



**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 2 Lincoln St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Wednesday, January 10, 2024
6:30 PM

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This meeting will be in-person at 2 Lincoln Street and available remotely. Options to watch or join the meeting remotely:

- **WATCH:** the meeting will be live streamed on [Town Meeting TV](#)
- **JOIN ONLINE:** [Join Zoom Meeting](#)
- **JOIN CALLING:** (toll free audio only): (888) 788-0099 | Meeting ID: 944 6429 7825; Passcode: 635787

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [6:30 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
 - a. Comments from Public
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Discussion with HR Director, Colleen Dwyer
 - b. *Interviews and Consider Appointments to the Bike/Walk Committee and the Community Advisory Board
 - c. Discussion & Consideration of Adoption of VT-Alert as a Public Notification System
 - d. Winooski Valley Park District Presentation & Discussion
 - e. Green Mountain Transit Presentation & Discussion
 - f. Discussion & Consideration of CCRPC UPWP Applications and match
 - g. Discussion of FY25 General Fund Budget and Budget Schedule
6. **CONSENT ITEMS**
 - a. Approve Meeting Minutes: 12/13/23 & 12/20/23
 - b. Approve Adding VMERS Defined Contribution Option-Revised
 - c. Approve Copier Lease
7. **COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**
8. **READING FILE**
 - a. Check Warrant # 24028 (12/15/23) & 24029 (12/29/23)
 - b. Board of Civil Authority Draft Minutes 12/12/23)
 - c. Development Review Board Draft Minutes 12/19/23
 - d. Bike Walk Advisory Committee 12/18/23
 - e. Tree Advisory Committee 12/19/23
 - f. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes 11/21/23
 - g. Senior Center January Newsletter
9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
 - a. *An executive session may be needed to discuss an Appointment of a Public Official
10. **ADJOURN**

Members of the public are encouraged to speak during the Public to Be Heard agenda item, during a Public Hearing, or, when recognized by the President, during consideration of a specific agenda item. The public will not be permitted to participate when a motion is being discussed except when specifically requested by the President. Regarding zoom participants, if individuals interrupt, they will be muted; and if they interrupt a second time they will be removed. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the City Council, like all programs and activities of the City of Essex Junction, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the City Manager's office at 802-878-6944 TTY: 7-1-1 or (800) 253-0191.

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
JANUARY 10, 2024**

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Raj Chawla, President; Amber Thibeault, Vice President; Marcus Certa, Clerk; Andrew Brown; Elaine Haney.

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Colleen Dwyer, Director of Human Resources; Ricky Jones, Public Works Superintendent; Ron Hoague, Chief of Police; Brad Luck, Director of Essex Junction Parks & Recreation; Susan McNamara-Hill, Clerk; Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality Superintendent; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Harlan Smith, Grounds & Facilities Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Director of Communications & Strategic Initiatives; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director; Chris Gaboriault, Fire Chief.

OTHERS PRESENT: Lauren Chicote, Clayton Clark, Annie Cooper, Craig Dwyer, Susan French, Michael Giguere, Jeanne Grant, Anthony Jackson-Miller, Deb McAdoo, Resa Mehren, John O'Brien, Christie Packard, Richard Smith, Sarah Spinette, Dennis Thibeault, George Tyler, Nick Warner.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Councilor Chawla called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

None needed.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public

Craig Dwyer spoke about the decision to stop fines for the livestock at 8 Taft Street but said that this is not reciprocal, as more livestock has been added and more structures have been built, despite the City's ordinances. He said that this situation is the direct result of the Council's inaction a year ago, which has led to a macro-level situation that has cost the taxpayers money and time, as well as costing residents of Taft Street their quality of life and decreases in their property values. He said that situations need to be addressed at a micro level before they become larger issues.

City Manager Mahony spoke about last night's storm. She noted that a number of trees were downed throughout the City and that public works is working on cleanup. She also noted about \$60,000 worth of damage to the Brownell Library roof. Director of Grounds and Facilities Smith noted a temporary fix to the library's roof, and that there is no water damage as far as he can tell. City Manager Mahony noted that claims have been filed with the City's insurance company.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion with HR Director Colleen Dwyer

Director Dwyer began with a summary of activities for the last six months. She spoke about her personal growth as a new director of HR in the City, the complexity of being a "New City", challenges around maintaining a stable workforce (particularly due to the childcare crisis in the City, state, and country), open enrollment activities, and connecting with Champlain Medical Urgent Care on flu vaccination. She then spoke about looking ahead six months, saying that items on her radar include contract negotiation, the VLCT Welcoming and Engaging Communities Program, and obtaining more tools for staff via certain

53 trainings. She acknowledged the City's incredible workforce and the breadth and depth of services they
54 provide.
55

56 Councilor Certa asked how Director Dwyer sees the City maintaining services given certain workforce
57 challenges and turnover. Director Dwyer said that they need to ensure that they're providing a good
58 work/life balance and competitive wage and benefits packages. She said that the City provides an
59 excellent opportunity for professional growth, as well as a welcoming and positive work environment.
60

61 b. *Interview and Consider Appointments to the Bike/Walk Committee and the Community Advisory
62 Board

63 The City Council interviewed Sarah Spinette, Michael Giguere and John O'Brien for a position on the
64 Bike/Walk Committee. Each candidate introduced themselves and spoke about their interest in serving
65 on the Bike/Walk Committee, each expressing interest in increasing the walkability and bikeability of the
66 Essex Junction community.

67 The City Council interviewed Susan French for a position on the Community Advisory Committee. She
68 introduced herself and spoke about her background and interest in serving on the Community Advisory
69 Committee, saying that she has a good history and understanding of the Chittenden County community,
70 and that this is a good opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the community and the police.

71 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by ANDREW BROWN, to appoint Michael Giguere to**
72 **the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee for a three-year term. The motion passed 5-0.**

73 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by ANDREW BROWN, to appoint John O'Brien to the**
74 **Bike/Walk Advisory Committee for a three-year term. The motion passed 4-1 (Councilor Haney**
75 **dissenting).**

76 c. Discussion & Consideration of Adoption of VT-Alert as a Public Notification System

77 City Manager Mahony began by introducing VT-Alert, which is a system that has been run at the State
78 level and can also be used by municipalities to send emergency or public safety alerts to residents and
79 visitors via email and text message. She noted that Police Chief Hoague has recommended that this
80 service be used for the City of Essex Junction (as well as the Town of Essex), so that information can
81 be provided in a streamlined, consistent, and timely manner. She noted that there is no cost outside of
82 the training and getting the software set up by staff.

83 Fire Chief Chris Gaboriault will also have access to this program.

84 Councilor Chawla asked if this software could be used for internal communication as well, and Chief
85 Hoague replied that yes, it can be used to send messages to specific groups it sets up, in addition to
86 broader community-wide communication.
87

88 **ANDREW BROWN made a motion, seconded by MARCUS CERTA, that the City Council approve**
89 **the use of VT-Alerts System for the City of Essex Junction, and authorize the President of the**
90 **Council to sign the attached MOU to move forward with the setup process. The motion passed**
91 **5-0.**
92

93 d. Winooski Valley Park District Presentation & Discussion

94 Nick Warner, the Executive Director of the Winooski Valley Park District, began by welcoming the City
95 to WVPD for Fiscal Year 25. He then provided an overview of WVPD, noting that it has three full-time
96 staff and leverages an immense amount of volunteer time from its member municipalities. He spoke
97 about recent challenges around flooding, which has taught WVPD about resilience, as well as the
98 importance of the floodplain and shoreline that WVPD manages. He noted that the District's mission has
99 morphed from aesthetic recreational priorities to a focused ecological imperative to acquire and directly
100 manage permanently-conserved lands. He spoke about upcoming capital projects and acquisitions,
101 noting that the District is seeking \$31,472 from Essex Junction to help fund operations, adding that

102 WVPD continues to seek new revenues that reduce reliance on such municipal shares. He noted that
103 the District does not carry debt and has strong strategic partnerships with a number of local
104 organizations, which helps with its overall sustainability.

105
106 Councilor Certa expressed concern about the amount of funding being asked of Essex Junction versus
107 the amount of land within Essex Junction that WVPD stewards. Mr. Warner replied that they take
108 equalized grand lists into account, which is a more progressive way of assessing this municipal share,
109 though acknowledging there is no perfect way of assessing municipal shares of funding for the District.

110
111 Councilor Haney asked for more details around the recently-acquired property behind Global Foundries.
112 Mr. Warner said that it is a 29-acre property and that they are working on securing public access and a
113 trail system going down to the Winooski River.

114
115 George Tyler, the current City representative on the WVPD Board, provided more detail about the
116 location of the recently acquired property and potential river access, emphasizing the importance of
117 preserving this as a biologically rich and diverse ecosystem. He noted that wetland areas like these are
118 able to absorb the overflow of rivers during flooding events.

119
120 Councilor Thibeault asked about whether an appointment or reappointment of a City representative to
121 the Board is necessary. Mr. Warner replied that the term length is typically three years, but that
122 municipalities can also choose shorter terms. City Manager Mahony said that she would look into when
123 the current WVPD representative term expires.

124
125 e. Green Mountain Transit Presentation & Discussion

126 Clayton Clark, the General Manager of Green Mountain Transit, provided an overview of GMT, that it is
127 one of the only transit organizations that spans urban and rural ridership. He provided a brief overview
128 of volume of rides on certain routes that transit through Essex Junction. He then spoke about the annual
129 assessment of Essex Junction's share of GMT's costs, which include a fixed route operating
130 assessment, a capital match, and a paratransit assessment, for a total of \$249,615 for Fiscal Year 2025.
131 He said that the fixed route assessment amount is a 2.6% increase from FY24's assessment. He spoke
132 briefly about fiscal pressures, noting that there was a significant amount of Covid-19 relief funding that
133 has been used over the last several years, and that GMT is looking at a \$3 million deficit to maintain the
134 current level of service at the current funding levels. He said that GMT is seeking additional revenue
135 sources and that they are not looking to municipalities to help fill that gap. He noted that fare resume on
136 March 6, 2024, and that GMT's new system will be more robust and allow riders to either use cash, a
137 monthly prepaid pass, or daily/monthly caps of \$4 and \$50 (respectively). He also noted that fares are
138 halved for those with disabilities.

139
140 Councilor Chawla asked about potential additional stops at the University of Vermont Medical Center,
141 noting a need for it by staff who rely on GMT for transportation. Mr. Clark replied that they are not looking
142 to add additional times, but could look at changing the schedule to try and better accommodate peak
143 demand. Councilor Chawla said that Chittenden County and the region as a whole are adding residents
144 monthly, and that lack of public transportation is a massive barrier for many. Mr. Clark noted a challenge
145 around federal funding, saying that they are receiving the maximum amount of federal funding they're
146 able to receive. Councilor Chawla confirmed that if member municipalities don't fund their share, it won't
147 place additional burden on other municipalities.

148
149 Councilor Certa asked for more details about route development and expansion, noting that the current
150 schedules for GMT buses are not as convenient as it could be for most of its residents. He expressed
151 concern that the current GMT model is stagnant. Mr. Clark replied that from a federal funding
152 perspective, GMT's allocation is based on population, not on volume of ridership, which makes
153 increasing routes difficult. He said that from his perspective, GMT could use a more entrepreneurial

154 approach to diversify funding opportunities going forward. He said that seeking non-profit status will
155 unlock a number of grant opportunities for GMT. He also noted the political difficulty of changing routes.
156

157 Councilor Certa noted concerns from constituents about accessing the senior transportation program
158 application from SSTA. Mr. Clark said that he would look into this further if staff would send him more
159 information, but also noted that the different public transportation options available to seniors have
160 different requirements and can be difficult to navigate.
161

162 Councilor Haney urged GMT not to cut services for Routes 2 and 10. Mr. Clark replied that GMT is
163 committed to working with municipalities early and often, if route changes are being contemplated. He
164 also said that GMT works with municipalities to understand changes to utilization patterns along routes.
165

166 f. Discussion & Consideration of CCRPC UPWP Applications and match

167 City Manager Mahony noted that this is the annual solicitation put out by CCRPC to understand the
168 projects that each municipality would like help with. She noted that the City's current projects (in
169 descending order of priority) include GIS services, the Pearl Street short-term multimodal improvement
170 scoping study, and a televising services (TV) condition assessment of select stormwater pipes. She said
171 that the recommendation from staff is to submit these requests.
172

173 Councilor Haney asked how the Pearl Street project interfaces with the Town of Essex's work on
174 improving flow for parts of Susie Wilson Road. Director Yuen replied that the Town is still determining
175 whether traffic patterns of changed enough since Covid to warrant changes to Susie Wilson Road. He
176 noted that the Pearl Street project would rely more on temporary traffic changes, and would not be an
177 impediment to however the Town decides to proceed. Councilor Chawla also advocated for a crosswalk
178 or two to accommodate the newly-permitted Pearl Street developments.
179

180 Councilor Thibeault asked whether the request for GIS support of CCRPC is in addition to the GIS
181 support in the Town's budget. City Manager Mahony confirmed this, explaining that the GIS needs of
182 the City are for more specific infrastructure initiatives and zoning mapping.
183

184 **ELAINE HANEY made a motion, seconded by MARCUS CERTA, that the City Council authorize**
185 **staff to submit the UPWP requests application for GIS Services, and Pearl St Short-Term**
186 **Multimodal Improvements, and Phase 4 TV condition assessment of stormwater pipes. The**
187 **motion passed 5-0.**
188

189 g. Discussion of FY25 General Fund Budget and Budget Schedule

190 City Manager Mahony began by noting that materials for this discussion include a description of the
191 changes that were discussed during Budget Day, which results in a 6.9% increase and a 7.7% tax rate
192 increase. She said that materials also include responses to the Council's questions from Budget Day.
193 She said that department heads have been asked to think of further reductions that may be feasible,
194 and that she also has a list of potential cuts and their implications. She noted that at the Council's next
195 meeting, it will have to vote on a budget to put forth for the community dinner on the 27th.
196

197 City Manager Mahony ran through a list of potential reductions to the budget based on the Budget Day
198 discussion. She noted that for the Finance Department, there is a \$16,000 cost request for software,
199 which would increase real-time reporting and transparency in the City's finances. She noted that in the
200 Streets Budget, the City can reduce paving and the costs of salt. She said that they are putting together
201 a bid for a new dump truck which would use salt more efficiently. She noted that in the Administration
202 Budget there were line items for increased community outreach and engagement, though they are
203 currently placeholders. She also noted the new CATMA membership which isn't currently being used.
204 She said that for the Fire Department, the wage increases covering the volunteer time could be delayed
205 to January, though they have been wanting to make this change for some time. She said that in the

206 building budgets, there are some possibilities to reduce costs for 2 Lincoln Street (though they are
207 modest), reductions for Park Street School (also modest), reductions for maintenance costs for Maple
208 Street, and additionally noted that there is a General Fund transfer of \$50,000 into the Building
209 Maintenance Fund that could also be reduced or not transferred. She noted a potential reduction due to
210 a personnel change. She said that the Library has been looking at implementing more part-time hours
211 and some cost reductions for software. She said that overall, reductions will be challenging given the
212 low unassigned fund balance.
213

214 Councilor Chawla expressed concern about nickel-and-diming the budget, but acknowledged that there
215 are some items on that list that didn't seem problematic if they were reduced. City Manager Mahony
216 said that from her perspective, the most feasible reductions would be related to personnel and 2 Lincoln
217 Street costs. Councilor Chawla said he isn't entirely comfortable with reducing the strategic plan line
218 items or items around communication. He said that he is reluctant to make modifications to capital
219 contributions.
220

221 Councilor Certa said he is not in favor of delaying the start time for the Fire Department wages. He
222 asked about the transfer to the capital budget. Councilor Thibeault spoke about the amount of money in
223 the Capital Fund and the amount of significant capital work slated for FY25, expressing concern that if
224 this transfer isn't made then the City will need to go out for a bond much more quickly than it previously
225 anticipated to cover those costs. Director Morris added that the General Fund Capital Reserve is
226 projected to be \$1 million short in FY30, based on current projections. She also noted the City's tendency
227 and desire to pay cash, which avoids the need to pay interest that borrowing would entail. Councilor
228 Certa asked about the staffing levels for the Library and asked whether there is less need than was
229 previously anticipated. City Manager Mahony said that the FY24 amount of part time hours for the Library
230 may have been high and that they could be reduced (though the Library staff is still reviewing this line
231 item). Councilor Certa asked about the skill level needed to staff the various positions in the library.
232 Brownell Trustee Chair Grant replied that the skill level needed across positions at the library is high,
233 given the breadth of their skillsets and the unique role the library plays in the community. Councilor Certa
234 agreed, saying that it is a difficult balance that the library must strike between the services it needs to
235 provide and the services being asked of the library.
236

237 Councilor Certa spoke more broadly about right-sizing departments based on comparable departments
238 in other municipalities, such as Brattleboro and Williston. Councilor Haney agreed, asking that Councilor
239 Certa share the data that he has on these equivalent departments in other municipalities. Councilors
240 discussed how prescriptive they should be with making funding recommendations related to the budget
241 for various departments.
242

243 Councilor Brown asked how many of the positions that support the enterprise funds are funded through
244 those enterprise funds.
245

246 Councilor Haney asked about the City's unrestricted fund balance target policy, noting that the balance
247 is low. Director Morris noted that the City is at 7.8% and that it can be up to 15%. Councilor Chawla
248 asked whether funding can be earmarked for the unassigned fund balance or whether it is composed of
249 carryover funding. City Manager Mahony replied that they generally don't earmark funding for the
250 unassigned/unrestricted fund balance, but will try to increase it by holding vacancies (for example) and
251 composing budgets that find savings. Director Morris noted that if a municipality falls below its
252 unassigned fund balance target, best practice is to have a plan to bring the balance back up to the target
253 level (which is up to 15%).
254

255 Councilors discussed the proposed budget cost reductions. They agreed to ask the community
256 specifically about the Capital Fund transfer. They discussed the amount to allocate for the strategic plan
257 implementation and other strategic visioning activities. The majority of Councilors agreed to leave this

258 line at \$10,000, given that other line items accommodate some of these costs, but acknowledging that
 259 more funding will be needed for specific projects related to strategic planning in future. Councilors
 260 acknowledged the importance of a community meal, noting that its costs should be included in the
 261 budget (related to the proposed reduction in Economic Development and its impact on the Community
 262 Meal).

263
 264 Councilors then discussed the proposed changes brought by City Manager Mahony earlier in the
 265 discussion. They discussed the proposed \$16,000 reduction that would delay Questica software
 266 implementation for the year and the implications for the City. Several department heads spoke about
 267 the importance of the software, and Councilors agreed to keep it. They agreed to keep paving and salt
 268 costs level-funded. The majority of Councilors agreed to keep CATMA costs in the budget. They agreed
 269 not to delay the wages for volunteer firefighters. They agreed to reduce costs for the 2 Lincoln Street
 270 building line item, but said they would keep funding in for the Park Street School and Maple Street. They
 271 discussed the proposed transfer of \$50,000 from the General Fund to the Building Maintenance Fund
 272 and agreed to leave this proposed transfer in place.

273
 274 Councilor Haney asked about a status update on the grants that could be repurposed from Main Street
 275 Park. City Manager Mahony replied that they have been able to apply for a grant related to emerald ash
 276 borer beetle control, though some of the grants related to Main Street Park will be difficult to repurpose
 277 for the Amtrak Station as proposed (thought more in-depth conversations with the State are still
 278 pending).

279
 280 Councilor Brown asked about EJRP staff and whether the administrative budget or the enterprise fund
 281 pays for those staff costs. Director Luck replied that there is not currently a process by which enterprise
 282 funds are transmitted to the General Fund, though they are reviewing this. He said that this type of
 283 transfer is more straightforward for other enterprise funds, though it is more complex for EJRP, and said
 284 that it may not be a feasible undertaking for the FY25 budget cycle.

285
 286 Councilor Certa requesting an analysis of level-funding the Brownell Library budget at \$964,134 (FY24
 287 funding), as well as a 2% increase over FY24's budget. Councilor Haney said that she would like this
 288 treatment for other departments, saying that she is not comfortable asking only one department to level
 289 fund for FY25. Councilor Certa suggesting seeing each department propose a budget with a 1%
 290 decrease. Councilor Chawla acknowledged the previous work conducted by staff and Councilors to find
 291 areas of savings already, since an obvious 1% savings isn't readily apparent. He acknowledged that
 292 one of the only areas of savings could potentially be the Brownell Library, but said that he would like to
 293 have that conversation with the community when they present the budget.

294
 295 The following public comments were received:

- 296 • Richard Smith expressed concern about Essex Junction providing services for other communities
- 297 on the back of Essex Junction taxpayers.
- 298 • Annie Cooper expressed confusion about the capital reserve. She asked whether the City can
- 299 more progressively allocate stipend funds to various board and committee volunteers. She also
- 300 supported transferring administrative costs from the General Fund to EJRP for EJRP positions.

301
 302
 303 **6. CONSENT AGENDA**

- 304 a. Approve Meeting Minutes: December 13, 2023; December 20, 2023
- 305 b. Approve Adding VMERS Defined Contribution Option-Revised
- 306 c. Approve Copier Lease

307
 308 **MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, to approve the consent agenda**
 309 **as presented. The motion passed 5-0.**

7. **COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**

City Manager Mahony noted that charter changes were passed by the House Committee on Government and Military Affairs today. She also noted that Bernie Fleury will receive the 2023 Alfred A. Peloquin Award for Vermont at the New England Environmental Water Association next week, which is a high distinction.

Councilor Thibeault thanked Public Works for dealing with two storms in one week and keeping the community's roads safe and maintained throughout the storm events.

8. **READING FILE**

- a. Check Warrant #24028 (12/15/2023) & #24029 (12/29/2023)
- b. Board of Civil Authority Draft Minutes – 12/12/2023
- c. Development Review Board Draft Minutes – 12/19/2023
- d. Bike Walk Advisory Committee Draft Minutes – 12/18/2023
- e. Tree Advisory Committee Draft Minutes – 12/19/2023
- f. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes – 11/21/2023
- g. Senior Center January Newsletter

9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. *An executive session may be needed to discuss an Appointment of a Public Official

MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss the appointment of public officials, pursuant to 1 V.S.A § 313(a)(3) to include the City Manager. The motion passed 5-0.

MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by ANDREW BROWN to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:32 P.M.

10. **ADJOURN**

ANDREW BROWN made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:36 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt