of the Town Plan.

The Stormwater Management Plan also discusses future measures that will be taken to comply with the Flow Restoration Plans (FRPs) for Indian and Sunderland Brooks and the Lake Champlain Phosphorus TMDL Implementation Plan issued by the EPA. Indian and Sunderland Brooks are currently on the State of Vermont's impaired waters EPA 303(d) list, determined to be primarily a result of stormwater runoff. The FRPs identified 2 projects that will be required to meet the high flow reduction target for Indian Brook. One project has already been constructed. The second project which retrofits 2 detention ponds off Essex Way into an underground storage chamber and sand filter is expected to be constructed in 2024.

The Town developed a Phosphorus Control Plan which identified projects that will reduce the amount of phosphorus entering Lake Champlain by approximately 20% from municipally owned and operated developed land. The Town will be required to meet the targets outlined in the permit by 2036.

The Town's Water Quality Director oversees the Highway Maintenance staff management and maintenance of all stormwater infrastructure. Essex has no full time employees dedicated completely to stormwater. As stormwater maintenance requirements continue to expand and as more stormwater infrastructure is constructed, a department completely dedicated to stormwater may be required.

Essex may also want to consider implementing a stormwater fee for new construction and/or creating a stormwater utility to efficiently manage and fund stormwater management. Through stormwater utility, fees are charged to property owners who use the municipal stormwater system. The revenue is used for maintenance and upgrades to existing stormwater systems, constructing flood control measures, developing drainage plans, and covering the costs of utility administration.

Broadband and Telecommunications Services

Chittenden County is the most internet-enabled region of Vermont, and yet, there remain pockets of rural neighborhoods that are either not connected or connected at impractically slow speeds. Many Essex homes have some internet connection, but some do not have enough to effectively work or attend school remotely, or consistently stream video, especially if there are multiple members of a household online at the same time. According to the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, about 3 percent, or 98 homes in Essex fall into this category. These homes are mostly at the end of various roads in the rural parts of town. It's about the same percentage of unserved and underserved homes countywide.

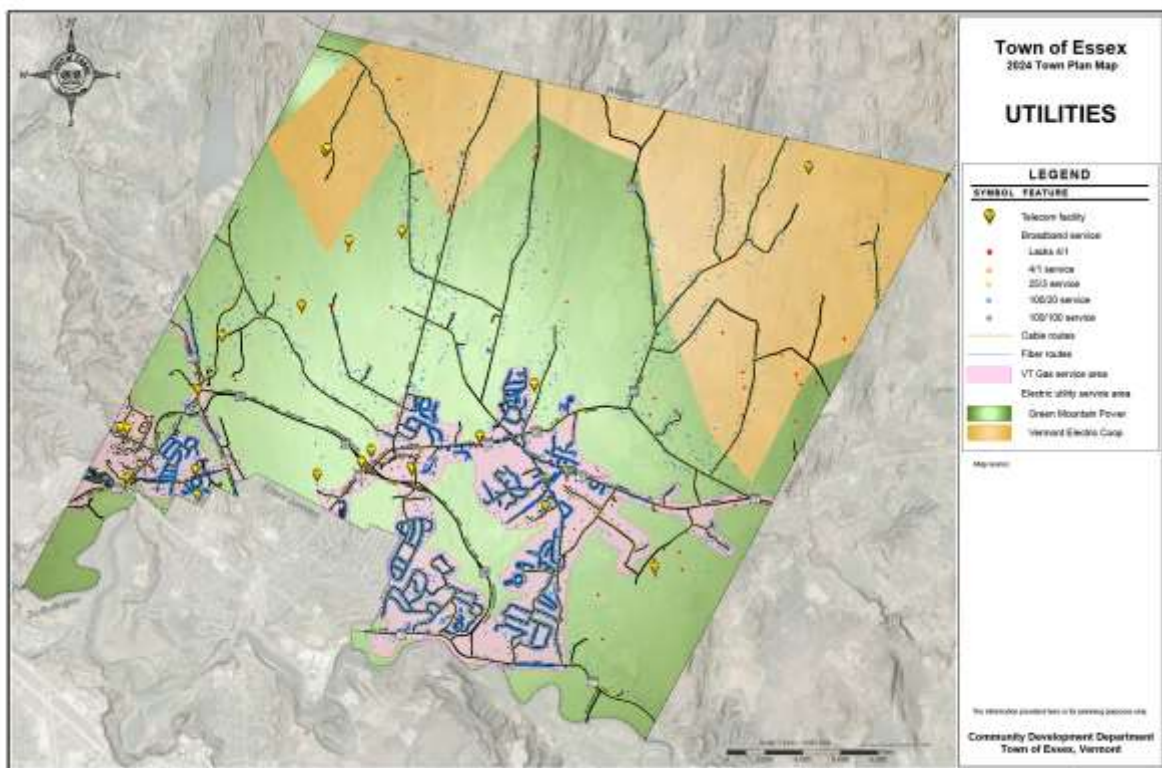
By a vote of the Town in 2022, Essex joined the [Chittenden County Communication Union District \(CCCUD\)](#). A Communications Union District (CUD) is a municipal organization made of two or more towns for the purpose of building, or causing to be built, communication infrastructure together. CUDs may plan, contract, build, and manage the infrastructure that will provide high speed internet. The main function of the CUD would be to deliver public funds to the providers to build the network and to provide public oversight to ensure broadband service is provided to

underserved locations at speeds of at least 100/100 Mbps in accordance with Act 71. By working together, municipalities are more likely to attract a provider and leverage financial resources. The CCCUD is made up of eight Chittenden County municipalities: Essex, Essex Junction, Jericho, Shelburne, South Burlington, Underhill, Westford and Williston.

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.

Portions of Essex are served by natural gas, through [Vermont Gas Systems](#) (VGS) and electric service is provided mostly by Green Mountain Power and in the northern portions of Town by Vermont Electric Coop.

MAP 23: Utilities



Solid Waste

The Town of Essex operated a municipal landfill off VT Route 2A until the landfill was closed in the early 1990s with EPA closure grant funds. The landfill remains on the list of active Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Information System (CERCLIS) sites, also known as EPA Superfund sites. The landfill has a low rank priority relative to its potential to be a risk to the general public. The site, which operates under an Administrative Closure Order issued in November 1992, is tested twice a year and will be monitored for the foreseeable future.

4235 Essex is a member of the [Chittenden Solid Waste District](#) (CSWD), which handles disposal of the
4236 Town's solid waste. The former municipal landfill site now hosts a transfer station for CSWD, with
4237 drop-off and storage facilities for a wide variety of materials.