

Essex Economic Development Commission Priorities Document (Summer 2014)

Goal #1: Increase and Diversify Tax Base

A. Industrial & Commercial Zoning: Promote and support development within existing industrial and commercial zoning areas.

Purpose: To promote a diversified tax base composed of a mix of residential, commercial and industrial properties, which reduces the percentage of taxes paid by residential taxpayers and provides adequate income to pay for current level of services.

B. Commercial & Industrial Facilities: Establish and maintain policies and resources to support companies using space at designated industrial land in Essex.

Purpose: To actively support the retention, expansion and attraction of businesses using or seeking to use land designated for commercial and industrial uses, with a focus on the Champlain Valley Technology & Park (CVTIP), the North 60 at CVTIP, Forestdale Industrial Park, Gauthier Industrial Park, and others.

C. Infill Development: Establish flexible policies and administrative processes to support appropriate infill development of commercial properties in Essex.

Purpose: To encourage new commercial development within designated commercial and industrial areas which will diversify or add to the Town's tax base.

Goal #2: Improve and Invest in Infrastructure

D. Major Roadway Improvements: Support upgrades to ensure that Route 15, Route 117 and other major arteries and routes in and out of Essex are adequate to attract and retain new businesses and residents, with particular attention to be focused on major upgrades to Route 117 between Essex Junction and Route 89 in Richmond.

Purpose: To ensure that roadways needed for economic development are adequate over time.

E. Other Transportation Issues: Support state and regional efforts to develop transportation links in and out of Essex, including upgrades to rail service, alternative transit systems, and regional multi-modal transportation options.

Purpose: To support transportation options for residents, business, and industry, including international connections to the Province of Quebec and to Montreal.

F. Other Infrastructure Issues: Establish and maintain resources to create better public understanding and awareness of infrastructure needs for growth, including water, waste water, broadband, permitting, etc.

Purpose: Improve support for projects approved by Planning and Zoning

Goal # 3: Foster Enterprises that Create Jobs

G. Entrepreneurship in Essex: Establish and maintain resources and programs to encourage entrepreneurs / creators of businesses to live and work in Essex.

Purpose: Support the growth of new businesses and job creation.

H. Public and Private Sector Employers: Participate with other Vermont agencies, especially the Vermont Agency of Commerce, Vermont Department of Labor, the Vermont Congressional Delegation, and the Center for Technology – Essex, to assist Essex employers in the public and private sectors to recruit and retain talented workforces and to operate in a healthy local business environment. This effort includes a focus on the facilities and businesses on the the Champlain Valley Technology and Innovation Park (CVTIP - the IBM campus) productive and employing Vermonters and working to retain government services with operations in Essex.

Purpose: Foster a vibrant and stable business and residential community in Essex.

Goal #4: Expand Communications and Outreach

I. Develop the Essex “Brand” and Market It: Attract new residents and businesses to Essex by using various media to market our “brand”

Purpose: To spread the word about Essex as a desirable place to live and work, particularly with regard to opportunities for growth for business & light industry, including the promotion of local education resources

J. Business Development: Establish, maintain, and review resources for business development in Essex, including outreach efforts to current and prospective employers

Purpose: Support the retention, expansion, and attraction of employers through knowledge, awareness, and public understanding.

Strategies and Action Steps to Accomplish Goals:

1. **Expand Economic Development Staffing:** Create a staff position filled by an economic development professional.
(All Goals)
2. **Establish a Development Review Board (DRB):** Adopt a DRB planning environment where regulatory responsibilities (planning and zoning) are combined in a DRB and the Planning Commission focuses on planning without regulatory responsibility.
(Goal #1A: Increase and Diversify Tax Base: Industrial & Commercial Zoning)
3. **Assess Uses at Fort Ethan Allen:** Undertake a review of current uses and potential uses of the Essex portion of Fort Ethan Allen aimed at promoting uses that generate higher tax revenues. Issues to be analyzed include: maintaining historic character of area while possibly changing uses, suitability of internal roads, possible road connection to the north and an assessment of commercial impacts of this linkage, assessment of sewer and water capacity and possible upgrades to accommodate changes in use, and related tasks.
(Goal #1A: Increase and Diversify Tax Base)
4. **Improve Policy, Regulation and Outcomes:** Establish metrics related to job creation and business development to measure economic development activity and impacts. In addition, review municipal policies and regulations from the perspective of supporting job creation and business development.
(Goal #1B: Increase and Diversify Tax Base: Commercial & Industrial Facilities)
5. **Engage with Essex Businesses:** Initiate Essex efforts, including face-to-face meetings, and participate in broader efforts to get to know and to understand the needs and supports identified by Essex businesses, especially Global Foundries, the likely new owner of the Champlain Valley Innovation & Technology Park and of IBM's Microelectronics Division.
(Goal #1B: Increase and Diversify Tax Base: Commercial & Industrial Facilities)
6. **Route 117 Upgrades:** Promote major upgrades and road straightening of Route 117 / River Road from Essex Junction to Route 89 in Richmond in appropriate State and regional forums (such as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO); Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC); Vermont Department of Transportation (VTrans); and the Governor's advisory committee on the IBM / Global Foundries transition) with the goal of making this transportation corridor more usable by commercial traffic.
(Goal #2D: Improve and Invest in Infrastructure: Major Roadway Improvements)

7. **Infrastructure Retention:** Work to retain infrastructure on the Champlain Valley Innovation and Technology Park (CVTIP) site (i.e. former IBM campus), including the discharge permit associated with the site's waste treatment plant.
(Goal #2F: Improve and Invest in Infrastructure: Other Infrastructure)
8. **Affordable Housing in Essex:** Promote creation of adequate housing affordable by conducting an affordable housing need projection and making recommendations for effective incentives.
(Goal #2F – Improve & Invest in Infrastructure: Other Infrastructure)
9. **Promote Entrepreneurship in Essex:** Support initiatives and collaborations to promote innovation and entrepreneurship including partnerships with neighboring communities, co-working spaces, maker spaces, and the development of an entrepreneurial culture in Essex.
(Goal #3G: Foster Enterprises that Create Jobs: Entrepreneurship in Essex).
10. **Communicate the Value of Economic Development:** Promote importance and impacts of economic development, including tax implications, using the Town Annual Report, Town Meeting, the Town's website (essex.org), Essex focused social media, and other appropriate vehicles.
(Goal #4: Promote Communications & Outreach)
11. **Support Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Education:** At least once per year, reach out to educators from the Essex Center for Technology (CTE) and Essex High School (EHS) to explore ways Essex Town can help promote the importance of and need for educational programs related to advanced manufacturing, technology and entrepreneurship, and the local need for graduates of these programs. Outreach should include CTE's staff focused on advanced manufacturing and EHS's faculty focused on STEM and careers.
(Goal #3H: Foster Enterprises that Create Jobs: Public & Private Sector Employers)
(Goal #4K: Expand Communication & Outreach: Business Development)
12. **Economic Development Collaboration:** Actively seek opportunities for the Town of Essex to collaborate with the Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation (GBIC), the Vermont Department of Economic Development (VDED), and Committees of the Vermont Legislature to educate these parties about the Essex economic development agenda, to attract new business to Essex, to help Essex businesses expand, and to address major changes at businesses that impact Essex.
(Goal #4K: Support Communications and Outreach: Business Development)

13. Advocate for Key Regional, State and National Issues:

- a. **AMTRAK:** Support extension of Amtrak's *Vermont* passenger train to Montreal and passenger rail connection between Essex and Burlington;
(Goal #2D: Improve and Invest in Infrastructure: Other Transportation Issues)
- b. **Retain and Attract Government Jobs:** Monitor the status and actively work to retain and to attract government operations (state and federal) in Essex. Retention activity will focus on United States Department of Homeland Security operations and related federal initiatives;
(Goal #3H: Foster Enterprises that Create Jobs: Public & Private Sector Employers)
- c. **Other Advocacy:** Pursue other objectives consistent with Goals identified in the Town Plan.

Transmittal e-mail: Nov 3, 2014

Hi Dana and Greg:

Thanks so much from the EDC for all your guidance and insights. As you know, the EDC has been working on this document for several months. We look at it as a draft to be edited and altered as the Planning Commission and the Selectboard review and react to our proposals. Members of the EDC stand ready to discuss our proposals and rationales when the time is right. Please call on us as this plan evolves.

Also, I will work on an outline for the text of the Economic Development portion of the plan. We hope the narrative can reflect some of the points made in our work plan.

Attached are two versions of the draft EDC Goals and Priorities for the 2016 Essex Town Plan. These drafts are the same – but formatted a bit differently. The EDC has a difference of opinion about repeating Action Steps under goals. In other words, if an action step applies to multiple goals, you might include that action step multiple times. Or just have each action step once, even though it refers to multiple goals. Please consider these opinions when developing the format you will use for the Town Plan.

Both of you provided terrific insights when I asked what staff thought would be appropriate goals and strategies. We have adopted some of your thoughts – and others are not in the plan. I have left copies of your thoughtful e-mails at this bottom of our draft document so we don't lose these threads.

Things we have not yet done that you mentioned previously for possible inclusion:

- a. Address recreation tourism issues – recreational economy
- b. Ride sharing and alternative transportation
- c. Community Farms
- d. Essex Brand

Also below are comments from Dennis about Fort Ethan Allen. These thoughts need to be captured / remembered as we proceed. Our FEA section reflects his comments, I believe.

The EDC's failure to include action steps associated with these ideas is not because they are not valuable. More likely, we did not have time or they did not fit our larger framework as defined in our goals. Please feel free to add related tasks – or share with other Committees / Commissions for inclusion in other sections.

Note that Goal #1C has no strategies / action steps associated with it. We should figure out if that is appropriate as this document is reviewed.

Thanks again for all you have done.

Greg

Greg Morgan, Chair

Economic Development Commission for the EDC

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Planning Department Comments:

Hi Greg –

Great goals. As you go through this exercise, I am wondering what you like about the current Chapter 3 and what you would like to be kept in. There are some good data, charts, etc.

On some particulars:

Affordable housing - After some thought, I'm not sure what a full bore housing study would do for us at this point, given the costs. Regardless of Paul O'Leary's point that \$265,000 (or thereabouts) is affordable in Chittenden County, I think it is very intuitive that there are housing sectors whose needs are unmet in Essex. Young couples in their twenties would be lucky to buy in Essex. As the refugee population moves out from Burlington along the CCTA line, no housing will be available for them. A targeted project to identify incentives to add into the regs would be more effective.

Transportation upgrades to the major traffic corridors are done at the CCRPC level, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in Chitt Co. has already been done through FY2018. Dennis goes to those meetings. Dennis' ability to cover this topic may, (I don't know), be compromised as part of the consolidation effort. He has already put staff on notice that DPW may stop providing Comm Dev with development review services. We would need to contract this service out, which may slow development review significantly. Problem! Permitting is the gateway to job creation. But this is far from official. Nevertheless, something to keep our eyes on.

Modifying the local planning process can simply be stated: adopt a Development Review Board.

Also, the term "shall" is the one you want, instead of "may", if you want the teeth. This is supported by case law.

Any reference to the recreation/destination economy is good. Very big. Too bad the town recently rejected the opportunity for a 300 acre public park with trails ;-)

As far as identifying entrepreneurship, that's all about partnering. With GBIC, CCRPC, the state. With no (limited) economic development funding or staffing, towns are limited in how aggressive and creative they can be.

Dana

From: Gregory Duggan
Sent: Monday, October 06, 2014 5:28 PM
To: Greg Morgan (gsmorgan@yahoo.com)
Cc: Dana Hanley; Sharon Kelley
Subject: Staff thoughts for EDC priorities

Greg,

Since I had to leave before the meeting ended, here are thoughts that Sharon and I had discussed earlier:

- Affordable Housing – If affordable workforce housing becomes a priority for the EDC/Town, consideration should be given to incentivizing affordable housing. Right now developers just aren't building affordable housing, despite some incentives allowing for higher density if affordable units are included in a project. That said, I like the idea of looking at whether affordable housing is needed in town, and support Barbara's idea for an overall housing study that also looks at affordable housing.
- Joint meeting with Selectboard, PC, EDC, etc. – As Sharon said, no point in having one board pursue something that doesn't have broader support in the community.
- Ride sharing, other alternative transportation – This may fit under Goal 2 (Improve and Invest in Infrastructure), but how can the town support and encourage carpooling, bus ridership, walk/bike commuting, etc.? Having options available is part of that solution, as are development patterns.
- Community farm(s) – Sharon brought this up. There's a community garden in the Village and another in the Town, but what else can be done to support local ag? I'll let Sharon elaborate as she sees fit.
- Recreation Economy – This has been a big push in the VT planning world recently, with Stowe and Burke (Kingdom Trails) being prime examples. The summarized version: extensive trail networks can attract mountain bikers, skiers, snowmobilers, etc., which leads to money for local shops, restaurants, hotels (depending on how far people travel), etc. And in the case of a place like Essex, which has other strong components of the local economy, trails and recreation can improve quality of life and attract residents and businesses. (As a quick aside, I went hiking with some friends yesterday who were telling me that one of the hotels in Stowe is charging people \$45 apiece (!!!!!) to bring them five minutes down the road to see a waterfall.)
- Entrepreneurship – Fully support the idea of encouraging entrepreneurship in Essex, but I wonder what exactly that means. How can the town reach out to potential entrepreneurs (or touch base with Essex entrepreneurs, or Burlington entrepreneurs) to see what would attract them to Essex. What type of infrastructure do they need, or what types of public services could attract businesses to Essex? (I'd say this is important to know for existing businesses, too; Action #4.) Is it an issue that CTE and the schools should be involved with? How can businesses partner with St. Mike's, Champlain, UVM, etc. on internships, job training, etc.? Action #3 talks about planning and zoning changes that promote entrepreneurship, but what type of changes would be necessary?
- IBM – Agree with everyone else who said the focus should be the IBM site, not just IBM.
- Essex "brand" – What is it? Get the business community involved in promoting the town/village, so it's not just government trying to create a marketing tool.
- Action #6 – Echo what others have said to specify a DRB, or at least have that discussion in the community.

- Fort Ethan Allen – Still like the idea of doing something to support businesses in that area, but beginning to think it may not be the time for a full-blown, two-town visioning effort. Start small, with understanding what the existing infrastructure could handle, and then deciding if I1 zones should have some extra conditional uses added (i.e. breweries).
- Public Education – The more we can all do, the better. A question of how to effectively do it. Can the EDC write a quarterly column in the Reporter? Updates on Front Porch Forum? The ongoing struggle of government is how to educate residents and get them involved ...

Dennis Lutz Feedback:

Greg,

I know that this may sound parochial but I believe that the Town's interests (financially) lie within the portion of the Fort in Essex. That may be where the group should start. If Colchester wants to look at their end, then each should do separate analysis of their needs and potential. It could be a coordinated approach but with each looking at the issues in their respective portions of the land area.

A study could be undertaken looking at the land use potential – however, it needs to be supported by three key players upfront – the owner of the Gero Industrial Park, UVM and the owner of the old Gero Brothers Moving Building. Unless they are really involved in such a study and willing to look at future property changes to improve their marketability, the study would be a waste of time (in my opinion).

Key issues are road access (not private easements) to reach all the potential building sites, conversion of sites to other uses but preservation of historically meaningful structures, sewer and water capacity (in the Town portion) – how much is needed to support a planned land use, can that capacity be obtained through extension of the sewer core and how could this be done without taking needed capacity from other areas of the Town in the sewer core. Can the area be linked from a Traffic perspective with the Lowes site (the answer is yes if done correctly – it is not a great expense). What would such a link provide from a business development standpoint. How does that open up the empty lot at the intersection of VT15 and Susie Wilson?

In my view, there isn't a short term fix to the area's problems that need to be overcome for future development of the area. However, a study could be undertaken in the planning cycle coming up that might lead to constructive efforts in future Town plan cycles. Again, the key is to involve the key players before any study is undertaken.

From: Greg Morgan [mailto:gsmorgan@yahoo.com]
Sent: Friday, October 03, 2014 8:26 AM
To: Dennis Lutz; Aaron Martin; Pat Scheidel
Subject: Re: Fort Ethan Allen - EDC Request for Consult

Hi Dennis:

Thanks so much - while I may have heard these 4 points before, this makes it so very clear. The EDC meets Monday and will talk about these points. I will share them with the EDC. Aaron has offered to meet with us on Oct 27 - but this may be all we need. I'll get back.

I agree with your observation that other areas are more easily developed and should be a priority. That said, the Fort is unique, with a couple of thousand folks living within a contained area and development possibilities different than we might find in Saxon Hill, the North 60, Gauthier, etc. At a minimum, I think you are thinking this is an intermediate to long term issue. The EDC is wondering what concrete, incremental steps we might take over the next 5 years to set the table for long term development - or, realistically - should the area be written off to stay as it is? Thanks again - you have moved us forward.

Best, Greg

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From: Dennis Lutz <dlutz@ESSEX.ORG>
To: Greg Morgan <gsmorgan@yahoo.com>
Cc: Pat Scheidel <pats@essexjunction.org>; Gregory Duggan <gduggan@ESSEX.ORG>; Dana Hanley <khanley@essex.org>; Aaron Martin <amartin@ESSEX.ORG>
Sent: Thursday, October 2, 2014 10:45 AM
Subject: RE: Fort Ethan Allen - EDC Request for Consult

Greg,

Either Aaron or I can attend a meeting if you give us some advance notice. The Fort is an area we have discussed on a couple of previous occasions with the Economic Development Commission. Even before we meet, there are a couple of very basic issues that we have mentioned in the past.

- 1) The infrastructure is very old with a much higher probability of failure than the rest of our systems. There are clay tile sewers that go back 100 years with high infiltration, old cast water mains subject to tuberculation, marginal water pressures in areas, etc..
- 2) Essex maintains the municipal water and sewer systems because they were transferred by deed to the Town of Essex and not split at the municipal boundaries. Nobody in Colchester would agree to take any portion of these over given their age and condition-- as would we if the tables were reversed.
- 3) The storm systems and road responsibility are split along the municipal boundaries.
- 4) The Fort is not within the sewer core boundary map for future growth. It was never put into it in 1984 when the sewer system came on line because of the very delicate issue of giving future growth to an adjacent community – where any tax benefits go to another community and the only Town benefit is some additional users to help pay the water/sewer bills --offset by higher repair and maintenance costs if more flow goes through the old water systems or sewers.

There continues to be other areas within the Village and Town sewer core where the levels of development problems, impacts and costs are substantially less than in the Fort. This is reality—not intended to be negative – but reality. Given the various opportunities and options for future economic growth in the community, it appears that there much more potential for success in looking at the Town Center area, Saxon Hill Industrial Park, potential open land a s part of the IBM complex and redevelopment of existing parcels where the problems are easier to overcome and the infrastructure is in place, with capacity and in good condition to accommodate future growth.

Please don't misunderstand me. It isn't that it should not be looked at. But in my opinion, it is a lot further down the list than other potential economic development opportunities with greater payback and less problems.

Dennis