

Essex Economic Development Commission (EDC)
Regular Meeting Minutes
August 6, 2025, 11:00AM
Meeting Held at 81 Main Street, Essex Junction VT 05452
Minutes Submitted by Clerk Keith Dunbar, August 6, 2025

Attendees

Commission Members:

Present: Igor Polenov, Chair; Ken Signorello, Vice Chair; Keith Dunbar, Clerk; Irene Wrenner

Remote: N/A

Absent: N/A

Staff: Jean O'Sullivan

Staff: Katherine Sonnick

Public: Walter Adams

Cheryl Van Epps (Virtual)

Anne Miller (Virtual)

Representative Abby Duke

Katie DeSanto

Partners: Sam Andersen – GBIC

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 11:03 AM by Chair Polenov.

2. Agenda Additions/Changes

- Item 6a: Update on Economic Development Study Report – TPMA was removed due to Lindsay Bloos' illness. A draft report is expected by September.
- A letter from Cheryl Van Epps (previously in the reading file) was added to the agenda for discussion.
- Motion to approve the changes to the agenda:
Signorello motioned to approve the agenda, seconded by **Dunbar**.
Vote passed unanimously 4-0.

3. Public to be Heard

Walter Adams expressed concern over the newly enacted development impact fees, including:

- Substantial increases in building permit and fire department fees.
- Lack of clarity and transparency in how fees were calculated and communicated to the public.
- Potential economic deterrents for residential and commercial development.
- He urged the EDC to reflect on their prior support for the fee structures and their long-term implications.

Cheryl Van Epps provided additional public comments:

- Advocated for economic inclusivity and incentives for residents to reduce municipal costs.
- Suggested incentive-based programs to encourage better development outcomes and community engagement.

Anne Miller attended to observe and expressed interest in future participation in the EDC.

4. Approval of Minutes

Motion made to approve the minutes with the following amendments:

- Strike line 50 (item 6) which did not occur.
- Retain line 49 (reading file mention).
- Add clarification to line 46 regarding the potential locations for a proposed indoor bubble facility, including Saxon Hill.
- Motion: **Wrenner** motioned to approve the minutes of the July 17, 2025, meeting, seconded by **Dunbar**.
Vote: Unanimous approval 4-0.

5. Partner Updates

Sam Andersen GBIC:

- GBIC is monitoring the CHIPS (Community Housing and Infrastructure Program) process and participating in the “Let’s Build Homes” and VEPC meetings.
- New job board launched by Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies (VCET).
- Highlighted Green Mountain Job & Retention Program for recent Vermont graduates.
- Reported a spike in unemployment claims in manufacturing, a deviation from typical seasonal trends.
- Encouraged the EDC to scrutinize proposed fee structures that may place Essex at a competitive disadvantage.
- Discussion followed regarding TwinCraft’s departure from Essex, and GBIC’s neutrality on the siting of the new women’s correctional facility. GBIC did acknowledge this would be a new business to Essex.

6. Business Items

TPMA Economic Development Study

- Deferred – Consultant Lindsay Bloos was unable to attend due to illness. A draft report is anticipated in September.

CHIPS (Community Housing and Infrastructure Program) Presentation

Representative Abby Duke presented a comprehensive overview of the CHIPS program, highlighting:

- Purpose: Encourage housing development through scaled-down Tax Increment Financing (TIF) tools.
- Key Components: Municipal-developer agreements, infrastructure eligibility, and affordable housing targets.
- Timeline: Applications to open January 2026.

- Concerns raised by commissioners and public members regarding:
 - Long-term tax revenue diversion.
 - Lack of affordability covenants beyond the 20-year CHIP period.
 - Risk of units converting to Airbnbs or second homes post-CHIP.
 - Potential tax burden on other municipalities due to diverted education funding.

Representative Duke acknowledged concerns, reiterated the optional nature of the program, and encouraged Essex to participate in the guideline development process.

Tree Farm – Site Visit and Economic Impact Discussion

Commissioners discussed the recent site visit and economic development potential of the Tree Farm Recreational Facility:

- The Tree Farm’s complex ownership and management structure is impeding private development (e.g., indoor turf facility proposed by Vermont Athletic Development Corporation).
- Current management contracts are short-term, complicating financing options for long-term development.
- Recommendation considered: Encourage the Selectboard to adopt longer-term agreements with the Tree Farm Management Group to facilitate public-private partnerships.
- Commissioner agreed to draft a recommendation for the next meeting agenda.

7. Reading File

- Materials related to the CHIPS Act and EDC mission statements were included.
- A letter from Cheryl Van Epps was addressed verbally during public comment.

8. Next Meeting

8/21/2025, location to be determined. Agenda to include:

- Review and potential revision of EDC Mission Statement and 2025 Work Plan.
- Continued discussion on the Tree Farm facility and potential public-private partnerships.

9. Adjournment

- Motion: **Signorello** motioned to adjourn the meeting at 1:15 PM, seconded by **Polenov**.
Vote: Unanimous approval 3-0. (**Dunbar** had departed prior to adjournment)

Meeting recording available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoHSuXb9SkM>