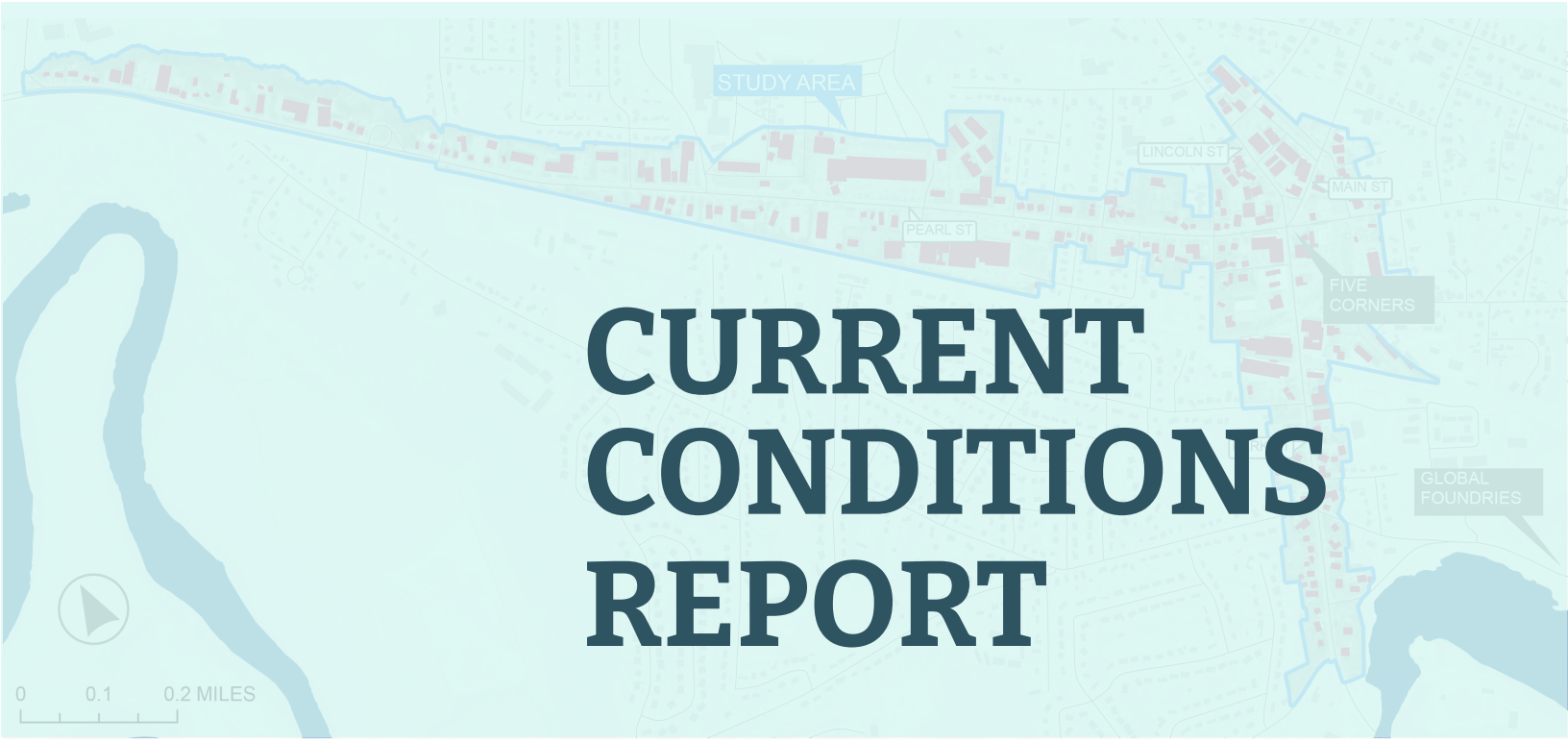
AUGUST 2024



CURRENT CONDITIONS REPORT

CONNECT THE JUNCTION

TOD PLAN FOR RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION

CONNECT THE JUNCTION

City of Essex Junction

framework

TABLE OF CONTENTS

framework

1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The City of Essex Junction is producing a transit-oriented development (TOD) master plan focused on the City Center, Park Street, and Pearl Street–areas surrounding the city's primary transit routes. The project comes as part of the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program, which has awarded funding for transit-oriented development to 10 communities throughout Northwest Vermont. In Essex Junction, these funds will be used to build upon previous plans that have outlined the "thoughtful growth" Essex Junction residents would like to see, and to work toward the vision of a City Center that provides opportunities to live, work, and gather.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) focuses on creating dense, walkable, mixed-use development near transit, creating vibrant, connected communities that enjoy easy access to jobs and services. Through a community-based approach with extensive engagement, this master plan will incorporate land use, transportation, economic development, and placemaking strategies to enhance walking, biking, and access to transit within the project's study area. This report is an early project deliverable to summarize current conditions and inform development of the plan.

The primary project area for the TOD Master Plan includes the City Center surrounding the Five Corners intersection, residential and mixed-use areas surrounding the City Center, and the Pearl Street and Park Street corridors, including commercial, mixed-used, and residential areas. These areas were chosen for their proximity to existing two-way, all-day transit service. Secondary focus areas include potential transition zones that are not planned for significant growth, but are still within a short walk to transit. The primary and secondary project areas are outlined on the map on the subsequent page.

What is transit-oriented development (TOD)?

TOD focuses on creating **dense, walkable, mixed-use development near transit,** creating vibrant, connected communities that enjoy easy access to jobs and services.

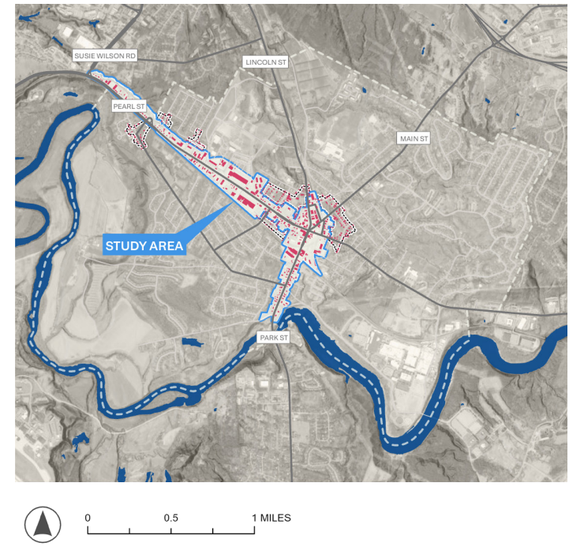
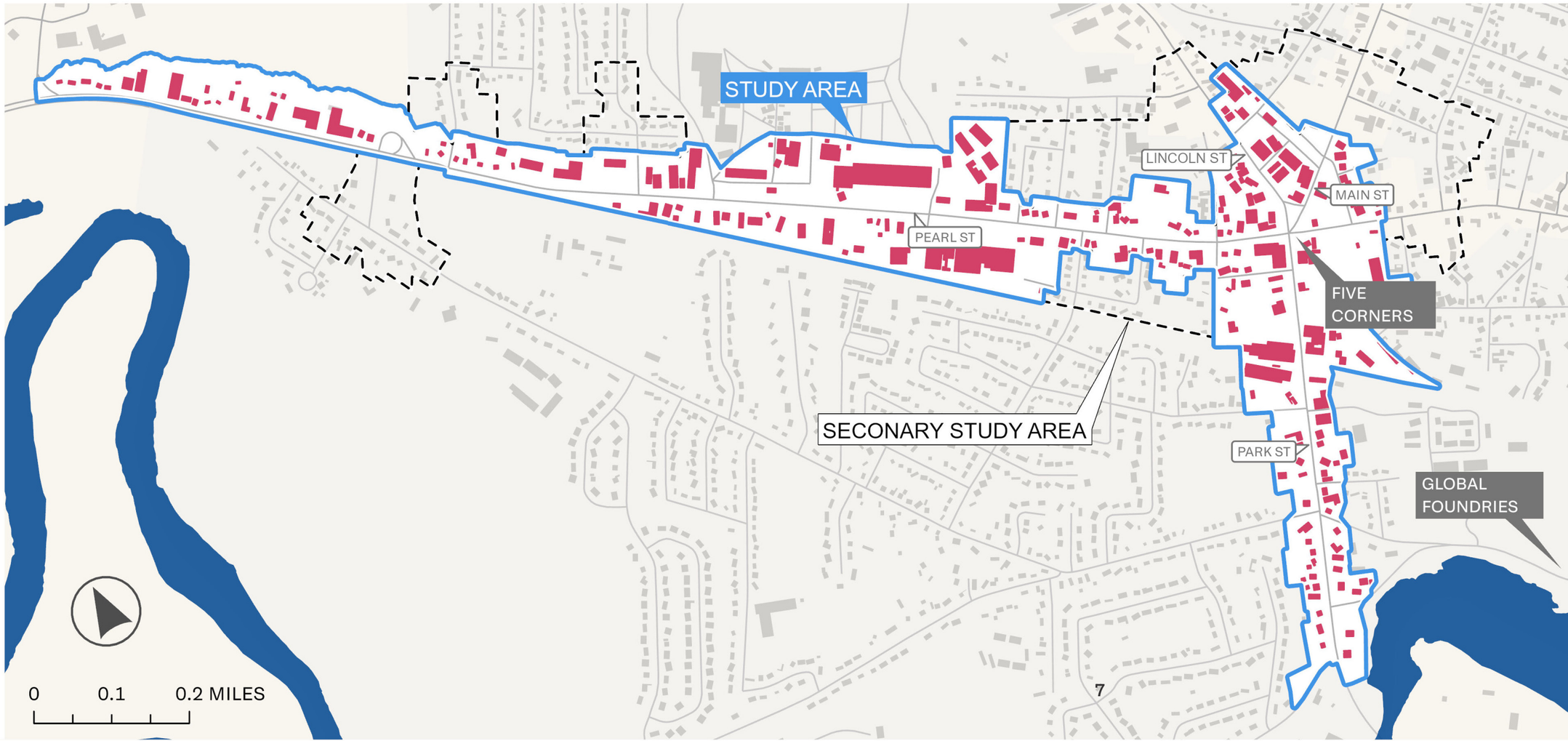


Figure 1. Project Area Maps



History and Context

The understanding of a place is rooted in its physical setting and its cultural history. In today's Essex Junction, the interrelated layers of its geography, natural environment, unique New England history, and actions of people over generations underlie the contemporary urban fabric. Revealing and highlighting these layers of context and history magnify Essex Junction's distinct sense of place.

Natural setting

Vermont's landscape was formed by its geologic history of dynamic mountain building and pressures that folded the Green Mountains; the stories of centuries of glacial activity are told in the soils that support Vermont's forests and farmlands, and filter the rainwater running through rivers and streams to Lake Champlain. The rivers on either side of downtown Essex Junction—the Winooski and Indian Brook—drain downtown's watersheds.

Indigenous history

The Western Abenaki people lived in this area for thousands of years by fishing, hunting and farming. With the coming of European settlers, disease and conflict pushed many of the Abenaki north across the Canadian border. Today, while the Abenaki are not federally recognized, four Abenaki tribes are recognized by the state of Vermont. Little of their historic presence can be seen in present-day Essex Junction.

Beginning of the town

Like many New England towns, Essex Junction traces its beginning to a riverfront location that supplied power. "Green Mountain Boy" Ira Allen built a dam at Hubbell Falls near the current Essex Junction to power his sawmill, sending logs down the Winooski River and marking the beginnings of industry in the area. The Town of Essex, including what is now Essex Junction, was created in 1763, a generation before the founding of the United States and the creation of the State of Vermont. Some structures from these early days remain, including the Lincoln Tavern, built around 1820 and currently City Hall.

Becoming a Train Town

It was the decision-making of the railroad powers that profoundly shaped the history and current form of Essex Junction. Rail was late to Vermont and rife with mismanagement and corruption. Vermont Central Railroad, headed by Charles Paine, was chartered to bring a rail line from the Connecticut River to Lake Champlain. Paine secured a route that bypassed Montpelier and Barre, and instead of connecting to Burlington, the line connected to the Montreal line six miles east in what was then called Painesville, completed in 1849, where Burlington passengers needed to change trains. Painesville, where six rail lines intersected by the 1850's, became known as Essex Junction. With its position as a rail hub, the town prospered.

The Village of Essex Junction was chartered in 1892 at the intersection of active rail lines. As a railroad town, commercial activity was centered on the junction itself. Samuel Brownell was the original owner of a block at Railroad, Main Street and Lincoln Street, still known as the Brownell Block. This area is now designated as the Downtown Essex Junction Commercial Historic District, with 10 buildings contributing to the district's historic significance.

The Twentieth Century

In addition to the trains, the road network shaped Essex Junction. By 1869, the intersection of Main, Maple, Park, Pearl, and Lincoln Streets created another "junction" known as the Five Corners. These roads weren't paved until the rise of the automobile; Route 15 (Pearl Street west of the Five Corners, Maple Street to the east) was paved with concrete in 1918 and Main Street was paved from Pearl Street to Railroad Street in 1929.

For over a hundred years, the Champlain Valley Fair has been an important part of Essex Junction. Founded in 1922, Champlain Valley Exposition owns some 130 acres just blocks from downtown, with grounds that include a racetrack, 4,000 capacity grandstand, and space for exhibitions. The largest annual event in Vermont, the fair draws over 120,000 attendees for a 10-day event. At other times of the year, portions of the site are rented for smaller events and for boat and camper storage.

IBM arrived in Essex Junction in 1957 and played a major role in the community for nearly sixty years. In part because of the new job opportunities, the population of Essex Junction nearly doubled between 1950 and 1960, from 2,741 to 5,340 residents. At IBM's height in the 1980's, with over 8,000 employees, it was the largest employer in Vermont. GlobalFoundries took over the IBM facility in 2015, and as of March 2024, employed around 1,800 people. This GlobalFoundries location continues to manufacture semiconductor chips, used in a wide array of electronics from smartphones to electric vehicles. Semiconductors are now Vermont's largest export by value, accounting for close to 30% of the state's $3 billion in exports as of 2023.

Trains are still important to Essex Junction, though they play a smaller role than they once did. The Amtrak Vermonter–one of two Amtrak lines serving the state of Vermont–runs from Washington, D.C. through New York City, New Haven, and St. Albans, stopping at the Essex Junction station twice per day. The rail line is shared with major rail providers New England Central Railroad and Vermont Rail System, which haul freight through Essex Junction daily.

Champlain Valley Exposition in 1923. Source: Library of Congress

A Walkable City

Essex Junction has a strong history as a walkable city. For many years the city's neighborhood school system did not provide bus service because students were close enough to walk–resulting in very few snow days despite many storms. More recently, due to demographic changes and shifting enrollment, busing is now provided as the distances to school have grown. Essex Junction continues to be a walkable city with an expansive sidewalk and bike network.

Village and Town Relationship

Under Vermont law, people living in village jurisdictions are technically still part of the encompassing town, and still are required to pay taxes to the town. The relationship between Essex and Essex Junction has been an issue over the years, and as the area developed, some residents felt that having a village within the town resulted in duplication of services and inefficiencies. There have been as many as 20 failed attempts to merge or separate the jurisdictions, most recently with a 2021 vote to separate Essex Junction from the Town of Essex, which resulted in the newly formed City of Essex Junction. Much of the discussion over the years has been based on fairness in taxation, but some residents of the Village valued a distinct identity connected with the downtown that they wish to preserve. As an early plan for the now City of Essex Junction, this plan is an excellent opportunity to engage the community around the desired future of their city.

Related Plans and Policies

This plan builds upon previous work done in the region. Key plans and policies that will guide the Essex Junction TOD plan are outlined below.

Plans Reviewed and Summarized in this Document

- **Village of Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan** (2019)
- **Design 5 Corners** (2015)
- **Design 5 Corners Implementation Plan** (2019)
- **Chittenden County Regional Environment, Community, Opportunity, Sustainability (ECOS) Plan and Public Engagement** (Ongoing)
- **Pearl Street Scoping Studies** (2012 and 2018)
- **Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan** (2014)

Key Findings

- **Thoughtful growth, a key community interest in Essex Junction,** is incorporated into other recent plans and policies in the area and in every element of the Comprehensive Plan. Thoughtful growth prioritizes high-quality pedestrian space, economic vibrancy, connected multi-modal transportation networks, collaboration with surrounding communities, and development of more diverse mixed-use spaces.
- **There is an ongoing housing shortage** in Chittenden County, and more diverse and affordable options are needed in Essex Junction.
- **Planning work has yielded several recommended strategies for a walkable City Center,** including pedestrianizing Main Street, focusing infill along the street edge, and increasing public green space.
- **Plans for Route 15 have resulted in the addition of on-street bike lanes,** and a shared use path was the preferred alternative for the portion east of Susie Wilson Road as of the 2018 scoping study.

Village of Essex Junction Comprehensive Plan

2019

The Comprehensive Plan for 2019-2027 is guided by key community values, which were determined through in-depth 'Heart and Soul of Essex' community conversations with the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction in 2012 and 2013. The most pressing community interest was determined to be 'Thoughtful Growth,' which prioritizes high-quality pedestrian space, economic vibrancy, connected multi-modal transportation networks, collaboration with surrounding communities, and development of more diverse mixed-use spaces.

Other community interests included Local Economy, Education, Health and Recreation, Community Connections, and Safety. These community interests were woven into the goals and objectives of the eleven Plan Elements and can be summarized as follows:

- High-quality pedestrian experience: walkability, attractive spaces, local businesses
- Connected network: coordination with neighboring communities, regional multi-modal transit networks
- City Center/Five Corners as a focal point: commercial, industrial, multi-family development, transit connections
- Physical infrastructure improvements: for traffic calming, bike/pedestrian access and safety, reduction in emissions, integrated urban/natural environments, positive health behaviors
- Collaboration with state and nearby communities, public and private partnerships, seamless development, connected transit networks, cost efficiency
- Maintain character and fabric of community: historic character, mix of tight-knit neighborhoods and open space, culture and community events, community participation
- Future thinking: reduction in emissions, thoughtful growth, investment in future generations' health and education

Figure 2. Matrix connecting Comprehensive Plan Elements and Community Visions

PLAN ELEMENT / COMMUNITY VISION	Thoughtful growth	Local Economy	Education	Health & Recreation	Community connections	Safety
Energy						
Agriculture and Community Forestry						
Business/Economic Development						
Open Space, Recreation, Public Health						
Natural Environmental Resources						
Natural Hazards Resiliency						
Education and Child Care						
Utilities/Facilities						
Housing						
Transportation						
Land Use						

Design 5 Corners

2015

Design 5 Corners (D5C) was a 2015 community design process aimed at articulating an urban form for Essex Junction that reflects the "thoughtful growth" that residents desire. Outlining how Essex Junction took shape around the railroad depot and later lost its human scale to the onset of Vermont's highway-based transportation system, Design 5 Corners envisions how physical changes to the area could create a pedestrian-oriented, economically vibrant City Center. With walkability a key goal moving forward, the plan recognizes the following challenges and opportunities:

Challenges:

- Wide roads that facilitate high speeds.
- The use of a large amount of land for parking.
- Buildings set back away from the road.

Opportunities:

- Many neighborhoods and destinations within walking distance of the City Center, including schools, the library, senior center, city offices, and significant tracts of open land.
- Extensive network of bus lines and presence of Amtrak station.
- Recent investments into pedestrian infrastructure such as sidewalks, street trees, benches, and human-scale lighting.

Through a community design process including surveys and design exercises that asked participants to create their preferred layouts for City Center using a map and building blocks, the D5C revealed the community's desire for more building entrances close to the street and an overall increase in destinations for eating, shopping, and gathering. They desire to see fewer parking lots and more greenery, and wider sidewalks with more of a buffer from cars.

Walkability is a common term that generally describes how friendly an area is to walking.

Several elements contribute to the walkability of a place, but the following components have significant contributions to the attractiveness of walking environments:

- Green street facilities
- Parks
- Separation from vehicle traffic
- Pedestrian network connectivity

Key recommended strategies:

- Focus on mixed-use development and infill along the street edge on Park Street, Maple Street, and Main Street that interfaces with the streetscape.
- Organize parking into tighter configurations, share parking between complementary uses, and use aggressive parking management.
- Pedestrianize Main Street and create a new village green.
- Connect all buildings and public spaces with sidewalks and crosswalks.
- Add street trees and rain gardens for shade and stormwater mitigation.

Rendering of pedestrianized Main Street and addition of village green from Design 5 Corners

Design 5 Corners Implementation Plan

2019

This plan examines potential impacts and recommends strategies for implementing the Design 5 Corners plan, focusing on the planned Crescent Connector and the proposed concept of pedestrianizing Main Street. This planning process included a public engagement effort, which brought forth additional insight into the opportunities and challenges for pedestrians in the Five Corners area.

This study included an analysis of historic traffic through the Five Corners intersection and the potential impacts of the Crescent Connector, which is planned as an alternative route to bypass the busy Five Corners intersection. It also outlines benefits of pedestrianizing Main Street, including:

- Safer and easier pedestrian crossings through the Five Corners intersection.
- Economic benefits from additional and longer-stayed visitors to pedestrianized streets.
- Health benefits from the addition of green, public space.

The implementation plan shows a pedestrianized Main Street with gardens designed to absorb runoff from surrounding buildings.

A parking study was conducted as part of this effort, to determine whether the pedestrianizing of Main Street would negatively impact the availability of parking spaces. The study found that the utilization rate of existing parking spaces on Main Street is low, and that the parking planned as part of the Crescent Connector would more than account for the loss of Main Street's spots. Given that people who work and visit Main Street businesses may need to park closer to their destinations, the study recommends marking more municipal parking spaces along Railroad Ave at the corner of Main Street as handicap spaces.

Finally, the plan outlines a phased implementation strategy for closing Main Street to vehicles. They recommend hosting a kick-off event and subsequent demonstrations whereby Main Street is closed off using quick build strategies such as bollards, planters, or delineator posts. During these events, data would be collected for speeds and volumes on local streets. When the City is ready to permanently close the street, the study recommends a design that makes use of rain gardens to add greenery and absorb stormwater runoff from adjacent buildings. The study also recommends installing traffic calming measures on key neighborhood streets to reduce traffic speeds throughout the village.

Chittenden County Regional Environment, Community, Opportunity, Sustainability (ECOS) Plan and Public Engagement

Ongoing

Chittenden County is in the process of updating its Environment, Community, Opportunity, Sustainability (ECOS) Plan. While the planning boundaries and scope of the ECOS plan extend beyond Connect the Junction's project extents, feedback received during this planning effort's engagement process can help to serve as a jumping off point. Public engagement themes that are pertinent to Transit-Oriented Development and the scope of this project include desire for:

- Increased housing affordability and diversity.
- Denser downtowns with greater access to services.
- Developments built closer together and designed for walking and biking.
- Inclusive social events
- Accessible housing for elderly and disabled residents.
- Housing policies that support racial and economic equity, such as down payment assistance for BiPoC communities.
- Larger housing units to accommodate big families and multi-generational living.
    - Varied housing options such as Attached Dwelling Units, co-housing, and mixed-income housing.

Pearl Street Scoping Studies

VT Route 15 / Pearl Street Scoping Report
2012

This report evaluated alternatives for improvements along Pearl Street from Post Office Square to the Five Corners, with the goal to promote a safe multimodal corridor more reflective of the area's zoning for Transit-Oriented Development. The Project Committee recommended:

- Widen roadway (from 36' to 41') to accommodate 4' shoulders with painted bike lanes and drainage grates.
- 11' travel lanes and 11' central turn lane to maximize safety for vehicles and bicycles.
- Conserve green space with added street trees in sidewalk buffer strips and setbacks.

Recent improvements resulting from this study include:

- Addition of painted bike lanes between Post Office Square and the Five Corners.
- Eastbound bike lane (on south side of Pearl) extends to Curtis Ave (no eastbound bike lane between Curtis Ave and Five Corners to maintain widths for sidewalks and utilities while allowing for wider lanes surrounding the fire station).
- Westbound bike lane on north side of Pearl extends all the way between Post Office Square and the Five Corners.
- 5' sidewalks, curb, buffer strip, street lighting all along Pearl from Five Corners to West Street Ext/Pearl Street Park. Narrower sidewalks continue west.
- New traffic lights and pedestrian crossings at Post Office Square and Summit Street.

Issues identified in the report that continue to exist include:

- No bike lanes between Post Office Square and Champlain Valley Exhibition.
- Older, narrow sidewalks were not replaced west of Warner Avenue.
- Limited transit options and frequency.
- General lack of bus shelters along local transit routes.

Recent Improvements to Pearl Street including a striped bike lane, lawn-planted buffer, and pedestrian lighting.

VT Route 15 Bicycle/Pedestrian Improvements Study

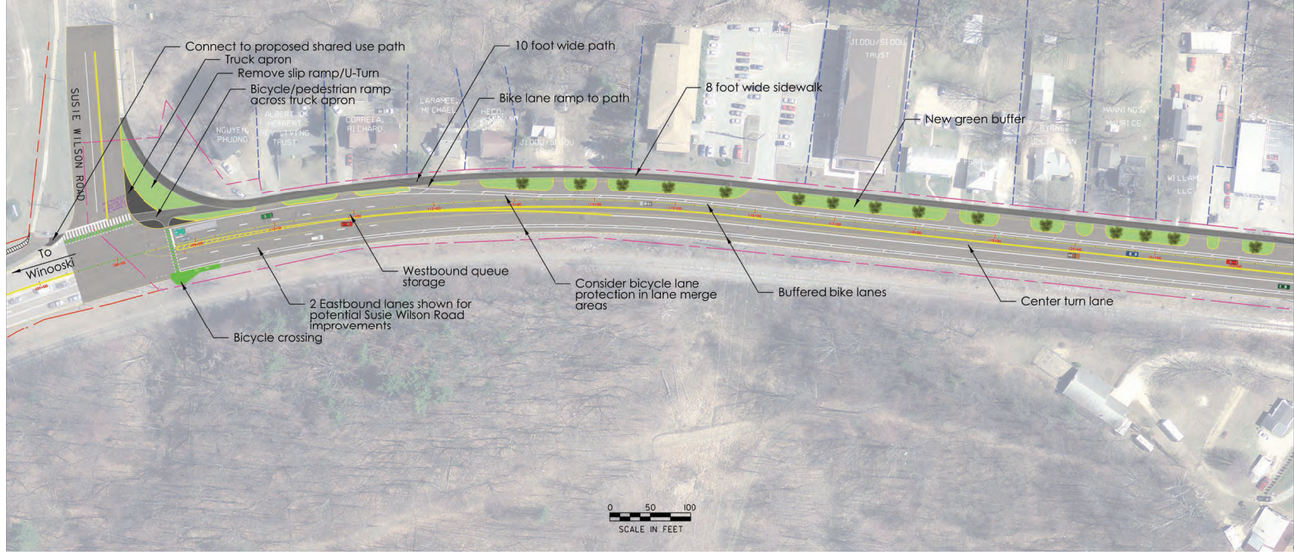
2018

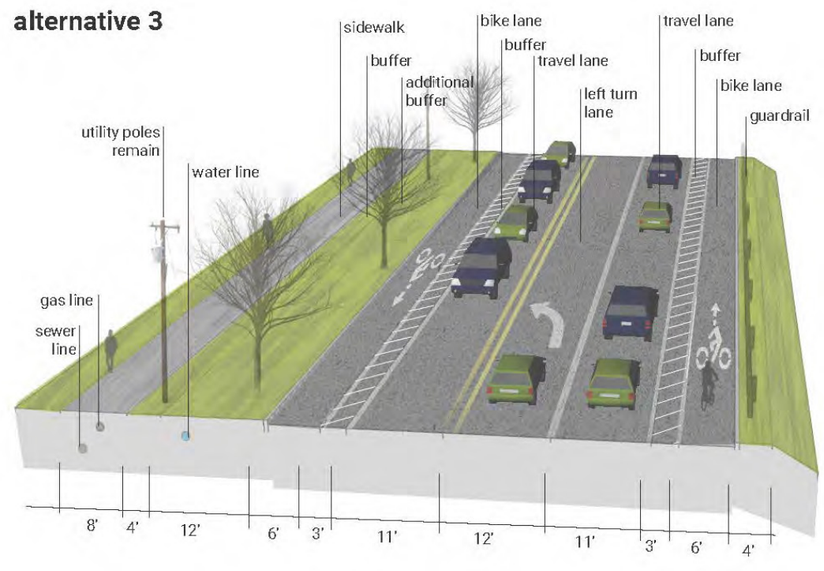
Another Scoping Study along VT Route 15 between Susie Wilson Road and West Street Extensions (a 0.4-mi stretch) was completed in 2018, commissioned by Essex Junction and the CCRPC. Again considering improvements in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, the study produced a preferred alternative which proposed:

- Removing the center median.
- Reconfiguring vehicle travel lanes from four to two travel lanes and one turn lane.
- Adding buffered bike lanes.
- Replacing existing 5-foot sidewalk with an 8-foot asphalt shared-use path, which would be a continuation of the recently completed Colchester/ Essex Shared-Use Path.

This preferred design was projected to cost $2.5 million. Another scoping study is planned to be conducted by summer 2025, looking at lower-cost, short-term “paint-and-post” solutions for this street segment.

An opposing intersection project for Susie Wilson Road is in development by The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), which would include two left-turn lanes from Susie Wilson Road southbound to Route 15 eastbound. If chosen, this design may present some challenges for the City’s bike and pedestrian planning efforts, as it would require two receiving lanes on Route 15 eastbound and may limit design options for accommodating pedestrian and cyclist movement. VTrans will be making decisions regarding these plans in the coming months.





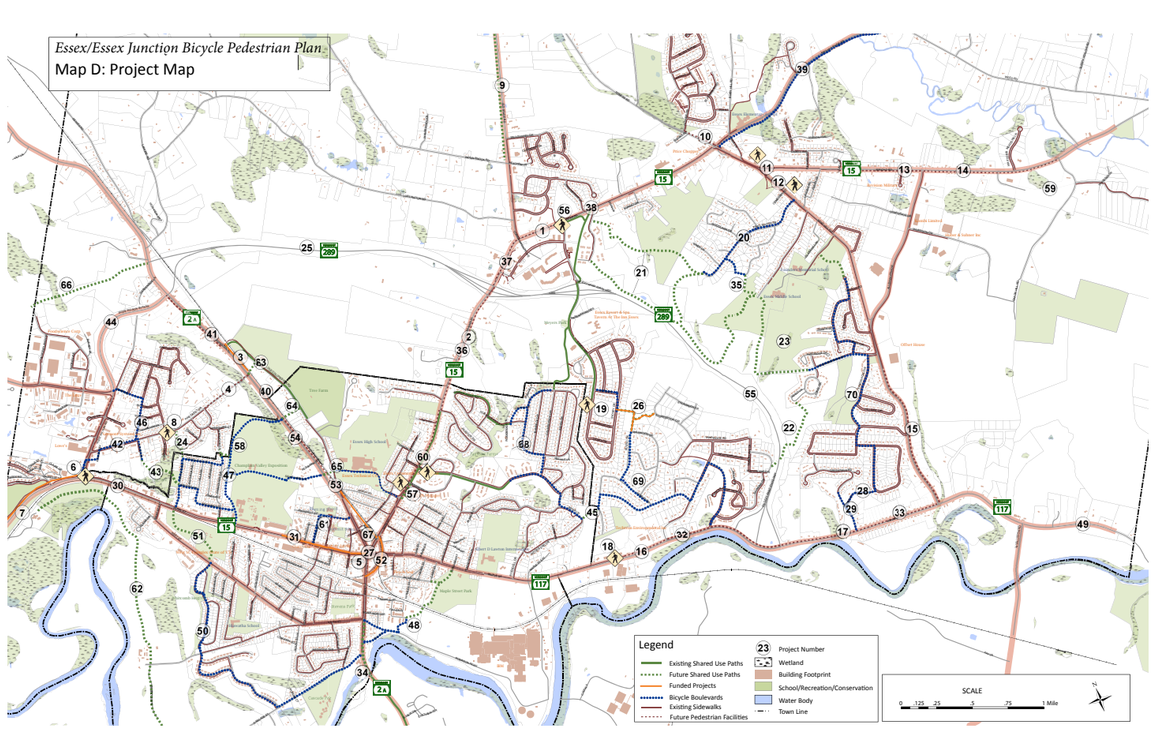
The 2018 updated scoping report recommends alternative 3, which includes 3 driving lanes, two buffered on-street bike lanes, and a 10' wide shared use path.

Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan

2014

This plan outlines potential and funded projects for pedestrian and bicycle networks in Essex Junction. The map below shows both existing and funded projects for sidewalks, striped bike lanes, shared-use paths, and bicycle boulevards. The yellow-marked “planned projects” in the Five Corners area are complete or in progress:

- The North Street to Central Street Shared Use Path now provides an off-street connection between the City Center and the roads leading to Essex High School, filling a gap of about .25 miles.
- The striped bike lane on Pearl Street is now complete, although some gaps still exist in sections with insufficient right-of-way width.
- A striped bike lane will be included on the Crescent Connector–currently under construction and set to open in September 2024.



framework

2 LAND USE

Key Findings:

- **The project area contains a mix of land uses,** including residential, commercial, civic, and mixed use developments.
- **Large surface parking lots exist in the project area** and represent opportunities to realize community goals for more housing options and better access to transit.
- **The City Center has the highest land values per acre** due to its compact mixed-use development. The City Center is also the most walkable area within the project area despite the impact of traffic flow along state highways.
- **Most of the uses within the project area are along major transportation corridors and state highways.** These properties are impacted by traffic that may not have an origin or destination in Essex Junction.
- There are **significant redevelopment opportunities within the project area** on vacant parcels and non-vacant parcels with high likelihood for future redevelopment.

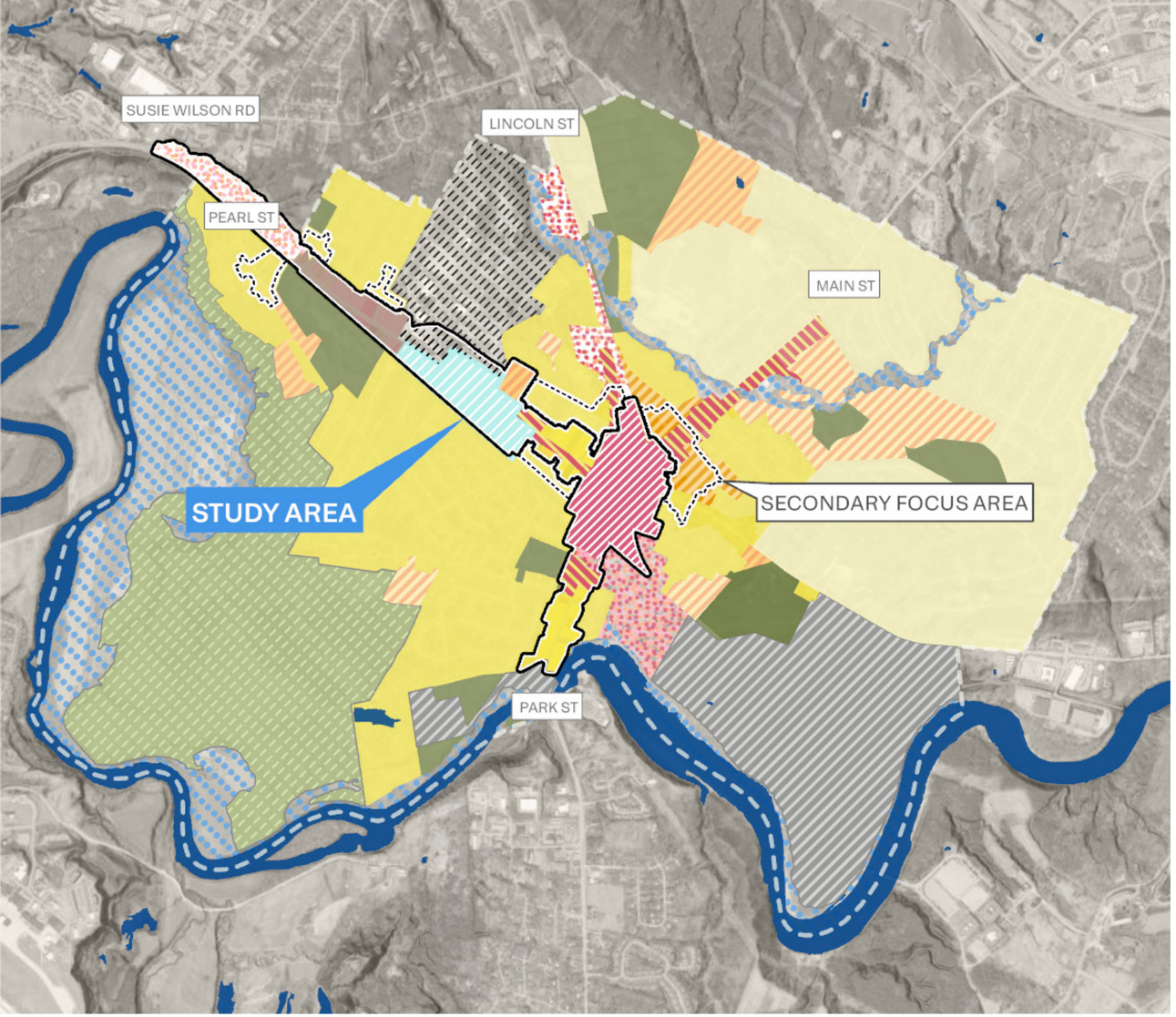


Figure 3. Land Use Map

Current Land Use

The following zoning districts are included within this project's study area:

- Residential 2 (R2)
- Multi-Family Residential 2 (MF2)
- Multi-Family/Mixed-Use 1 (MF-MU1)
- Transit Oriented Development (TOD)
- Highway Arterial (HA)
- Residential Office (RO)
- Planned Exposition (PE)
- Village Center (VC)
- Open Space

These zoning districts allow for a range of housing types, businesses, and public space, allowing for development that can support the goal of a more walkable corridor with destinations for shopping, eating, and gathering.

This project's study area contains the City's Village Center zoning district, which allows for multi-family housing, offices, recreation, and several types of businesses. There are thus many ways that development in this area can steer it towards a local destination rather than an area that people pass through.

The following tables show the permitted uses within the zoning districts in this project's study areas.

District/Use	R2	MF2	MF- MU1	TOD	HA	RO	PE	VC
SINGLE FAMILY DWELLING	X	X	X			X		X
TWO FAMILY DWELLING	X	X	X			X		X
THREE FAMILY DWELLING	X	X	X	X		X		X
FOUR FAMILY DWELLING	X	X	X	X		X		X
MULTI-FAMILY DWELLING		X	X	X	X			X
AGRICULTURE								
AGRICULTURE PRODUCTS SALES							S	
ANIMAL BOARDING FACILITY							C	
ANIMAL EXHIBITS							S	
ANIMAL SHELTER	X	X				X	X	
ANTENNA TOWER								
BANK			X	X	X			X
BANK W/ DRIVE THROUGH			X	X	X			
BED AND BREAKFAST	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
BOARDING HOUSE	C	C	C	X	C	C		X
BUILDING MATERIALS ESTABLISHMENT					X			
BUSINESS SERVICE			X	X	X	C		X
CANNABIS RETAIL ESTABLISHMENT				X	X			
CANNABIS WHOLESALE ESTABLISHMENT				X	X			
CANNABIS MEDICAL DISPENSARY				X	X			
CANNABIS CULTIVATOR ESTABLISHMENT								
CANNABIS MANUFACTURING ESTABLISHMENT (TIER 1)	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
CANNABIS MANUFACTURING ESTABLISHMENT (TIERS 2 & 3)								
CANNABIS TESTING LABORATORY ESTABLISHMENT								
CAR WASH, INCIDENTAL							S	
CAR WASH					X			
CATERING SERVICES			X	X	X	C		X
CHURCH	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

District/Use	R2	MF2	MF- MU1	TOD	HA	RO	PE	VC
CIRCUS, CARNIVAL							S	
CLINIC, MEDICAL			X	X	X			X
CLINIC, VETERINARY			X	X	X			
CONGREGATE HOUSING	C	X	X	X		X		X
CONSTRUCTION SERVICES ESTABLISHMENT				C				
CULTURAL FACILITY			X	X	X	S	S	X
DAY CARE HOME	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
DAY CARE FACILITY	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
DORMITORY			X	S	X			C
DRY CLEANER			X	X	X			
EATING ESTABLISHMENT DRIVE THROUGH				X	X			
EATING AND DRINKING ESTABLISHMENT			X	X	X		S	X
FAMILY CARE HOME	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
FAMILY CARE FACILITY	C	C	X	S	X	C	C	C
FLEA MARKET							X	
FREIGHT RAIL DISTRIBUTION CENTER								
FUNERAL HOME						C		X
GAS PUMPS				C	C			
GROUP HOUSING	C	C						X
HOME OCCUPATION	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
HOTEL, MOTEL – EXTENDED STAY			X	X	X		C	X
HOTEL, MOTEL			X	X	X		C	X
JUNK YARD								
LANDFILL COLLECTION SITE								
LANDSCAPE SERVICE								
MAIL SERVICES			X	X	X			X
MANUFACTURING - LIGHT				X	X			
MANUFACTURING - HEAVY								
MASSAGE THERAPY	C	C	C	C	C	C		C
MEDICAL AND DENTAL LAB			C	X	X	C		C

Figure 4. Land Use Table

District/Use	R2	MF2	MF- MU1	TOD	HA	RO	PE	VC
MINI-WAREHOUSE								
MOTOR VEHICLE MAINTENANCE SERVICE					X			
MOTOR VEHICLE REPAIR SERVICES					X			
NURSING, REST, CONVALESCENT HOME	C	C	X	X				
OFFICE, HOME	X	X				X		X
OFFICE, PROFESSIONAL			X	X	X	C	S	X
PARKING, COMMERCIAL				X			S	X
PERSONAL SERVICES ESTABLISHMENT			X	X	X	C		X
PRIVATE COMMUNITY USE	C	C	X	X	X			X
RECREATION USE, LOW INTENSITY	X	X	X	X	X	X	S	X
RECREATION USE, HIGH INTENSITY			X	X	X		S	
RECREATION USE MEDIUM INTENSITY			X	X	X		S	X
RECREATIONAL VEHICLE SITE							S	
RECYCLING CENTER							C	
REPAIR SERVICES ESTABLISHMENT			X	X	X			
RETAIL, SALES W/ DRIVE-THROUGH			X	X	X		S	
RETAIL SALES			X	X	X		S	X
ROADSIDE SALE OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS								
SALES, TEMPORARY			X	X	X		S	X
SALES, OUTDOORS							S	X
SCHOOLS	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
SHOPPING CENTER				X				X
SMALL SCALE WIRELESS FACILITY			X	X	X	X	X	X
SOLID WASTE COLLECTION POINT							C	
STABLE, PUBLIC							S	
STORAGE, OUTDOOR							S	
TAXI-CAB LIMOUSINE SERVICE							S	C

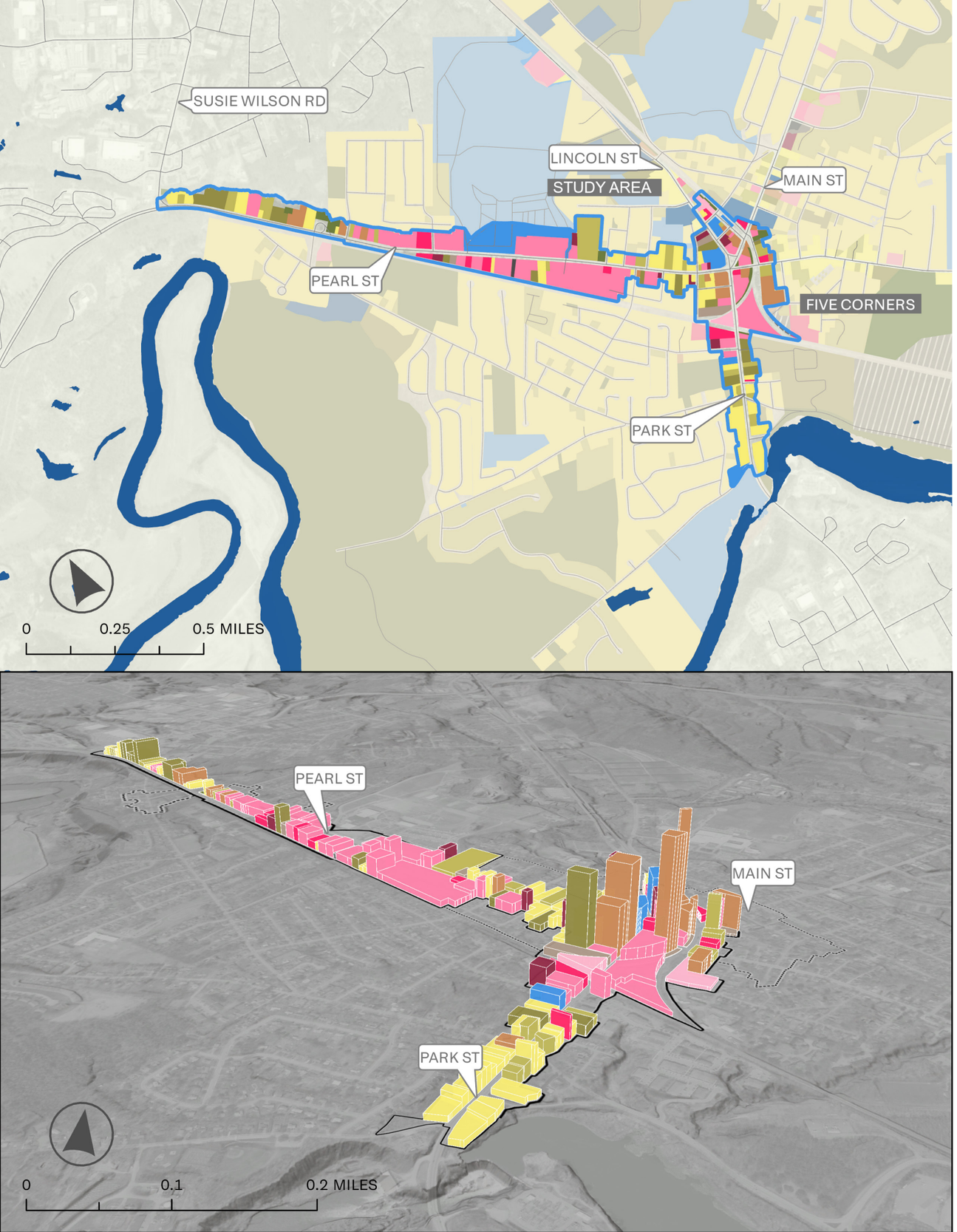
District/Use	R2	MF2	MF- MU1	TOD	HA	RO	PE	VC
TRANSIT PARK AND RIDE				X			X	
VEHICLE SALES					C		S	
WAREHOUSE					C			
WIRELESS TELE-COMMUNICATIONS FACILITY			C	C	C		C	

R2	Residential 2
MF2	Multi-Family Residential 2
MF- MU1	Multi-Family/Mixed use-1
TOD	Transit Oriented Development
HA	Highway-Arterial
PE	Planned Exposition
VC	Village Center
RO	Residential Office

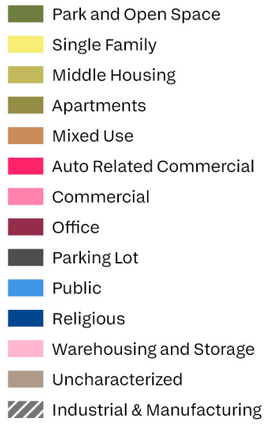
Conditional | Permitted | Not Permitted | Special Use

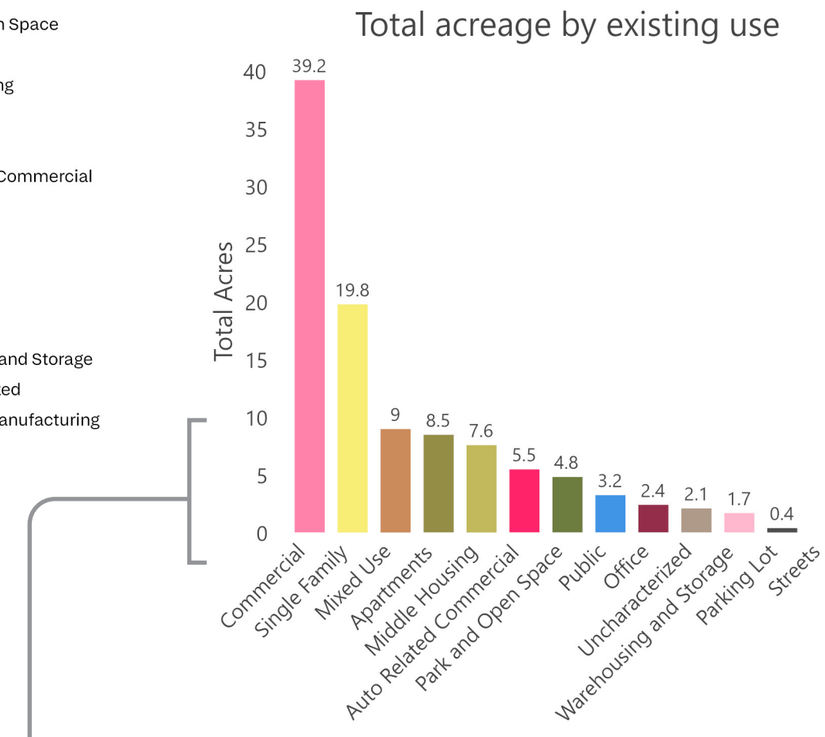
Land Value per Acre

Land value per acre is an indicator of economic productivity. The parcels shown on Figure 6 are extruded to show relative land value per acre, with taller extrusions indicating higher land value parcels and taller extrusions showing lower land value parcels. The highest land value per acre is in the City Center where there is dense and compact development. Lower land values are shown for the two large shopping centers on Pearl Street, which have low scale one-story buildings and large surface parking lots. Areas with higher land value also contribute more to property taxes on a per-acre basis, and typically provide better access to quality services.



Existing Land Use Classification





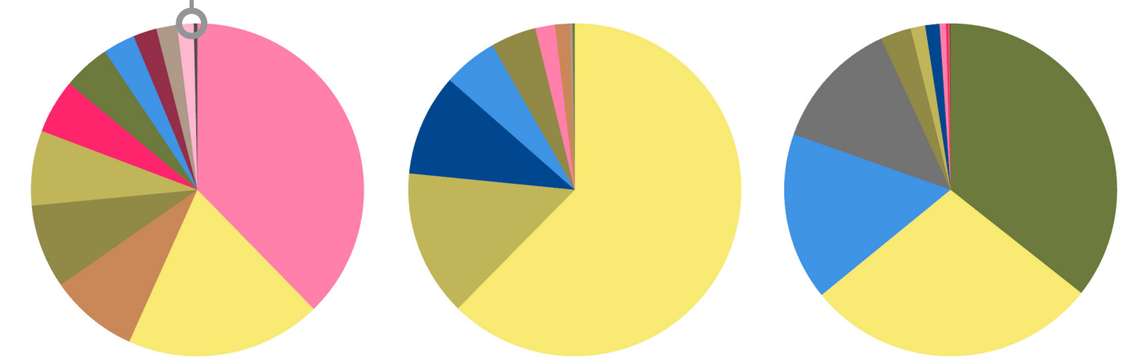


Figure 5. Existing Land Use Classifications

Figure 6. Land Value Per Acre by Use Type -3D

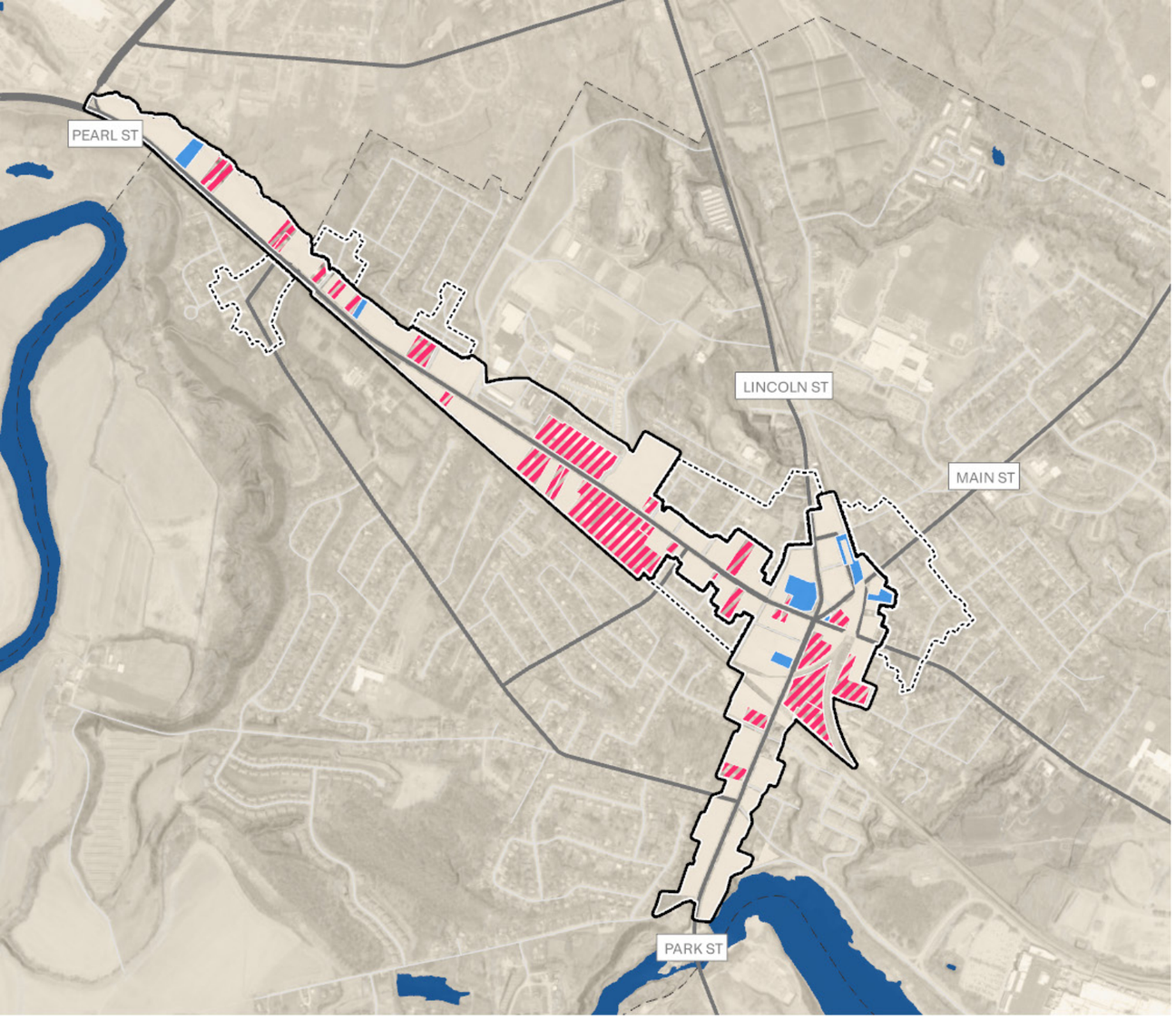


Figure 7. Redevelopable parcels

Redevelopable Parcels

The map on the left shows parcels that have been identified as "redevelopable" based on their current use, condition, land value, or other factors. In blue are shown parcels that have already been approved for redevelopment, which present opportunities for development that creates a pedestrian-friendly corridor that serves as a destination for Essex Junction residents and visitors. In striped red are parcels that may be redeveloped in the next 20 years. While identified as redevelopable, these parcels may not necessarily be redeveloped, and there may be sporadic redevelopment on non-identified parcels; this map represents an estimation.

3 COMMUNITY DESIGN

Overview

Community design is the process through which cities cultivate their unique character and sense of place. It encompasses physical attributes of the built environment, including private and public spaces, which influence the visual and experiential aspects of city life. Land use designations, buildings codes and design guidelines, environmental factors, and transportation systems all impact community design. The result is an urban condition that shapes the experiential qualities of being in a space, the impression it leaves on visitors, and the pride residents feel for the area. Community design is the art and science of crafting cities that are both functional and enriching for their inhabitants.

As a new city, Essex Junction will continue to rely on its urban design and architecture to create its unique identity. At present, the City Center has a 'neighborhood village' character and feel to it. All five streets that connect at and form the Five Corners contribute to the community design in different ways, at the central intersection and throughout the surrounding project area.

Key Findings

- **The City Center features** a mix of architectural styles and scales, including historic buildings, local businesses, and diverse landscape and lighting features, which contribute to a **"neighborhood village" character.**
- There is a **striking lack of green space within the primary and secondary project areas** – and especially the more commercial zones – when compared to surroundings.
- **Landscape conditions in the project area are varied,** including narrow grass strips along roads, areas of patchy grass surrounding rail lines, sizable and well-manicured lawns, and some instances of front yards that feature rock walls and established shrubs.
- **The urban fabric is oriented around cars, with numerous free parking options,** including public parking lots, customer parking lots, on-street parking, exposed dirt lots, and parking garages. In addition, there is an **abundance of car-related services, repair shops, car washes, and gas stations** throughout the project area.
- The frequency of car-related services, surface parking, as well as drive-thrus in certain areas contribute to a **large amount of paved surface** in the project area. The sheer number of parking lots, in addition to their irregular shapes and layouts, point to a potential lack of space efficiency and an **opportunity to add and improve public space and landscaping.**

Figure 8. Land Cover within Study Area

Context + Character

The project area focused on and around the City Center and Pearl Street corridor for the TOD Master Plan includes a mix of zoning typologies: Village Center, TOD, Highway-Arterial, Residential Office, Residential 2, Multi-Family/Mixed Use-1, Multi-Family/Mixed Use-2, and Open Space. Much of the City Center development has been subject to the design review standards of the Historic Preservation Overlay. Thirteen historic districts were listed in the Vermont State Register of Historic Places in 1980, including eleven within the primary and secondary project areas, plus the Champlain Valley Fair Grounds, which abuts the primary project study area. The Downtown Essex Junction Commercial Historic District was additionally listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004, which includes a stretch of buildings along Railroad Ave, Railroad St, and Main St. As of 2023, the entire project area was designated a new Design Review Overlay District, with review standards intending to preserve and enhance the city's historic character.

As a result of these different zoning typologies and design standards, elements such as building facades, landscape features, and street furnishings are varied throughout the project area.

City Center

Having previously allowed construction up to six stories, the zoning in the City Center currently allows for mixed-use buildings up to four stories tall (58 feet). A 2023 amendment to State of Vermont Statutes, S.100 or the HOME bill, permits any affordable housing development one additional floor, up to five stories (72 feet).

The area around the junction features a diverse mix of functions across its five corners, including newly constructed multi-family mixed-use buildings like–such as 5 Corners Apartment, Park Street Apartments, and 3 Maple at Chittenden Crossing–alongside an NGO office and the city's municipal offices, the Veterans Memorial Park, a gas station with a convenience store, and a

TOP: View of Main Street looking north from Five Corners.

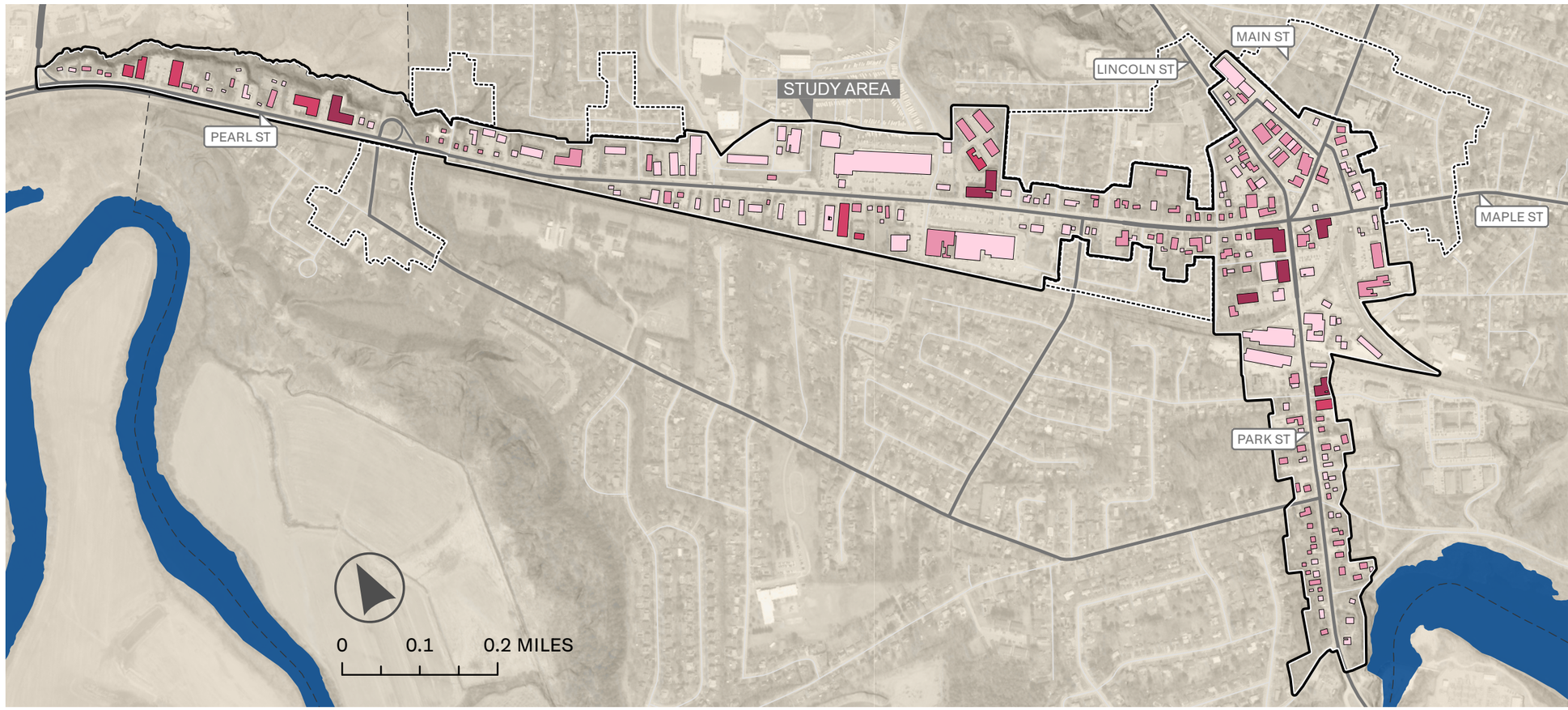
MIDDLE & BOTTOM: Newly constructed mixed-use buildings in the Village Center and the Five Corners Intersection.

cafe with an adjacent parking lot-turned-seating area. Despite differences in age and architectural style, most buildings at the Five corners intersection sport a red brick facade.

Some businesses at the corners contribute to street activation by providing cafe seating, while others have entrances set back behind lawn. Despite heavy vehicular traffic, there are well-maintained sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and effective street lighting.

Many historic buildings have no parking on-site and some new apartments and businesses have their parking located behind the structures, which enhances street frontage interaction and accessibility for pedestrians. However, numerous parking lots occupy street frontage, detracting from the pedestrian experience and underutilizing valuable street-facing parcels.

Figure 9. Building Heights in Study Area



Pearl Street (Route 15)

The predominant zones around Pearl Street are Residential 2, Transit Oriented Development, Highway Arterial, and Multi Family / Mixed-Use 1. As a result, the architecture and landscaping along the street vary, ranging from single-family homes with front lawn areas, stretches of parking lots along various single-story businesses including strip malls, fast food chains, and other typologies. There is a consistent but narrow buffer that separates the sidewalk from the road, resulting in an exposed and uncomfortable pedestrian experience throughout much of the corridor.

Dominant typologies on Pearl Street include single-story block-long strips and drive-thru buildings, including chain restaurants and car-related shops. Both of these typologies contribute to an excess of paved surfacing due to setbacks that accommodate large surface parking lots and maximized driveway/drive-thru space. These typologies are most prominent from Summit St to W St Ext. The scale of paved areas decreases nearing the City Center, contributing to the more friendly character that includes more landscaped area, tree cover, and diversity of building style (including historic houses). Closer to the western end of the project area, the scale of buildings also decreases and includes old single-family homes (both residential and converted commercial) and newer, taller multi-family residential developments– but the wider street width and lack of buildings on the south side of the street contribute to a less neighborly feel.

TOP RIGHT: Single-family homes on Pearl St.

BOTTOM LEFT: Car-oriented retail with parking lot abutting the sidewalk

BOTTOM RIGHT: Varying conditions for businesses along Pearl St. including setbacks planted with lawn, cafe seating, and parking lots. Sidewalk buffer is treated with gravel and contains pedestrian lighting.

Maple Street (Route 117)

Only a small section of Maple Street falls within the project area, but is a segment that contains several types of land uses and retail typologies. Two gas stations and a public parking lot represent the car-dominated characteristic of the corridor, with a railroad crossing a block east of Five Corners. A mixed use building on this same block exemplifies the street-facing retail recommended in Design 5 Corners, but without any buffer from the adjacent travel lane, the pedestrian experience is still lacking.

This segment of Maple Street is zoned as Village Center, but the street transitions to Residential 2 as one moves east. Maple Street as it continues east has large lots with historic Colonial-style homes, lawns, and abundant tree cover.

TOP: Public parking next to the railroad crossing on Maple Street.

BOTTOM LEFT: Mixed-use development with street-facing retail, including cafe seating contributes to the pedestrian experience, but a lack of buffer from the travel lane detracts.

Lincoln Street (Route 2A)

Lincoln Street just north of the City Center has a historic and civic character, with colonial style red brick buildings of small- and medium-scale, including: Lincoln Hall, home to the city's municipal offices and one of the oldest buildings in Essex Junction; Brownell Library; the Winston Prouty Federal Building; and a handful of small businesses housed in converted historic homes. Large deciduous trees and grass lawns of varying sizes surround most of these buildings, but there are several large surface parking lots fronting the street within the project area, which, while serving these civic and commercial uses, may detract from the neighborhood feel. Moving north, the street becomes predominantly residential including single-family and small-scale multi-family uses along with a church and a convenience store. The area is less developed than the other corridors in part because the properties on the east side of the street are shallow due to the railroad tracks.

Tree-planted lawn separates brick buildings from the street on Lincoln.

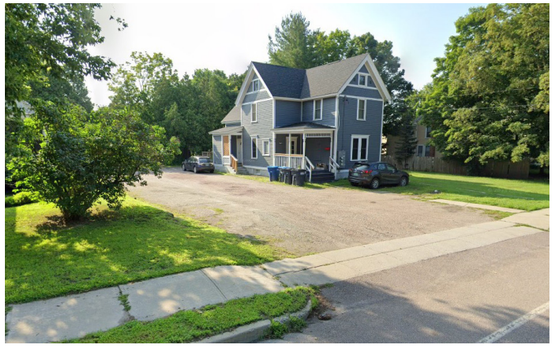
Park Street (Route 2A)

In the first few blocks south of Five Corners, Park Street contains new mixed-use buildings, older single- and double-story retail, and surface parking lots. The two intersections of rail tracks through Park Street contribute to irregular lot shapes and building configurations, with several, large parking lots that envelope multiple sides of buildings. While they currently contribute to disconnections along Park Street, these lots represent opportunity for infill development, new public spaces, and landscaping. The addition of the Crescent Connector will introduce another intersection point, adding another road crossing for pedestrians as well as new possibilities for land use along the new corridor.

Moving south on Park Street, the urban fabric is largely residential, with regular spacing of lots and buildings, single- and double-story homes and buildings, lawns, and mature trees. Stevens Park abuts one block of Park Street to the west and the Winooski River to the southeast, adding to the neighborhood greenery. Residential uses consist of apartments, small-scale multi- and single-family.

TOP: An example of middle housing on Park Street - a two-story, duplex.

BOTTOM: In addition to directing traffic away from the Five Corners intersection, the Crescent Connector will change pedestrian conditions on Park Street.



Main Street (Route 15)

While subject to much of the same empty paved space as Maple Street and Lincoln Street, Main Street is defined more by its commercial block; local businesses are housed in well-maintained colonial-style buildings, tightly knit together with landscaping, lighting, and furniture features, which together create an attractive and walkable pedestrian space. North of the railroad tracks, the quaint historic character is maintained, with abundant greenery, large trees, many large older homes–many of which have been converted to small-scale multi-family or commercial uses such as professional offices or a funeral home–a cemetery, and a church.

TOP: Main Street adjacent to the Five Corners, envisioned as a pedestrianized-street in the Design 5 Corners plan.

BOTTOM: Mature trees and brick buildings characteristic of Main Street moving north from the Five Corners intersection.

4 STREETSCAPES, TRANSIT + MOBILITY

Overview

This section examines existing streets in Essex Junction, how they currently accommodate various forms of transportation, and how streetscapes could be redesigned to support safer, more accessible multi-modal transit.

Key Findings

- **Traffic counts in Essex Junction have increased in recent years,** with the highest traffic counts on Pearl Street from Susie Wilson Road to Post Office Square and on Park Street at the Five Corners. **Much of the traffic in and around Essex Junction is through-traffic,** coming to/from Burlington and to/from the Town of Essex.
- **Streets in the project area generally prioritize cars, with wide lanes, narrow sidewalks, and insufficient buffers from the travel lane.** Recent improvements have begun to work towards safer and more attractive conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, especially along Pearl Street.
- **The Crescent Connector will relieve traffic from Park Street,** connecting Park Street to Maple Street and Main Street. It will also add a pedestrian crossing on Park Street.
- **Transit in Essex Junction has high ridership**, but car-centric streetscapes limit the number of stops along certain corridors and create **zones with poor pedestrian access to transit stops**, especially due to limited safe pedestrian crossing opportunities.
- **Bicycle facilities in Essex Junction consist of striped, on-street bicycle lanes, bicycle boulevards, and a few short stretches of shared-use paths. . .** In the project area, striped bike lanes were recently added on Pearl Street, and will be included in the Crescent Connector.
- **The recently added Colchester-Essex Multi-Use path connects the project area to a 10'-wide asphalt path** that extends west from Lime Kiln Road in Colchester to Susie Wilson Road, where Route 15 becomes Pearl Street. The addition of a shared-use path along Pearl Street would connect riders from Colchester to Essex Junction's City Center.

Street Network

Traffic Counts

Traffic counts have grown for all streets since 2022. Traffic is generally equal in both directions, with slightly higher counts westbound (toward Burlington) and northbound (toward Route 289, Route 15). All streets listed in Figure 8 are designated as “Principal Arterial - Other” and/or Minor Arterials by the Vermont Agency of Transportation.

Traffic Count data is sourced from the Vermont Agency of Transportation Traffic Count Database System and the Open Geodata Portal.

AADT: Annual Average Daily Traffic (VOL x SF x AF)

Volume: 24-hr volume count

SF: applicable month/day combination seasonal factor

AF: applicable axle-correction factor

Figure 10. Table and Map of Annual Average Daily Traffic on key Essex Junction Roads

Street	Segment	AADT	SF group	AF group	Traffic tier
Pearl St	At Five Corners (Summit Street to Park Street)	11,718 (2023)	3	U3	med (3)
Pearl St	At Post Office Square	11,989 (2023)	3	U3	med (3)
Pearl St	Between W Street Ext and Post Office Square	15,798 (2023)			med (4)
Pearl St	Just east of Susie Wilson Rd	16,955 (2023)	3	U3	med (4)
Pearl St	Just west of Susie Wilson Rd	23,059 (2023)	3	U3	high (5)
Susie Wilson Rd	At Pearl St	20,129 (2023)	3	U3	high (5)
Lincoln St	At Five Corners	6,501 (2023)	3	U4	low (2)
Lincoln St	Between Prospect St and North St	5,780 (2023)	3	U4	low (1)
Main St	At Five Corners	11,341 (2023)	3	U3	med (3)
Main St	Between Educational Dr and Densmore Dr	10,524 (2023)	3	U3	med (3)
Maple St	At Five Corners	7,209 (2023)	3	U3	low (2)
Maple St	Between Railroad St and Elm St	7,466 (2023)	3	U3	low (2)
Maple St	Between Maplewood Ln and Rivendell Dr	5,825 (2023)	3	U3	low (1)
Park St	At Five Corners	14,750 (2023)	3	U3	med (4)
Park St	Five Corners to Williston Town Line	10,881 (2023)	3	U3	med (3)

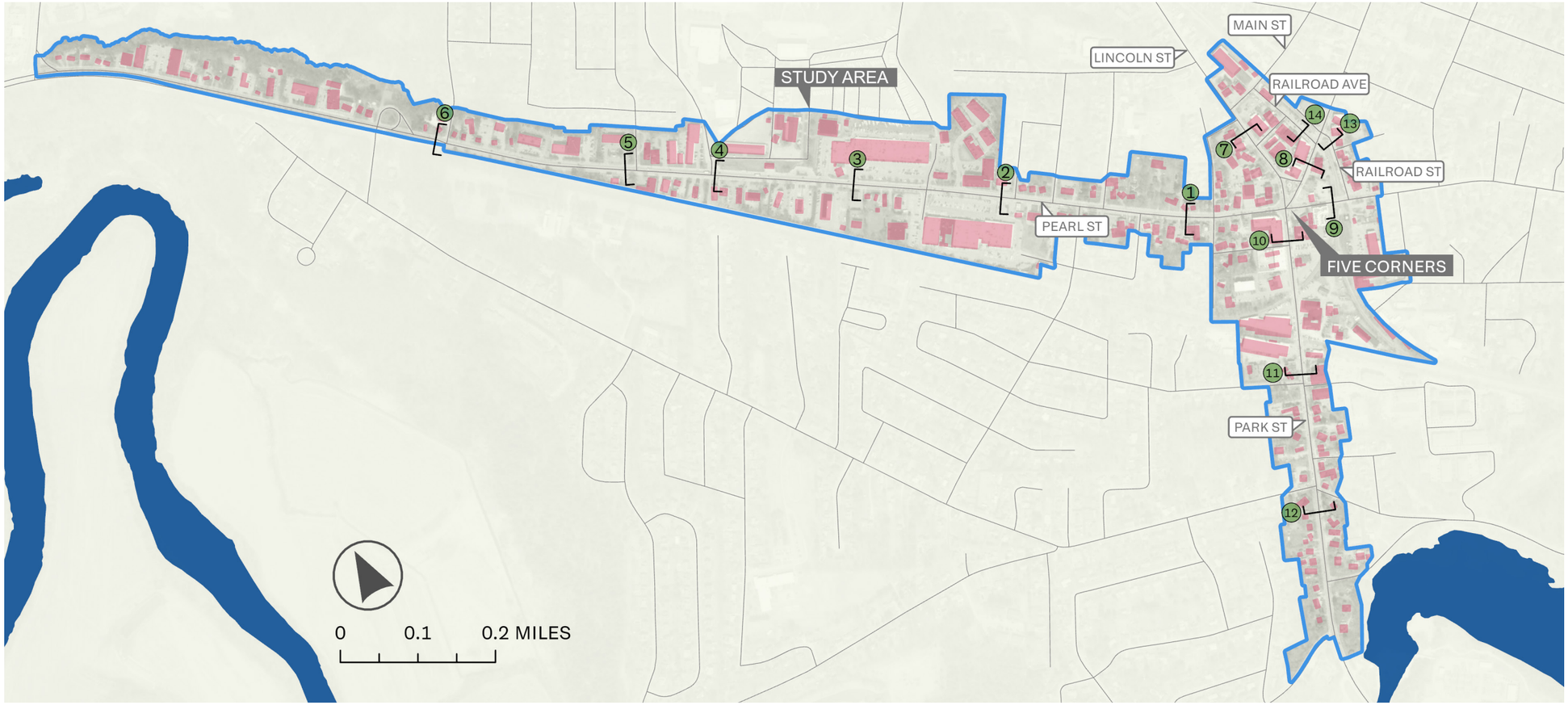


Figure 11. Study Area with Street Sections

Existing Streetscapes

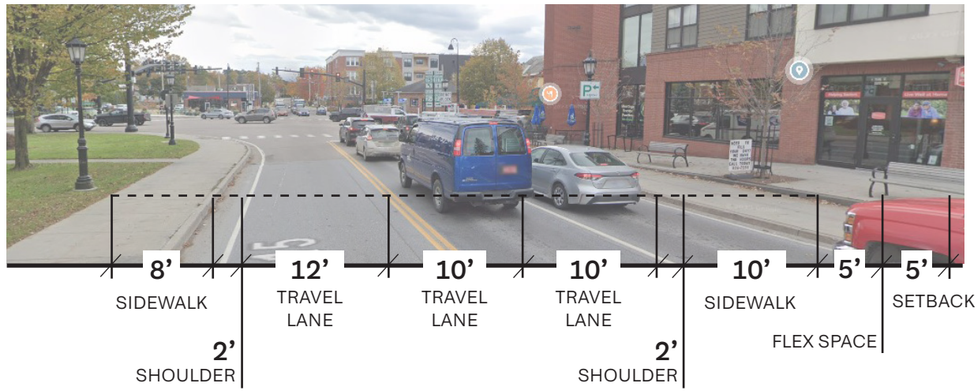
Streetscapes are diverse throughout the project area but generally prioritize vehicular travel over other modes of transportation. Recent improvements have created safer and more attractive conditions for pedestrians and cyclists– with more connected bike lanes and sidewalks, street trees, and lighting – but designated pedestrian street crossings, especially near bus stops and along Pearl Street, are still extremely limited. Analysis of existing street sections within the project area appear on the following pages.

Pearl Street (Multiple Sections)

Stretching 1.6 miles from Susie Wilson Road to the Five Corners intersection, Pearl Street functions as a community road. The majority of through-traffic to/from Burlington uses Susie Wilson Road to continue on Route 15. Recent improvements to the streetscape have improved conditions for non-vehicular travelers, including consistent 5' sidewalks, 3' min sidewalk buffers with pedestrian lighting, and, in some areas, 4' shoulders with painted bike lanes and drainage grates. The sidewalk improvements were made between the Five Corners and Warner Avenue, but narrower (somewhat damaged) sideways continue from Warner Avenue to Susie Wilson Road (~0.4 miles). New traffic lights and pedestrian crossings were also put in at Post Office Square and at Summit Street. Despite being a community road, the streetscape still prioritizes cars– the 3-4' of strips of lawn or gravel do not adequately buffer pedestrians from Pearl Street 3 travel lanes.

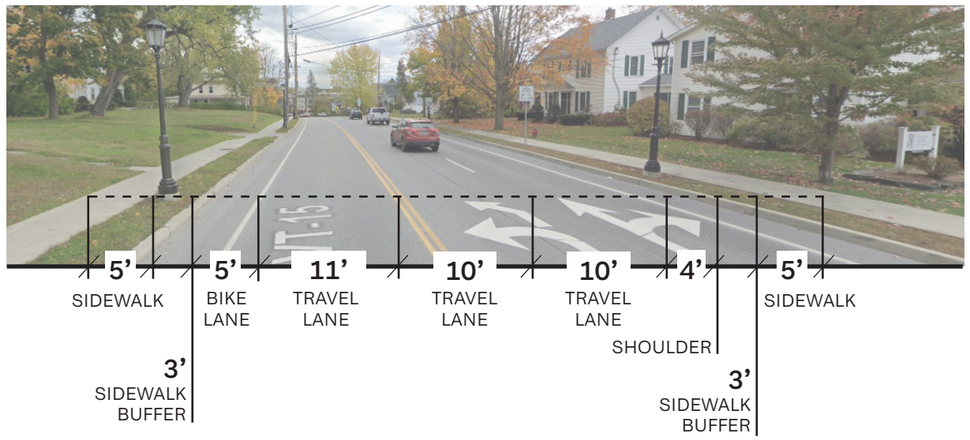
1 Pearl Street @ Five Corners (Southeast)

54’ R.O.W.



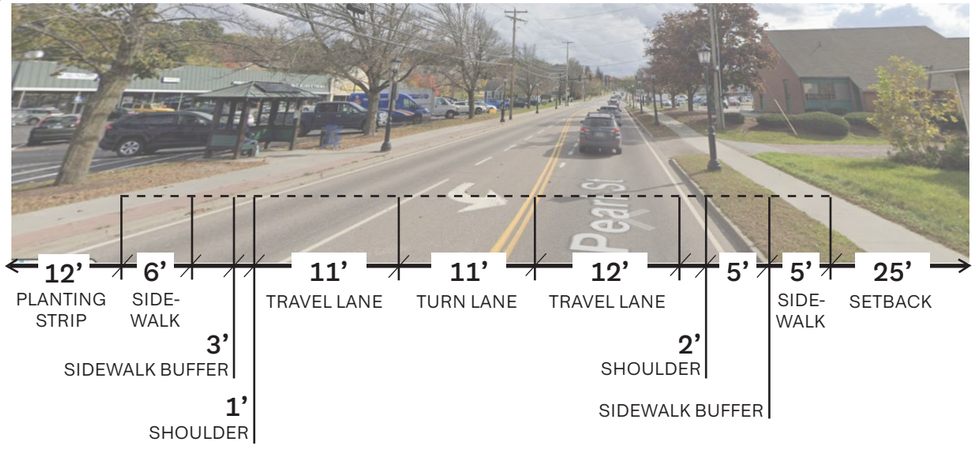
2 Pearl Street x Curtis Street (Southeast)

56’ R.O.W.



3 Pearl Street @ EJ Shopping Center (Southeast)

56’ R.O.W.



4 Pearl Street x Weston Way (Southeast)

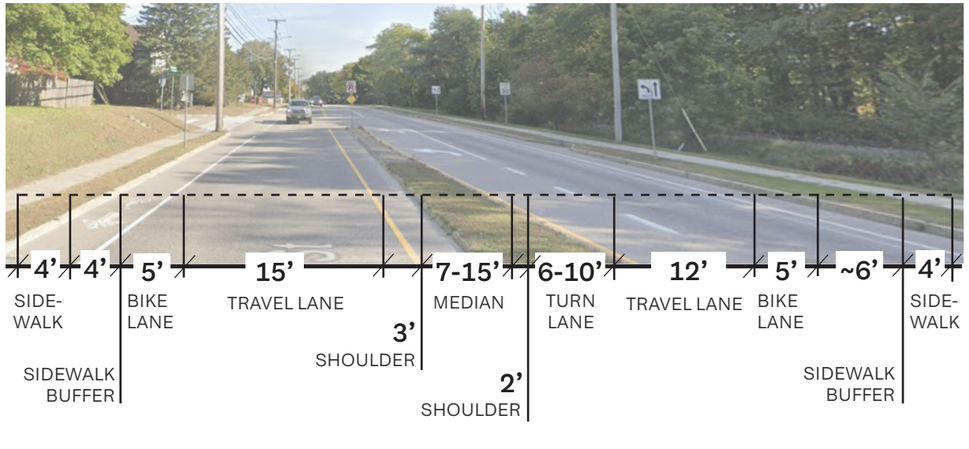
69’ R.O.W.

5 Pearl Street x Willeys Court (Southeast)

64’ R.O.W.

6 Pearl Street x Warner Avenue (Southeast)

74’+ R.O.W.



Except at Five Corners, buildings on Pearl Street are generally set far back from the curb.. There are still no designated bike lanes between Post Office Square and Champlain Valley, and there is no bike lane on the south side of the street between Curtis Street and the Five Corners, allowing for wider car lanes surrounding the fire station.

Lincoln Street

Several public and community buildings live on Lincoln Street, including Brownell Library and the Winston Prouty Federal Building. The streetscape consistently provides parallel parking, which alternates sides block-to-block. There are several paved parking lots along Lincoln Street, as well as wide, planted sidewalk buffers, lawns, and large deciduous trees. There are no bike lanes.

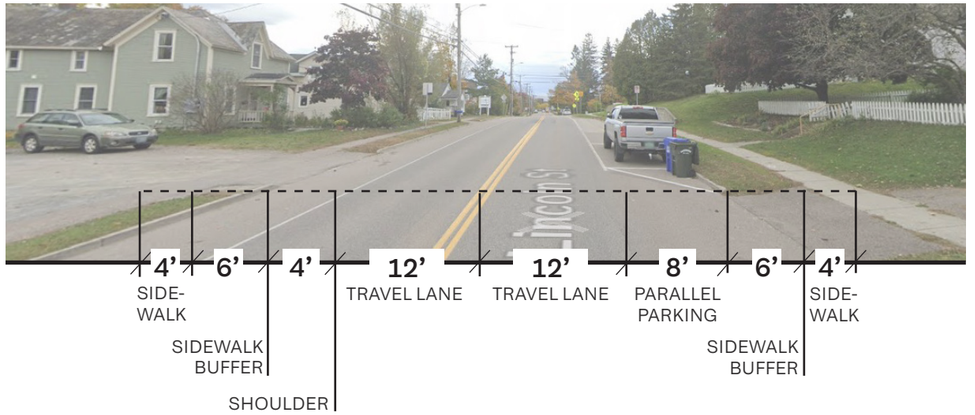
Main Street

Main Street has significant space for cars as well as pedestrians. Adjacent to the Five Corners intersection, sidewalks are 6-12’ wide along business frontages, but there are few amenities–no street trees or planting strips, and minimal street furniture. A significant amount of space on and around Main Street at the Five Corners is currently dedicated to cars, with angled parking along both sides and several adjacent parking lots. There is an expanded intersection where Main Street meets Railroad Avenue, the railroad tracks, and Railroad Street, creating a potentially dangerous area for pedestrians and cyclists. Further down, pedestrian spaces are more comfortable, with wide shoulders and sidewalk buffers, trees, and grassy setbacks.

Maple Street

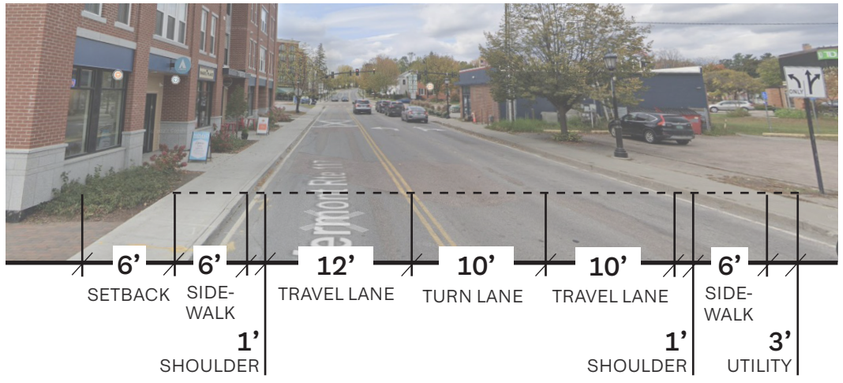
Maple Street is a primary thoroughfare, the continuation of Pearl Street to the east of the Five Corners intersection. At Five Corners, the streetscape is dominated by pavement, with three wide car lanes and parking lots (or former parking lots) on both sides. While there are some street trees, planting strips, and a few spots with street furniture, pedestrians have narrow or no sidewalk buffers from the roadway. Moving further east, the streetscape becomes more residential, with

7 Lincoln Street x Prospect Street (South) 56’ R.O.W.



8 Main Street @ Five Corners (East) 74’ R.O.W.

9 Maple Street @ Five Corners (West) 49’ R.O.W.



long setbacks, larger trees, and lawns. Car travel lanes remain wide, and there is a sidewalk buffer (3'-wide) on just the north side. A portion of Maple Street (east of Railroad Street) is being redesigned as part of the Crescent Connector.

Park Street

The block of Park Street adjacent to the Five Corners has significant pedestrian space, street trees, and lighting along business frontages, in addition to four vehicle travel lanes. Moving down Park St, there are inconsistencies in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure that contribute to potentially unsafe conditions. The sidewalk on the eastern side disappears between River Street and Mill Street heading south toward Williston, and there is no crosswalk near that location for pedestrians who need to continue walking south.

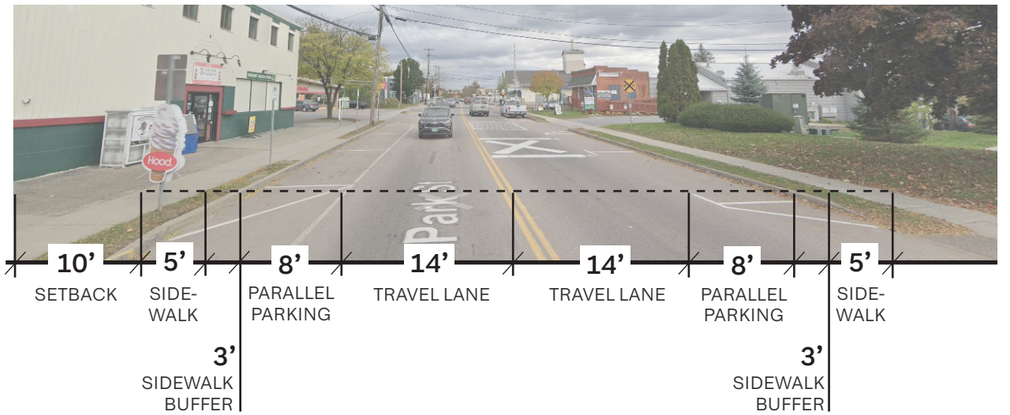
There are painted bike lanes on both sides of Park Street on its southern end near the Winooski River, but both disappear before the intersection of Park Street with South Street and River Street; bike lanes are replaced by scattered parallel parking on both sides of the street between that intersection and the Five Corners. Pedestrian infrastructure in that zone is consistent and well-kept, but there are few sidewalk buffers, planting strips, or trees and a large amount of adjacent property space is taken by paved parking lots.

Five Corners

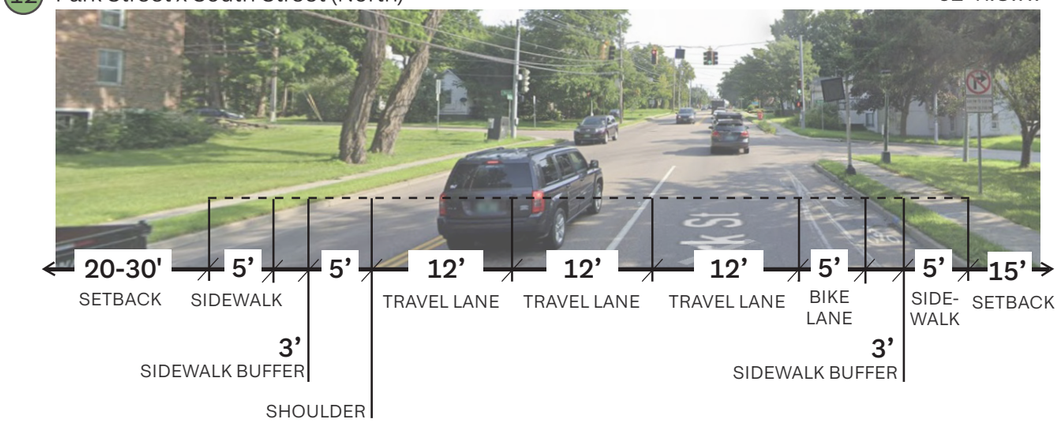
The Five Corners intersection has a uniquely constrained capacity; each of the five directions has its own traffic phase, and pedestrian signals are timed so that one crossing goes at a time, resulting in three-minute wait times at minimum for all road users. The in-progress Crescent Connector aims to address frustration and safety concerns at this intersection, and future TOD planning should consider additional improvement opportunities for this focal point of Essex Junction.

10 Park Street @ Five Corners (North) 66' R.O.W.

11 Park Street x Iroquois Avenue (North) 60' R.O.W.



12 Park Street x South Street (North) 62' R.O.W.



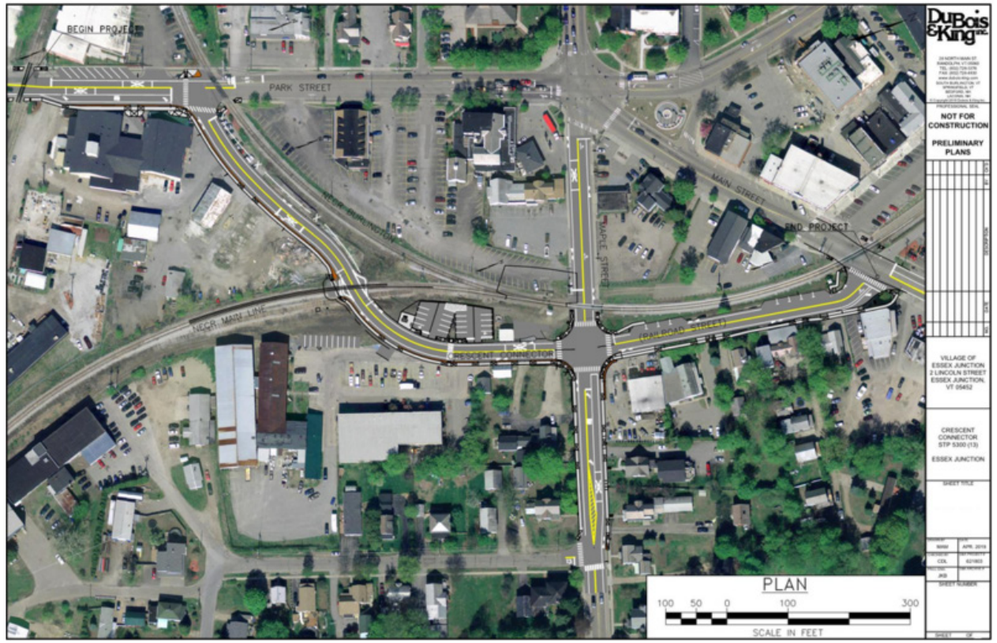


Figure 12. Crescent Connector (Proposed).

Image by DuBois & King, accessed via City of Essex Junction Website (June 8, 2022)

Crescent Connector

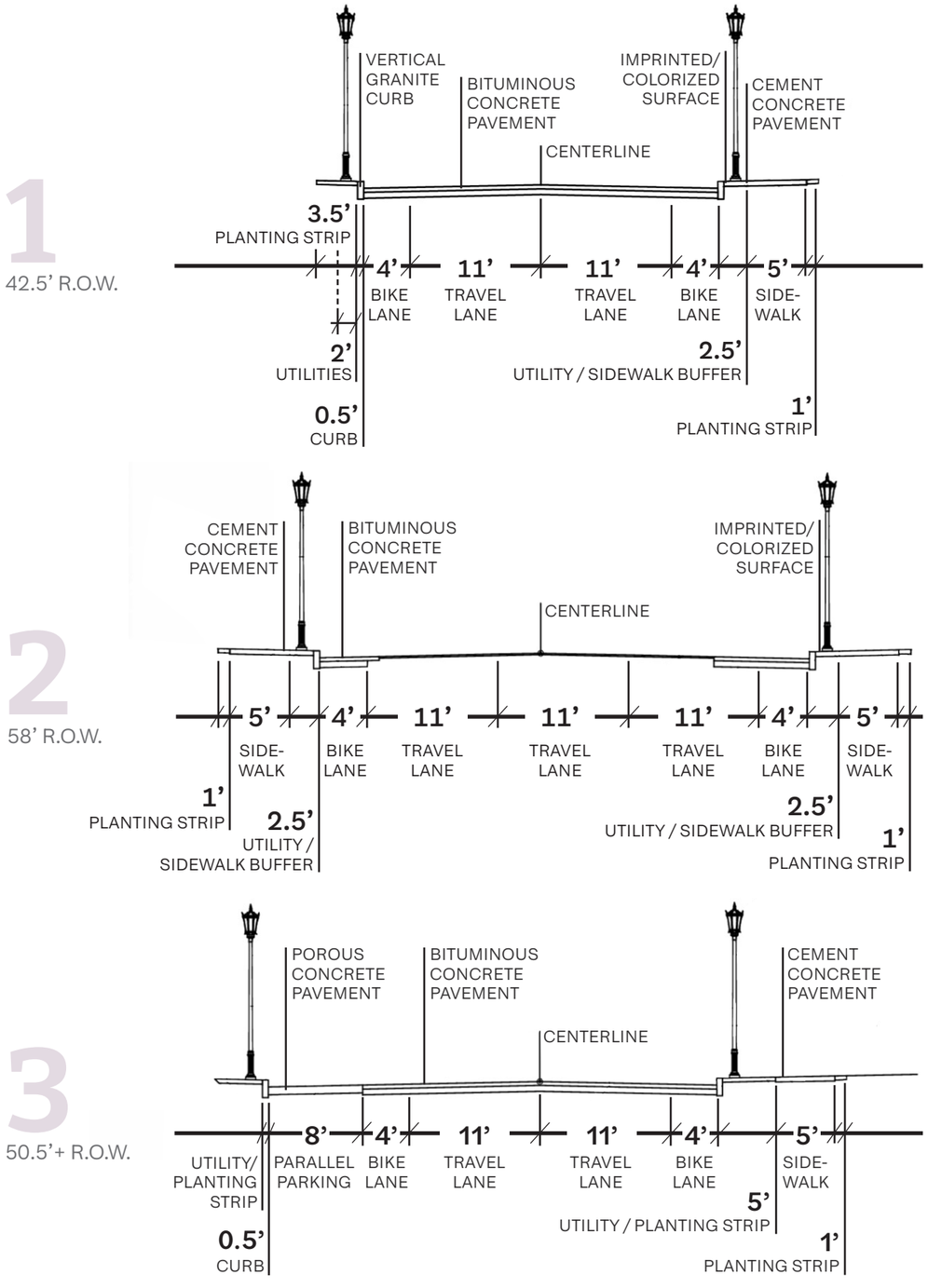
Currently under construction, the Crescent Connector is a road intended to redirect through-traffic from the Five Corners. The Crescent Connector will connect Park Street, Maple Street, and Main Street, crossing the New England Central Railway rail line (with a new at-grade rail crossing) then running adjacent to the railroad. The streetscape provides for two-way car traffic, two-way bike traffic in designated lanes, and a sidewalk on at least one side, plus lighting and sidewalk buffers. A small parking lot will be located between the Crescent Connector and the railway just south of Maple Street. Stormwater infrastructure will include catch basins, swales, and porous pavement in the parking lot which will allow for filtration and infiltration. Construction is expected to be completed in November 2024.

Figure 13. Crescent Connector Sections (Proposed)

1 Crescent Connector, connecting Park to Maple (North)

2 Maple Street x Crescent Connector (West)

3 Crescent Connector, Railroad Street (North)



Section drawings. Source: DuBois & King Inc, accessed via Crescent Connector Project Village of Essex Junction, Vermont Revised Environmental Assessment (March 2014).

Railroad Avenue

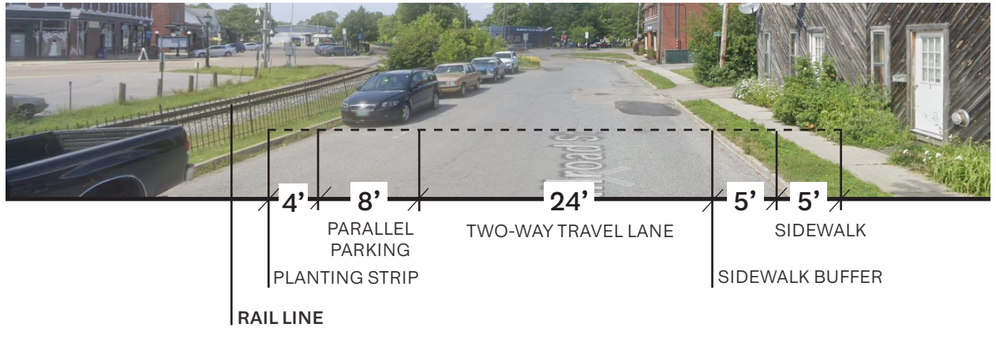
Railroad Avenue is a one-block road that runs parallel to the railroad track and leads to the Essex Junction Amtrak station. The road functions as an access point to the train station and provides parking for the train station as well as the City Center. There are a few businesses and restaurants with frontages on Railroad Avenue, just off Main Street. While cars are prioritized, there is ample space for pedestrians and outdoor use by businesses, with bumpouts, planters, and street lighting contributing to an attractive pedestrian zone.

Railroad Street

Railroad Street is another one-block road that runs parallel to the railroad track between Maple Street and Main Street. Railroad Street will be redeveloped into part of the new Crescent Connector.

13 Railroad Avenue (North) 69'+ R.O.W.

14 Railroad Street (North) 42'+ R.O.W.



Non-Motorized Facilities

Shared-Use Paths

There are a number of shared-use paths for pedestrians and cyclists surrounding the project area. The Colchester/Essex Multi-Use Path is a recently completed 10'-wide asphalt path along Route 15 from Lime Kiln Road in Colchester to Susie Wilson Road, where Route 15 becomes Pearl Street. Completed in 2022, the project includes about two miles of multi-use path, pedestrian signal upgrades, signage, pavement markings and other incidental highway-related activities.

The North-to-Central shared-use path is just north of the Five Corners; the 10-foot-wide asphalt path runs parallel to the rail tracks adjacent to Lincoln St for about a quarter-mile, connecting Central Street by Railroad Ave to North Street. Further north, about a half mile from the Five Corners, another 0.5-mile shared-use path follows the perimeter of the Tree Farm Recreational Facility.

There is another 10-foot-wide shared-use path along Main Street between Densmore Drive and Fairview Drive, which then winds further north and east for another half-mile. This path ends about a quarter-mile (along winding residential roads) from the southernmost entrance to the Essex Bike Path, another one-to-two-mile shared-use path that runs north toward Essex Town Center, adjacent to Myers Park.

South of the project area, there is a shared-use path on Essex Road linking Taft Corners in Williston to Overlook Park, just south of the Winooski River. Buffered bike lanes connect this path to Park Street in Essex Junction (about a quarter-mile), but the street is lacking opportunities for cyclists to safely cross into the northbound bike lane.

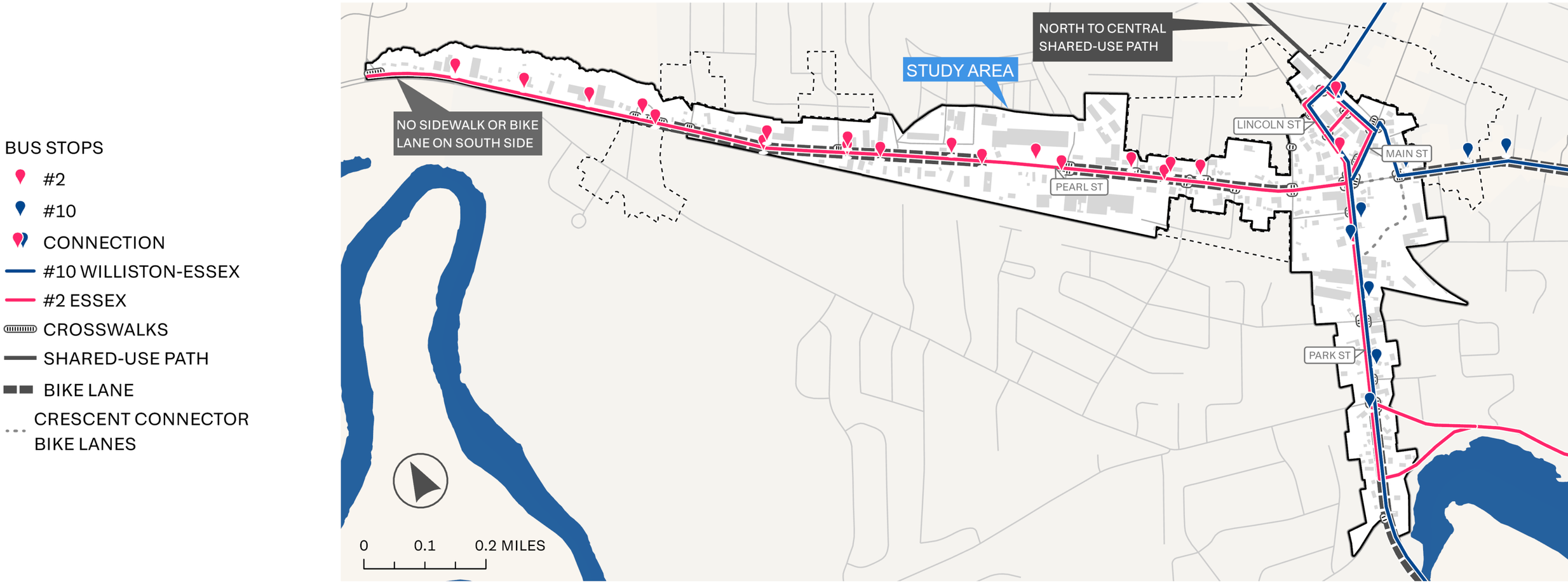
Shared-use paths that will cross the railroad are planned in two more places: south of Maple Street Park, and between West Street and Pearl Street near the West Street Community Garden and the Essex Dog Park.

TOP TWO: Colchester-Essex Multi-Use Path. Source: State of Vermont Agency of Transportation.

THIRD: Maple Street Bike Park. Source: EJRP.

BOTTOM: The entrance to the North-to-Central shared use path. The addition of signage would improve wayfinding.

Figure 14. Existing Bike and Transit Facilities



Bike Facilities

The Crescent Connector's on-street bike lanes will nearly complete a north-south connection for cyclists through the city, connecting Park Street at the Five Corners to the North-to-Central Path. As mentioned previously, a portion of Park Street south of Five Corners still lacks designated bike lanes. There are still significant gaps in east-west bicycle infrastructure, especially around Pearl Street's commercial centers and at the Five Corners.

2023 Land Development Code Amendments included adding short- and long-term bicycle parking as well as other amenities – including showers and clothes lockers for large developments – to promote and encourage cycling as a viable form of transportation for residents, consumers, visitors, and employees of Essex Junction.

In addition to aforementioned bicycle infrastructure intended for transit (including shared-use paths and on-street bike lanes), Maple Street Park, adjacent to the project area, has a freestyle bike park.

Trails

There are pedestrian trails near the project area in Maple Street Park, Stevens Park, Pearl Street Park, the Woodside Natural Area, the Essex Dog Park, and along the Winooski River near the southern end of Park Street. There are also many trails in and leading from the Tree Farm, north of the project area.

There are also many short connector paths for pedestrians throughout the project area and its surroundings, many of which have been documented by the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee. The Committee and BlueCrossBlueShield of Vermont identified 10 "walks" within Essex Junction – on a mix of sidewalks, streets, park trails, and nature trails – and published a map of these online to encourage pedestrian activity.

Transit

Transit in Essex Junction is serviced by Green Mountain Transit (GMT), the regional public transit system of Burlington and surrounding areas. Regular fare is $2 for a single ride, $4 daily, or $50 monthly. Discounted fares (50% of regular) are available for youth, seniors, persons with disabilities, and those with medicare cards. College and university students can ride GMT buses for free.

GMT offers complementary ADA paratransit service for residents who live within ¾ mile of GMT's fixed route service but are functionally unable to use the fixed route service due to a disability. ADA paratransit service provides pick-ups and drop-offs to any location not more than ¾ mile from the fixed routes, during the same days and hours as the fixed routes. Applications and approvals are required for residents to use this service. The Town of Essex Senior Bus Service previously provided free rides by appointment for residents of Essex Junction aged 60 and older, but as of January 2024, the service no longer serves Essex Junction residents.

Essex Junction is a key stop on the Vermonter Amtrak line, connecting St. Albans, VT to Washington, DC via Springfield, MA and New York City. The Vermonter stops in Essex Junction twice daily, once in each direction. The Essex Junction Amtrak station was Vermont's busiest train station – serving 20,000 customers in 2019 – prior to the July 2022 opening of Amtrak service between Burlington's Union Station and New York City via the Ethan Allen Express line. In 2023, the Essex Junction station served 16,000 riders, while Burlington's Union Station served 21,000 riders.

Trustees and community members have advocated for upgrades to the Essex Junction Station for over a decade, including in a 2016 Access and Circulation Study which proposed a redesign. $3 million in federal funding through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Grants Program was earmarked in 2022 to support the redevelopment of the Essex Junction station, which may help support an extension of the Vermonter line to Montreal, Canada.

Transit Network

The project area is serviced by two GMT local bus lines: Route #2 Essex and Route #10 Williston-Essex. Route #2 Essex runs through Burlington and Essex Junction, terminating at the Amtrak Station and/or the GlobalFoundries fabrication plant southeast of the city center. GMT Route #10 Williston Essex connects Essex Junction to Williston and Essex. The Route #36 Jeffersonville Commuter bus also connects closely to the project area, providing four trips per day in each direction and sharing stops with #2 at several points surrounding Saint Michael's College and with #10 at "Essex Experience" just north of VT 289, providing connections north to Jericho, Underhill, Cambridge, and Jeffersonville.

Stops on both lines, #2 and #10, are placed about 0.1 miles apart within the project area, though there are some gaps in service. In particular, there is a lack of eastbound #2 bus stops on the western end of the project area due to the lack of sidewalk on the south side of Pearl Street (and a lack of pedestrian crossings) between Susie Wilson Road and West Street Ext, limiting development potential in this area. Another limitation is along Route #10; between the Five Corners and the Town of Essex, the route is a one-way loop, traveling north up Main Street to Essex then westbound on Maple St back to the Five Corners, resulting in unnecessarily long commutes for many. In general, the project area lacks pedestrian crossings that connect bus stops, high-quality shelters and benches, and dense development surrounding bus stops; addressing these issues would improve safety, accessibility, and comfort of public transit usage in Essex Junction.

Despite current limitations, there is high demand for non-vehicle modes of transit in Essex Junction; as of April 2024, Route #2 had the highest average daily ridership (over 2,000 riders) and second highest overall ridership in GMT's network. Route #2 buses run every 20 minutes on weekdays between Burlington and Essex Junction; aside from the eastbound gap in bus stops on Pearl St, the route is consistent and reliable, with stops at major destinations including downtown Burlington, the University of Vermont, Saint Michael's College, a National Guard training facility, two large natural areas, the Champlain Valley Exhibition, Pearl Street commercial areas, the Five Corners, and the Essex Junction Amtrak station.

Route #2 buses run consistently every 20 minutes throughout the day on weekdays, every 30 minutes on Saturdays, and every 45 minutes on Sundays. Evening service (between 7PM and 11PM) is more limited, with buses every 60-75 minutes. Route #10 buses all run 75 minutes apart on weekdays and Saturdays. GMT buses do not run on Federal holidays. Routes and schedules described here were made effective on June 24, 2024.

	Weekdays			Saturday		Sunday
	6AM-6PM	6-7PM	7-11PM	6:30AM-7PM	7-11PM	8AM-7PM
#2 Essex	20 min	30 min	60-75 min 60-75 min	30 min	60-75 min	45 min

	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday
	7AM-7PM	7:15AM-7:15PM	
#10 Williston Essex	75 min	75 min	No service

Frequency of local GMT buses that service Essex Junction

Figure 15. Green Mountain Transit weekly schedule
Source: Green Mountain Transit.

5 COMMUNITY + CAPITAL FACILITIES

Overview

This section provides an inventory of existing public facilities in Essex Junction, including civic and community buildings, utilities and infrastructure services, and parks and outdoor spaces.

Key Findings

- **There is a cluster of buildings with civic and community uses at the Five Corners intersection, including the Brownell Library, the Essex Area Senior Center, the Fire Department, the Teen Center, and the municipal offices at 2 Lincoln.** Some of these user groups are likely to be non-drivers, and thus may be accessing the site using public transit, walking, or biking. The design of multi-modal facilities should consider these buildings, and there is an opportunity to support these programs through the addition of public space abutting or nearby these properties.
- **The project area and the Essex Junction park system as a whole lacks plaza spaces** or other park typologies that cater to public gatherings around main streets and dense urban areas.
- **The addition of bike and pedestrian facilities will affect the way Essex Junction accesses its parks,** as several parks are adjacent to this project's extents.

Figure 16. Community and Capital Facilities Map

Figure 17. Community and Capital Facilities Table

	Name	Type	Entity	Project Area
1.	Pearl Street Park	Park	Essex Parks and Recreation	Primary-adjacent
2.	State-Owned Park Land	Park	State of Vermont	Primary-adjacent
3.	Tree Farm	Recreational facility	Private	Outside of project area
4.	Stevens Park	Park	City of Essex Junction	Primary-adjacent
5.	Maple Street Park	Park	City of Essex Junction	Outside of project area
6.	Cascade Park	Park	City of Essex Junction	Primary-adjacent
7.	Hiwatha Elementary	School	Essex Westford School District	Outside of project area
8.	Thomas Fleming School	School	Essex Westford School District	Outside of project area
9.	Summit Street School	School	Essex Westford School District	Secondary
10.	Essex High School	School	Essex Westford School District	Outside of project area
11.	Albert D. Lawton Intermediate	School	Essex Westford School District	Outside of project area
12.	Fire Department	Capital Facility	City of Essex Junction	Primary
13.	Lincoln Hall	Capital Facility	City of Essex Junction	Primary
14.	Brownell Library	Capital Facility	City of Essex Junction	Primary
15.	Water Resource Recovery Facility	Utility	City of Essex Junction	Primary-adjacent

Utilities and Infrastructure

Essex Junction Fire Department

The Essex Junction Fire Department is next to the Brownell Library and the Essex Teen Center. It houses the City's on-call volunteer members, who provide fire protection and advanced EMS first-response.

Lincoln Hall

The historic buildings at 2 Lincoln contain municipal offices, the Essex Area Senior Center, Essex Community Health Initiatives & Programs for Students (CHIPS), the Essex Teen Center, and the Little Free Pantry. These buildings also host City Council meetings, Planning Commission meetings, and other meetings for City advisory boards and committees.

Renovations to Lincoln Hall are anticipated to begin in Fall of 2024. The project will establish a formal entryway into the building, create a layout that accommodates the City Office team, and install an elevator to serve the basement, first, and second floors. The project will also make the building fully accessible and upgrade the HVAC system. During renovations to the building occurring during 2024-2025, Senior Center programs will occur at a different location.

Lincoln Hall's buildings sit on the corner of the 5 points junction with its entrance facing out onto Lincoln Street, with a view of Veterans Memorial Park across the way. Future design decisions may consider how this entryway can interact with new and existing public spaces within the City Center and how pedestrian access to the building could benefit from intersection improvements or other traffic slowing measures. Further, the hub of civic and community uses that occur here beg the question of how public space could serve these user groups.

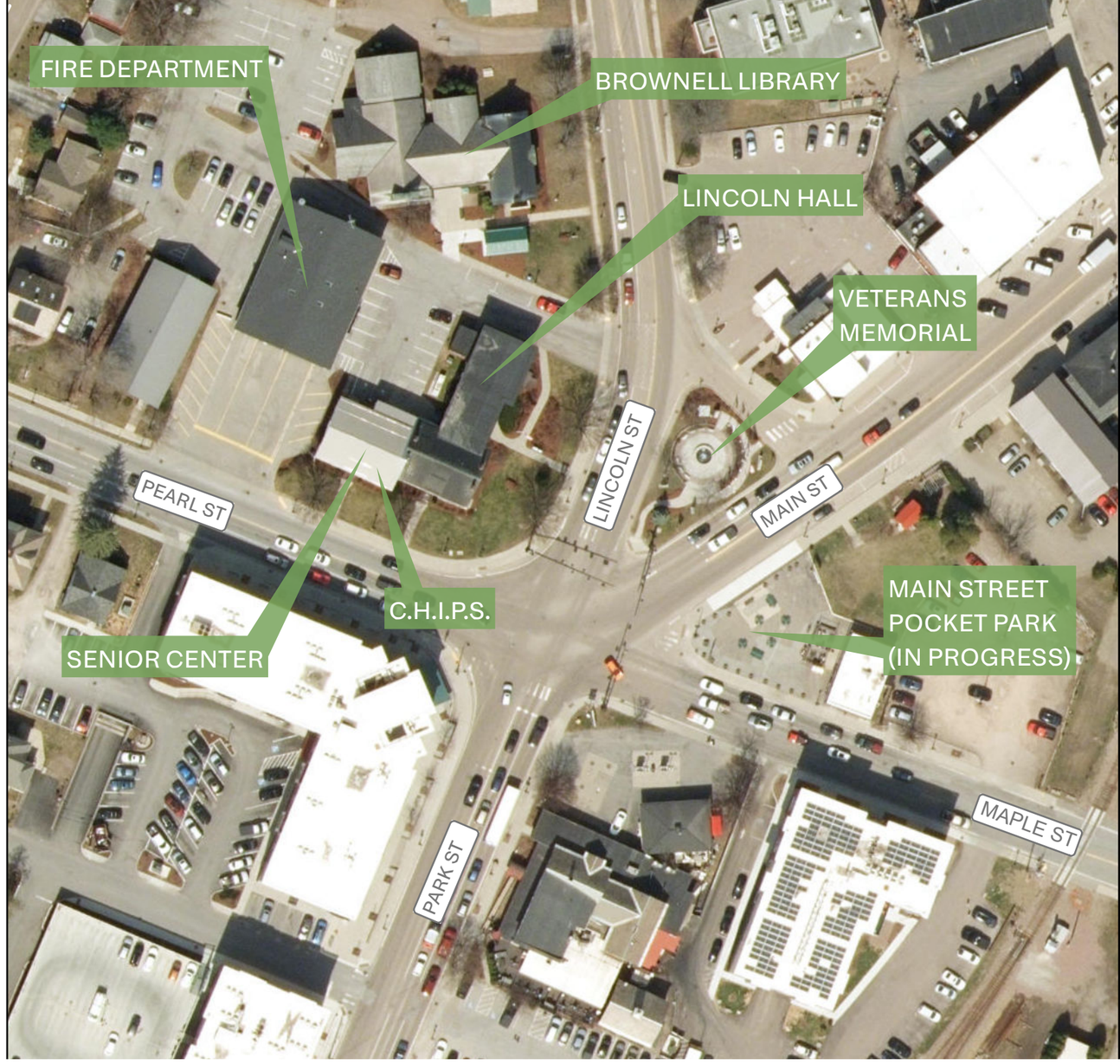


Figure 18. Capital Facilities at the Five Corners intersection

Essex Area Senior Center

Typically the Senior Center is open to members for a few hours during the day, Monday through Friday with scheduled times for games such as Mah Jongg, bingo, and bridge. During community engagement for the Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan, residents expressed that they would like to see expansion of the Center and its programs. As of January 2024, the Senior Center is being managed by EJRP, who created and hired for the new position of Program Director for Older Adults in Summer of 2024. This new management structure and staff could help to meet the community need.

Normally the Senior Center operates out of the white building at 2 Lincoln, but during construction at Lincoln Hall (anticipated to continue through Spring 2025), Senior Center activities will be limited to Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and will take place at the Holy Family Parish Center and the Brownell Library.

Essex Community Health Initiatives & Programs for Students (CHIPS)

CHIPS is a non-profit that provides direct service programs for youth and families, including substance abuse prevention programs. They manage the Teen Center, which operates out of the white building at 2 Lincoln and provides Monday-Thursday programming for teens and tweens during the school year. Redevelopment of the five corners area might consider how this group would use new public spaces within the City Center, and how improvements could help them safely access the site via public transit or non-motorized transportation.

Schools and Libraries

Brownell Library

Essex Junction's library serves as a hub for learning and community, offering programs for youth and adults, as well as rentals of not only books, but sports equipment, art supplies, and tech equipment as well. In 2023, the library served 55,830 visitors and hosted 567 programs with a total of 8771 attendees. Programming during this year included a summer reading program, the library's first Community Organization Fair, tax filing assistance, take-home craft kits, free Covid tests and KN95 masks, teen groups such as dungeons and dragons, as well as home school groups. Those who want to host an event can rent the library's Kolvoord Community Room at little cost.

Thomas Fleming Middle School

Thomas Fleming Middle School borders the secondary study area of this project, with a 5.44-acre parcel that houses the elementary school complex as well as a basketball court, a baseball field, a multi-purpose play area, and a high intensity playground.

Summit Street School

Summit Street School is within the secondary portion of this project's study area. Its 3.7-acre site contains the elementary school complex, including a playground and large open space area.

Essex High School

Essex High School is just north of the project area off Lincoln Street. The 50-acre site has numerous recreational facilities including practice fields, a stadium, track, tennis courts, and an indoor hockey rink. With current enrollment around 1,191 students and no existing bus service, there is opportunity to improve multi-modal options on and around Lincoln Street and Main Street.

Essex Junction Parks

Essex Junction Recreation & Parks (EJRP) maintains 5 main parks and facilities, 4 of which are within or adjacent to our project area. These parks offer places to play sports, swim, walk in the woods, use a children's playground, exercise dogs, and rent spaces for a gathering. There are also less-developed open spaces that offer access to nature as well as ecological services such as mitigating stormwater runoff, cleaning air and water, and mitigating urban heat island effect. As the area grows with more housing and businesses, these parks will support a greater number of people and offset a greater volume of environmental impacts.

The project area and park system as a whole lacks plaza spaces or other park typologies that cater to public gatherings around main streets and dense urban areas. These types of spaces can host farmers markets and other community events, be sites for public art and other cultural displays, and support local businesses by encouraging people to linger in commercial areas. The lack of this type of space was noted in the Comprehensive Plan, which cites the Design Five Corners Project proposal to reconfigure the Five Corners intersection and create a central greenspace adjacent to Main Street.

The City of Essex Junction received $200,000 in state funding to design and build out a proposal for this central green; "Main Street Pocket Park" will be located on Five Corners between Main St and Maple St, where there is currently a parking lot. The park will likely be "Montreal-style," made of cheap materials that can be stored for the winter.

Maple Street Park

Source: EJRP.

Acres: 38

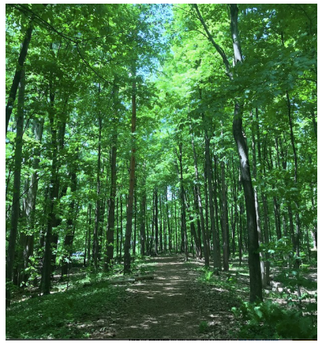
Surrounding LU: MF-R1, R2, R1, LII

Facility summary:

- 38 acres of park land
- Recreation center
- 2 swimming pools
- Concession stands
- 4 pavilions
- Baseball fields
- Tennis courts
- Basketball court
- Playground areas
- Nature trails
- Skate park
- Bike park
- GaGa Ball Pit
- Sand Volleyball Court

Maple Street Park offers 38 acres of playgrounds, recreation facilities, and trails, as well as the Maple Street Recreation Center (MSRC) and Maple Street Pool. It is the largest park in the EJRP system and the only classified as a Community Park, a typology of parks which serve multiple neighborhoods because of their size, number of facilities, and/or unique offerings. Much of the park's acreage is devoted to sports fields and courts, with significant tree canopy buffering it from its adjacent residential and industrial uses. Park goers enter on Vermont Route 117 into a large parking lot, where crosswalks through the parking lot offer an option for pedestrian access.

The park's many facilities host programs for youth and adults, including swimming lessons, dog training courses at the MSRC, exercise classes in the multi-purpose room, and a spring running series. These programs offer residents a way to learn, exercise, and connect with each other throughout the year in both indoor and outdoor facilities. At Maple Street Pool, which abuts the parking lot, visitors have access to two pools open during the summer months, with a water slide, three water features, a Zero Entry Beach, lap lanes, and three and one-meter diving boards. The Skate Park offers beginner-friendly equipment and hosts Burton's Chill Foundation Skateboarding program, a 501c3 arm of the Burton board sports company that teaches skills to young people. Maple Street Bike Park operates as another entity in the park, hosting meetups for riders and volunteer days for trail maintenance. The forested park space contains a variety of jumps, pump tracks and wooden features that can be ridden with a freestyle mountain bike or BMX bike.



Stevens Park. Source: EJRP.

Stevens Park

Acres: 8

Surrounding LU: R-1, R-O

Stevens Park is an 8-acre, largely undeveloped Neighborhood park that abuts our project area. Surrounded by a block of single-family homes, the park's entrance on South Street consists of a sign, with an unpaved pathway that leads into the forested acreage with walking trails and benches.

Because the park is tucked behind residential properties and lacks a parking lot, it likely is used primarily by the nearby residents. A public engagement process would be helpful to understand what the community's relationship is to the park and if there is any desire to further develop the site. Further development would also require improved park access, which could be accommodated via redevelopment of 49 Park St.

Veterans Memorial Park. Source: Google Maps.

Veterans Memorial Park

Acres: .12

Surrounding LU: City Center

A small triangle of ROW next to the Five Corners serves as Veterans Memorial Park, which contains stone benches surrounding a fountain, as well as trees, landscaping, and a small memorial.

Other Recreation Spaces

State-Owned Open Space

Bordering our project area to the south, separated from Pearl Street by a rail line, there are nearly 30 acres of state-owned land designated as Open Space. The parcel contains state offices including those for Fish & Wildlife, Natural Resources, and the Forest Parks & Recreation Department. The site also contains Essex Dog Park and a community garden called West Street Garden, both operated by EJRP.

Pearl Street Park's sports facilities are tucked amongst dense tree cover.

Pearl Street Park

Acres: 14

Pearl Street Park is a neighborhood Park maintained by Essex Parks and Recreation. It features two tennis courts, a playground, a basketball court, a ball field, a 9 hole disc golf course, and walking trails. The park is accessed via Pearl Street, with a roundabout and small parking lot before a gated drive that connects to the park.

The Tree Farm's soccer fields are separated by tall hedgerows. Source: Untappd

Tree Farm

The Tree Farm is a privately managed open space that consists of fields for soccer, rugby, frisbee, and other sports, as well as cross country skiing trails. Fields may be rented at $72/hour, with different rates for larger events.

Champlain Valley Exposition

The Champlain Valley Exposition serves as a venue for a wide range of events, including concerts, blood drives, the state fair, and other festivals. Facilities include 81,000 sq. ft. of combined clear-span exhibit space, a concert grandstand, 600 camper electric/water hookups, and professional staff and event management services. Public access to and through the site is permitted during non-event times.

6 LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE

Overview

This project's study area contains a mix of zoning districts and development standards ranging from small scale residential and multi-family districts to the historic Village Center and Transit Oriented Development District that prioritize mixed-use development. The maximum height varies between 3 and 4 stories, with standard parking requirements except in the Transit-Oriented Development and the Village Center Zoning Districts.

The Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District has reduced parking requirements compared to the other districts, and the Village Center District has no minimum parking requirements but does provide guidelines for minimums. The Village Center and the corridors approaching the Five Corners are also subject to the Design Review Overlay and Historic Preservation Overlay that include special standards for design review and historic preservation.

Key Findings:

- **Current zoning and standards are generally supportive of Transit Oriented Development,** particularly in the Village Center and TOD Districts which contain reduced parking requirements.
- **Building height limits and parking requirements may limit the flexibility for TOD development.**
- **The Residential 2 District allows one principal structure per lot** which provides less flexibility for middle housing.
- **Additional height and density allowances for affordable housing** in many of the zones support transit oriented development objectives.
- **Dimensional standards such as setbacks and lot coverage requirements** restrict the ability to replicate or improve upon some historically abundant building typologies and site layouts.
- **The City-wide parking standard for residential land uses is 1 parking space per unit.** All zoning districts within this project area follow this standard except for the Village Center and Transit-Oriented Development.

Zoning District Standards for Study Area

Village Center

Intent: To provide a compact commercial center with a mix of commercial, governmental, cultural and mixed use buildings that are consistent with the purpose of a designated Village Center District, and a neighborhood development area as both are defined by the State of Vermont. The Village Center shall be the core for an ongoing revitalization that will improve the community's vitality and livability and the goal of having a Center that accommodates growth. Due to the historic nature of the residential neighborhoods surrounding the Five Corners area, the design and layout of any new developments or infill projects shall acknowledge the importance of the existing streetscape and enhance the area through an architectural design and site layout that enhances pedestrian connectivity to adjacent properties.

Special Standards:

- Formula-based retail
- Historic building demolition
- Design Review

TOD

Intent: The purpose of the Transit Oriented Development District (TOD) is to encourage development that supports a variety of transportation options including public transit (bus and rail), walking, biking and the automobile. This zoning district deviates from the standard parking requirement, specifying 1 parking space per unit, or 3 per 1,000 square feet.

Special Standards:

- Block lengths
- Street frontage
- Parking reductions
- Sidewalk widths

Highway Arterial

Intent: To provide areas for retail, wholesale, commercial, residential, service and professional businesses while minimizing negative impacts due to increased traffic.

Multi-Family/Mixed-Use 1

Intent: The Multi-Family/Mixed-Use-1 District is intended to allow high density multi-family development along low intensity commercial uses along major transportation and public transit corridors. High Density, Mixed Use developments and affordable housing with parking below grade or on the first floor of the building are encouraged. Development in the MF-MU1 District should support alternative modes of transportation, while accommodating the automobile.

Residential Office

Intent: Provide areas for small office conversions of existing residential structures while maintaining residential type architecture. It is not the intent of this District to allow conversions which substantially alter the residential appearance of the structure or which alter the residential character of the neighborhood.

Special Standards:

- Maintain residential character for conversions

Planned Exposition

Intent: To provide an area for special events and exposition facilities while minimizing adverse traffic, sound and visual impacts. It is the intent of this district to encourage innovation in design and to encourage pedestrian, bicycle and bus access to such events.

Residential 2

Intent: To provide areas for high-density single family residential development and accessory uses.

Special Standards:

- Middle Housing required to be within one principle structure.
- Parking may not take up more than 20’ or 20% of the lot frontage; whatever is less

Relevant Zoning District Standards for Secondary Study Area

Multifamily 3

Intent: To provide areas for low density multi-family dwellings and accessory residential uses.

Multi-Family/Mixed Use-2 District (MF-MU2)

Intent: The Multi-Family/Mixed-Use-2 District is intended to allow high density multi-family development along low intensity commercial uses along major transportation and public transit corridors. High Density, Mixed Use developments and affordable housing with parking below grade or on the first floor of the building are encouraged. Development in the MF-MU2 District should support alternative modes of transportation, while accommodating the automobile. Developments within this district should be designed in such a way as to build upon the village character found in the core areas of the City.

(City of Essex Junction Land Development Code, 2023)

Zoning District	Minimum lot size	Max # Units per lot (as planned development)	Affordability bonus density	Max lot coverage	Affordability coverage bonus	Min. Front Setback	Min. Side Setback	Min. Rear Setback	Maximum Height	Affordability height bonus
RO	*****	19 units per acre; 4 per lot max.		40%		*20'	8'		35'	
R2	7500	4		40%, 30% per unit		*15'	8'	25’ ******	35'	
MF2	7500	3	+40%	50%		*15’	10’	10’	35’	48’
MF-MU1	15,000	N/A		65%	80%	20' min, 30' max	10'	10'	58'	72'
TOD	5,000	N/A		100%		no min, 20' max	N/A	N/A	58'	72'
HA	10,000	N/A	+40%	65%	80% ***	20'	10'	10'	58'	72'
PE	100 acres	N/A		40%		****	****	****	35'	
VC	5,000	N/A		**					58'	72'

Figure 19. Zoning Development Standards

*	Setback is established by the average setback of the principal structures on the two adjacent lots (or the closest two lots on the same side of the same street) and the minimum setback requirement for the underlying zoning district.
**	Determined by development review board as part of Site Plan Review
***	Waiver process through the development review board
****	20’ abutting commercial, 50’ abutting residential
*****	7500 + 500sq ft for additional units up to 4
******	25’ principal structure, 15’ accessory structure

APPENDIX: STYLE GUIDE

COLORS

Primary

R: 35 G: 74 B: 89
C: 61 M: 17 Y: 0 K: 65

R: 115 G: 166 B: 91
C: 31 M: 0 Y: 45 K: 35

R: 248 G: 237 B: 117
C: 5 M: 1 Y: 67 K: 0

R: 204 G: 246 B: 243
C: 17 M: 0 Y: 1 K: 4

R: 212 G: 65 B: 104
C: 13 M: 89 Y: 43 K: 1

Secondary

R: 115 G: 72 B: 112
C: 0 M: 37 Y: 3 K: 55

R: 55 G: 116 B: 140
C: 61 M: 17 Y: 0 K: 45

R: 248 G: 249 B: 239
C: 2 M: 0 Y: 6 K: 0

R: 175 G: 154 B: 137
C: 33 M: 37 Y: 45 K: 1

R: 198 G: 213 B: 111
C: 7 M: 0 Y: 48 K: 16

R: 156 G: 98 B: 147
C: 0 M: 37 Y: 6 K: 39

R: 184 G: 185 B: 187
C: 28 M: 22 Y: 21 K: 0

R: 117 G: 117 B: 117
C: 55 M: 47 Y: 46 K: 12

FONTS

H1: BITTER BOLD 28 PT; BLACK TINT 95%

H2: Bitter Bold; 17pt, Tracking 10

H3: Early Sans Variable Regular; 15 pt, Tracking 10; Black Tint 95%

H4: Early Sans Variable Medium; 12 pt, Tracking 10; Black Tint 95%

Body Text: Early Sans Variable Light; 12 pt; Black Tint 95%