

Final Report & Recommendations
December 5, 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Essex Junction Governance Committee was established in 2025 under the City Charter’s requirement that a special commission review local governance structures within three years of incorporation. Over eight months, the nine-member Committee examined potential structural reforms—including form of government, election methods, Council size and terms, compensation, and Charter review—to determine whether adjustments were needed as the City transitions from Village to City. The Committee focused on structural questions rather than “soft” reforms such as engagement or civic culture, which may be better suited for future community-led efforts.

The Committee began by developing a shared understanding of the issues and gathering feedback from current and former Essex Junction officials, most of whom felt the current system works effectively. Members also interviewed leaders from nine comparable Vermont communities. Despite wide variation in governance models—strong mayor, weak mayor, and council-manager—most interviewees believed their structures served their communities well. This reinforced the conclusion that governance design is highly context-specific and not determined by population size, geography, or standard formulas.

Community engagement included public forums, focus groups, and a four-week online survey. Overall, participation and community engagement was limited. After synthesizing research and input, the Committee reached the following recommendations:

No Change:

- Retain the **Council-Manager** form of government
- Keep **at-large elections**
- Continue with a **President elected by Councilors**
- Maintain **five Councilors**
- Maintain **three-year staggered terms**
- Maintain **no term limits**

Changes:

- Increase Councilor stipends from **\$2,500 to \$3,600**
- Provide the Council President **25% higher compensation**
- Index annual stipend adjustments to the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**
- Require a **comprehensive Charter Review every 12 years**

Future Exploration:

- Broader **soft reforms** to strengthen engagement and participation
- Examine a **recall provision** for elected officials

BACKGROUND

On July 1, 2022, the Village of Essex Junction became the City of Essex Junction. The City Charter had been approved by voters 3,070 to 411 in November 2021. It went on to be passed by the Vermont House and Senate, and ultimately signed by the Governor. The City Charter (Appendix 1) very intentionally mimicked the Village Charter in terms of how the City government would operate. It was deliberate so that the vote on whether or not to become a City, independent from the Town of Essex, was truly just that. The vote was not also about expanding the size of the elected body or moving to wards, or changing the length of elected members terms. However, in the Charter, the following section was added:

Sec. 15. TRANSITIONAL PROVISION; FUTURE GOVERNANCE COMMISSION

Within three years after the approval of this charter by the Legislature, the Council shall appoint a special commission to study governance considerations such as, but not limited to, form of government, election of officials at-large or through wards or districts, governing body composition, term of office, term limits, and councilor compensation.

To honor this Charter provision, on September 25, 2024, the City Council approved the Governance Committee Purpose Statement (Appendix 2), which said that “the City Council wished to explore governance structures”... “such as, but not limited to, form of government, election officials at-large or through wards or districts, governing body composition, term of office, term limits, and councilor compensation.” The Committee was to submit its work to the Council no later than November 1, 2025.

The Council started taking applications from interested community members and interviewing them. Seven members of the community volunteered and were selected, plus two City Councilors (Appendix 3 – Governance Committee Members). The first meeting was held on March 27, 2025.

Per the purpose statement outlined by the City Council, the Committee did not ask residents what kind of government they wanted, the Committee focused its efforts on structural reforms – looking mostly at Charter oriented changes. It did not look at “soft” reforms – things like community engagement, participation, education, local government culture, communication, and trust between government and residents. The latter types of reforms lend themselves better to a values centered approach to gathering community input on the ideal qualities of local government and barriers to participation, to then use that data to inform better approaches. This methodology could be useful in the future if there is an appropriate amount of time and resources to support the work. There are many

universal values that could be prioritized – transparency, representativeness, collaborative, innovative, efficient, stable, fiscally prudent, etc. The challenge however is that there are no linear formulas that connect values to most structural reforms. For example, a desire for broader representation could lead to a conclusion that structural reforms to a seven-member council and two-year terms will get more people at the decision-making table and attract more people to run with a shorter commitment to time in office. While this is a plausible conclusion, it may not manifest itself, and soft reforms such as local government 101 workshops, video testimonials, and a civic mentorship program (with or without the structural reforms) could be more effective measures to accomplish the same goal. The closest the Committee came to examining soft reforms was a look at neighborhood assemblies, which are discussed later in the report.

The Committee identified the following items to consider:

- Form of Government:
 - Current: Council-Manager
 - Council-Manager, Mayor-Council (Strong Mayor), Mayor-Council-Manager (Weak Mayor)
- Council Composition:
 - Current: 5 Councilors; President elected by Councilors
- Councilor Terms Length:
 - Current: 3 years
- Councilor Term Limits:
 - Current: no term limits
- Election of Officials:
 - Current: At-Large
 - At-large, districts/wards, hybrid
- Council Compensation:
 - Current: \$2,500 per year
- Neighborhood Assemblies
 - Current: none
- Voting Date
 - Current: April

The Form of Government question was broken into two separate questions – form of government and leader of the Council – should it be a president elected by the Councilors or a mayor elected by the residents. The method of increasing the stipend for City Councilors would later be added to the list, along with consideration if the leader of the City Council should receive a higher stipend than the rest of the Councilors, and whether or not routine reviews of the Charter should be spelled out.

APPROACH

Common Understanding

The Committee spent the first few meetings educating itself on the various potential structural reforms and held several discussions to ensure that there was a common understanding of the issues at hand. The insights from these conversations were captured in the Committee Thoughts and Questions document (Appendix 4). Note – there was an early conversation about moving the City annual voting date from April to Town Meeting Day. It became clear that this is the druthers of the current Council and the EWSD School Board was planning to have voters consider changing their voting date to Town Meeting Day as well, but needs to ask the question on the 2026 ballot to make the change for 2027. There was a recognition of the value of having these votes on the same day in terms of expense and convenience for voters. Further consideration of this topic was taken off the table given it was already being prioritized and had a path forward in the near future.

Thoughts from Elected Leaders

To gain insight from people with direct experience in serving on the elected governing body – formerly the Village Trustees and now the City Council since 2022, the Committee reached out to the nine individuals who had served on the board since 2010. There were seven responses. The results can be found in Appendix 5 – Councilor & Trustee Survey Results.

The consensus on most items was that the status quo was working well and they did not see much reason for change (i.e. “If it ain’t broke....”). This would be similar to the feedback in the next section from leaders from other Vermont communities who felt that their current governance structures were serving them well and they did not see the need for changes. There was an acknowledgement that in both the feedback from current and former elected officials from the City and interviews with leaders from other communities, it was the perspective from those in positions of power and there could be an inherent bias towards preservation of the current systems.

Exploring Other Communities

With a shared understanding of the topics at hand and consideration of the voice of recent elected officials, the Committee set out on a mission to gather input from nine other Vermont communities. Working in groups of three, each group had three communities to research. The goal was to interview at least one person from each community, and ideally two. The individuals were to be the chief administrative officer (either the manager or mayor) and the head of the elected body (weak mayor or president or chair). The interview questions can be found in Appendix 6.

The nine communities were selected based on communities that were closest in both population and square miles compared to the City (Appendix 7 – Other Vermont Communities). The communities were: Winooski, St. Albans City, Barre City, Montpelier, Rutland City, Barre Town, Williston, Burlington, and Brattleboro. The communities had a mixture of forms of government including (2) strong mayor, (4) weak mayor, and (3) council-manager.

At least one individual from each community was interviewed. Committee members took notes (Appendix 8 – Interview Reports), shared them with others, and presented/discussed the key takeaways from the conversations.

While there were various insights from the different communities, the sentiment was that each community generally felt that their government was serving their community well. Despite a wide range of differences in form of government, size of elected body, term lengths, elected official stipends, etc., there was not a compelling call for change in most communities on any of the structural reforms up for consideration. This observation begs all the questions – are people simply comfortable with what they know and experience? Are these elected officials and chief administrators proud of their community and not wanting to find fault in their home town? All of this despite the smallest community being of 1.5 square miles and the largest at 32.4, and the lowest population being 6,887 and largest being 44,743. It was clear that when it comes to the structural make-up of local government, there is no one size fits all approach or even a scale if your community is of a certain size in square miles or of a certain population, then X, Y, or Z is the best way to govern. Voting in wards or districts with wards, happens in communities of 2.0, 4.0, and 15.5 square miles. Communities with population differences of less than 100 residents have council-manager and weak mayor forms of government. It was clear that local government is truly just that – all local. History, community dynamics, infrastructure, neighborhoods, and more contributed to how each community governs itself.

Governance Action Items

Given the Committee's common understanding, feedback from current and former elected officials from the City, and conversations with nine other Vermont communities, the Committee took the temperature of its members to see which items they wanted to seek community input on and to see if there were some issues that they unanimously wanted to take off the table given the information gathered to date.

The Committee assembled a list of the ten Governance Action Items (Appendix 9) with facts about the status quo, an option they were considering, and options they had ruled out based on their learnings. For two of the ten options, they felt confident in

recommending no change at this time. This was for form of government (council-manager) and election system (at-large). For the other eight items, the Committee wanted to get input from the community before reaching its own conclusions.

Community Feedback

Next the Committee sought input from the community. They published information on the City website and shared it on the City's homepage, social media, and Front Porch Forum. Members attended the Meet Me on Main! community event to raise awareness of the conversation that was taking place, answer questions, and encourage people to take the survey. There was an in-person opportunity scheduled for residents to join the conversation, as well as a virtual opportunity. The flyer advertising these opportunities is Appendix 12 - Community Conversations Flyer. There was a focus group offered to all members of City committees, and a focus group offered to City employees. Three residents attended the in-person conversation, two residents joined the virtual conversation, six residents participated in the focus group, and two staff members joined the discussion in a separate focus group. The agenda for the conversations and focus groups is Appendix 13 – Community Conversations Agenda. The summary of new insights and questions that came up in these four conversations can be found in Appendix 14 – Community Conversations Notes.

The Community Survey was available for four weeks online. The information from the Governance Action Items sheet were incorporated to give facts about the status quo and other option being considered for the eight governance issues the Committee was seeking input on. There were 57 respondents – 53 who self-identified as residents and 4 who were employees of the City. The results of the survey can be found in Appendix 15 – Community Survey Summary.

The survey was a small sample of residents and not statistically representative of the community, however, it did produce several schools of thought:

1. Over 50% of respondents agreed with maintaining the status quo for:
 - Leader of City Council – president elected by Councilors (31/57)
 - Number of City Councilors – 5 members (38/57)
 - Term Length for City Councilors – 3 years for all (34/57)
 - Stipend for City Councilors - \$2,500 (34/57)
 - Stipend for Leader of City Council – same as rest (33/57)



2. The respondents were split on status quo vs. change:
Term Limits for City Councilors – Yes (25/57), No (24/57)
Charter Review – Built-into Charter (26/57), Not built-into Charter (24/57)
3. Over 50% of respondents agreed with change for:
Stipend Increases for City Councilors – define in Charter (30/57)

Committee Conclusions

Given all these conversations, discussions, feedback from current and former elected leaders, interview responses from other Vermont communities, and input from the community, the Committee conducted its final deliberations and made the findings and recommendations outlined below. The Committee appreciated and acknowledged the following:

- this was a limited timeline (eight months) for conducting research, doing outreach, and reaching conclusions;
- the scope of the inquiry was focused on structural reforms but through conversations and information gathering there is a clear interest by community members to examine soft reforms and those should be explored in the future;
- there was a low level of community engagement and participation in this effort and the recommendations from the Committee have not been fully vetted by the public.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Form of Government

Committee Recommendation: No Change

- Maintain Council-Manager form of government

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee felt that in a community of our size, we are best served by hiring an apolitical, professional administrator to run the City government.

Financial Impact:

- None.

Status Quo and No Proposed Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Elected City Council hires manager who runs government *Apolitical, professional administrator *Manager selected for expertise and experience *Elected officials have less control over municipal operations *Opportunity for consistent/stable management; not having to change with election cycles
Ruled Out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Mayor elected by residents serves as manager who runs government *Political administrator *Manager (Mayor) may not be qualified or lack expertise; holds position due to popularity *Power concentrated in one elected position *Manager (Mayor) may change frequently with elections

Electoral System

Committee Recommendation: No Change

- Maintain at-large elections for all City Councilors

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee felt that there are no prevailing reasons to break down the City into smaller wards within its 4.6 square miles. While smaller communities do it, there are no clear distinctions or differences in the various areas of the City, and that redistricting every census could be cumbersome and confusing. Elected leaders over the last 15 years have proven to be spread out geographically (Appendix 10 – Elected Officials Map).

Financial Impact:

- None.

Status Quo and No Proposed Change

At-Large

- *Live in 4.6 sq. mile community; small enough to not need to break down further
- *No recent history of all Councilors coming from one part of City
- *Neighborhoods/areas are diverse
- *Councilors represent all, not just their area; more constituents
- *Interested candidates can run whenever an election, don't have to wait until their ward is on ballot

Ruled Out

Wards

- *Councilors represent smaller area, fewer constituents
- *Councilors guaranteed to be from different parts of City
- *Outcomes may focus on best for ward vs. best for City
- *No existing equitable formula for dividing community
- *Need to update wards each census, potentially changing representation and eligibility
- *Option to do some wards & some at-large

Neighborhood Assemblies

Committee Recommendation: Further Work/Exploration Needed

- Maintain no Neighborhood Assemblies (at this time)

Prevailing Rationale:

- There were several discussions about Neighborhood Assemblies. The Committee reached the conclusion that this concept of smaller affinity groups engaging with City government in some way, could be valuable, but was not convinced that the Neighborhood Assembly model that exists in Burlington is the right model for the City. There were a lot of questions of what is it we are trying to accomplish or address and are Neighborhood Assemblies the correct solution to address this issue? This really was identified as a soft reform that had more to do with communication, engagement, input opportunities, and resident relationships. There was even the most basic question of what is a neighborhood and where do we draw the lines and why? The recommendation is to further explore this and other related topics in a broader community discussion of soft reforms, which could lead to changes in the City that may or may not be structural/Charter related.

Financial Impact:

- None.

Recall Provision

Committee Recommendation: Further Work/Exploration Needed

- Maintain no recall provision for City Councilors in the Charter

Prevailing Rationale:

- The topic of recall provisions for City Councilors came up through a conversation with a community member. It was not on the Committee's radar or a part of its explorations. The Town of Essex recently added a recall provision to their Charter (Appendix 11 – Recall Provisions). Due to the late timing of this question being considered by the Committee, this is a structural reform that could be given further consideration in the future.

Financial Impact:

- None.

Leader of City Council

Committee Recommendation: No Change

- Maintain leader of the Council is a president elected by the City Councilors

Prevailing Rationale:

- There was an openness on the Committee's part to give this great consideration. There are ten cities in Vermont:
 - six have a weak mayor form of government with a mayor elected by the residents
 - two have a strong mayor form of government with a city council president,
 - two have a council-manager form of government with a president/chair elected by the Councilors.

The Committee recognized the strengths of having a visible champion of the City in a mayor and questioned if that was an expectation of voters – that now we are a city, we should have a mayor. But, the Committee identified that the Councilors could best select amongst themselves the individual most capable of leading meetings and that the collegiality of the board helps it operate efficiently. The Committee approached this topic by distinguishing a president as elected by the board and a mayor as elected by the residents, but also discussed the notion of keeping the responsibility for the selection of the leader of the Council within the Council, but changing the title of the leader from “president” to “mayor.” They could not reach consensus on this concept.

Financial Impact:

- None.

Status Quo
President Elected by Councilors *City Councilors elect leader of Council (titled "President"); no direct public input *Greater flexibility to change leadership with annual election of President by Council; possible more frequent leadership turnover vs. just on election cycles *President has support from majority of Council; internal accountability *Needs to be responsive to Council dynamics in order to retain leadership role
Option
Mayor Elected by Residents *Residents elect leader of Council (titled "Mayor"); direct public input *Potential for leadership change only on election cycles; less flexibility, possibly greater leadership stability *Councilors do not select leader of Council *Mayor is visible/known representative of City for local, regional, and state affairs *Typically a Mayor is a more political leader of the Council; running on agendas; seeking votes from entire community to embrace as leader; serves as a symbolic leader of the City

Number of City Councilors

Committee Recommendation: No Change

- Maintain five City Councilors

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee felt that there was no compelling reason to increase the size of City Council and that it is currently a well-functioning board. There were concerns about needing an increase in the number of people running, given the lack of candidates or competitive races in recent years and a recognition that simply increasing the number of Councilors does not automatically result in broader or more diverse voices at the table.

Financial Impact:

- None.

Status Quo
5 Members *Fewer people needed to run/elect *Fewer voices around table *Fewer people to spread work of Council *Lower number needed for consensus and votes to take action; more efficient *Fewer stipends and less admin resources to support Council
Option
7 Members *More people needed to run/elect *More voices around table *More people to spread work of Council *Higher number needed for consensus and votes to take action; less efficient *More stipends and more admin resources to support Council *Opportunity to form sub-committees of 3 Councilors to get work done; potential for less transparency
Ruled Out

3 or 9 Members

3 - Too few to represent a community of 11,000

9 - Nearly doubles current Council size; much larger group to run effectively/efficiently

Term Length for City Councilors

Committee Recommendation: No Change

- Maintain three-year terms for all City Councilors

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee felt that the current practice and simplicity of all Councilors serving the same three-year term length, with staggered terms, provides consistency and gives Councilors an appropriate amount of time to learn their responsibility and focus on governing before running for re-election.

Financial Impact:

- None.

Status Quo

3-Years for All

- *More time to adjust to learning curve of Councilor role
- *More opportunities/experiences to hone decision-making skills
- *Greater Council consistency with terms longer and staggered
- *Focus on longer term gains with more time between elections
- *Less frequent accountability and slower to respond to shifts in public opinion
- *Simple with all same term length

Option

Some 3-Years, Some 2-Years

- *Keep advantages of 3-year terms while offering a shorter commitment option; which may appeal to more people
- *Less consistency with some shorter terms
- *Greater voter accountability and faster to respond to shifts in public opinion with 2-year terms
- *More complex with differing term lengths

Ruled Out

1-Year, 2-Years, More than 3-Years

- *1- too short to grasp role before next election
- *2- could be more appealing for broader set of people willing to run with less commitment; all 2-years results in potential for more than half of Council to turnover at one time; less institutional knowledge; focus may be on short term gains before next election
- *3+- a major commitment; smaller pool of people willing to run

Term Limits for City Councilors (and Appointed Committee Members)*Committee Recommendation: No Change*

- Maintain no term limits for all

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee felt that elections allow voters to choose their elected officials and there did not need to be an arbitrary measure. They also did not find this to be an issue in recent memory – in terms of people staying in office for extended periods of time.

Financial Impact:

- None.

Status Quo
No Term Limits *Elections serve as accountability; voters' choice *Incumbency advantage
Option
Yes Term Limits *Inability to run beyond limit not based on performance or voter accountability *Forces turnover and new Councilors *Reduces incumbent advantage *Can force loss of institutional knowledge and experience *Can have "lame duck" terms for people in final term

Stipend for City Councilors*Committee Recommendation: Change*

- Increase City Councilor annual stipends from \$2,500 to \$3,600

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee felt that the amount of time and work that a Councilor must put in to do this role well, in addition to the high levels of responsibility and decision-making, warranted a higher stipend. They also acknowledged that the higher stipend may alleviate barriers from running for office for some.

Financial Impact:

- An additional \$1,100 per Councilor x 5 = \$5,500
- If the stipend for the leader of the council is 25% higher, as recommended in the next section, this would be an additional \$275 (above 25% of \$2,500)
-

Status Quo
\$2,500 Per Year *Councilors receive \$2,500 stipend per year for their service *Stipends recognize many hours of work required to be a Councilor *Stipends can provide money for food, babysitters, lost wages, and other essentials; may open doors for some to feel they have ability to serve if elected

Option
Higher Stipend *Higher stipend may attract a broader pool of candidates; reducing or eliminating financial barrier; may not improve economic diversity of Councilors *Increased costs *Financial gain could be motivation for someone to run *Compensation reflects time and effort required to serve
Ruled Out
Lower/No Stipend *Being a City Councilor is a time-consuming role and people deserve to be compensated for their time

Stipend for Leader of City Council

Committee Recommendation: Change

- Leader of City Council should receive a stipend that is 25% more than other City Councilors

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee recognized the additional time and duties that are required of the leader of the Council and felt that it warranted a stipend that is 25% more than the other Councilors.

Financial Impact:

- Based on current stipends = $\$2,500 \times 25\% = \625
- Based on recommended stipends = $\$3,600 \times 25\% = \900

Status Quo
Leader Receives Same Stipend as Rest *All Councilors treated equal *No financial incentive to serve as leader *No compensation for leader additional time and duties
Option
Leader Receives More *Leader compensated for additional time and duties *Councilors may seek role for compensation

Stipend Increases for City Councilors

Committee Recommendation: Change

- Annual stipend adjustments shall be indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI)

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee felt strongly about the need to remove the process of stipend increases being initiated by the Council and to have a routine method for increasing them. Indexing increases to CPI ensures consistency and separates the question from the Council.

Financial Impact:

- Annual CPI x Councilor Stipend x 5



Status Quo
Can Increase with Budget Each Year *During budget process, stipends can increase and be part of overall budget vote *Potential conflict of interest as Councilors initiate stipend increases for selves *Ability to change annually but historically not increased frequently
Option
Charter Defines Council Stipend Increases *Removes decision and conflict from Council *Could define frequency and/or rate *Once defined, difficult to change as requires community vote

Charter Review

Committee Recommendation: Change

- Comprehensive review committee every 12 years built into Charter

Prevailing Rationale:

- The Committee heard about this as a practice in Brattleboro and liked it. They form a Charter Revision Committee every 15 years. There was a recognition that most of the time Charter amendments come through as specific changes without a holistic review. It was discussed on several occasions that creating this review process would not change the existing pathways for Charter changes and those avenues could still be used at any point in time. Up for consideration is whether or not this effort is about structural reforms only (like the purpose of this Governance Committee), or if it should be more broad and give consideration to soft reforms as well. Including soft reforms with the structural analysis may lend the inquiry to be more engaging and appetizing for public input. The two types of reforms also may play off from each other.

Financial Impact:

- Staff time, committee stipends, potential outreach materials and/or consultants; estimated \$10,000 every 12 years

Status Quo
No Built-In Charter Review *Charter can be reviewed at any point but no requirement that it be reviewed at any point; typically driven by a current issue
Option
Built-In Charter Review *Charter review frequency and process defined in Charter to require regular comprehensive review *Once defined, difficult to change as requires community vote

CONCLUSION

In summary, we recommend the following:

No Changes

- **Form of Government** – maintain Council-Manager
- **Election System** – maintain at-large election for all City Councilors
- **Leader of the Council** – maintain a president elected by the Councilors
- **Number of City Councilors** – maintain five City Councilors
- **Term Length** – maintain three-year terms for all City Councilors
- **Term Limits** – maintain no term limits

Changes

- **Stipend for City Councilors** – increase stipend from \$2,500 to \$3,600
- **Stipend for Leader of City Council** – 25% more than City Councilors
- **Stipend Increases for City Councilors** – annually indexed to CPI
- **Charter Review** – comprehensive review committee every 12 years built into Charter

Future Work/Explorations

- **Soft Reforms** – throughout the Committee’s conversations and engagement with others, there were a lot of questions about how to improve community engagement, communications, citizen involvement, etc. These types of changes were not in the purview of this Committee, but it is recommended that the City consider engaging in a community dialogue about these topics, which could lead to other structural reforms, or could simply lead to changes in other practices, plans, and policies.
- **Recall Provision** – given the limited time for the Committee to give due diligence to study this item, there is not a recommendation at this time, but this could be given consideration in the future.

Respectfully Submitted,

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The Vermont Statutes Online

The Statutes below include the actions of the 2024 session of the General Assembly.

NOTE: The Vermont Statutes Online is an unofficial copy of the Vermont Statutes Annotated that is provided as a convenience.

Title 24 Appendix: Municipal Charters

Chapter 4: City of Essex Junction

Subchapter 1: INCORPORATION AND POWERS OF THE CITY

§ 101. Corporate existence retained

Notwithstanding the provisions of any other municipal charter, the inhabitants of the Village of Essex Junction, within its corporate limits, shall be a municipal corporation by the name of the City of Essex Junction. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 102. General powers; law

Except as modified by the provisions of this charter, or by any lawful regulation or ordinance of the City of Essex Junction, all provisions of the statutes of this State applicable to municipal corporations shall apply to the City of Essex Junction. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 103. Specific powers

(a) The City of Essex Junction shall have all the powers granted to cities and municipal corporations by the Constitution and laws of this State together with all the implied powers necessary to carry into execution all the powers granted, and it may enact ordinances not inconsistent with the Constitution and laws of the State of Vermont or with this charter.

(b) The City of Essex Junction may acquire real and personal property within or without its corporate limits for any municipal purpose, including storm water collection and disposal; waste water collection and disposal; solid waste collection and disposal; provision of public water supply; provision of public parks and recreation facilities; provision of municipal facilities for office, fire protection, and police protection; provision of public libraries; provision of public parking areas; provision of sidewalks, bicycle paths, and green strips; provision of public roadways; provision of public view zones and open spaces; and such other purposes as are addressed under the general laws of the State of Vermont.

(c) The City of Essex Junction may acquire such property in fee simple or any lesser interest or estate, by purchase, gift, devise, lease, or condemnation and may sell, lease, mortgage, hold, manage, and control such property as its interest may require.

(d) The City of Essex Junction may exercise any of its powers or perform any of its functions and may participate in the financing thereof, jointly or in cooperation, by contract or otherwise, with other Vermont municipalities, the State of Vermont, any one or more subdivisions or agencies of the State or the United States.

(e) The City of Essex Junction may establish and maintain an electric power system and regulate power line installations; provided, however, that the City shall have no authority under this charter that conflicts with that authority granted to the Public Utilities Commission or any other state regulatory agency. The City of Essex Junction may also establish a telecommunications system and an enterprise to deliver Internet or broadband services.

(f) In this charter, mention of a particular power shall not be construed to be exclusive or to restrict the scope of the powers that the City of Essex Junction would otherwise have if the particular power were not mentioned. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 104. Reservation of powers

Nothing in this charter shall be so construed as in any way to limit the powers and functions conferred upon the City of Essex Junction and the City Council by general or special enactments in force or effect or hereafter enacted, and the powers and functions conferred by this charter shall be cumulative and in addition to the provisions of such general or special enactments. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 105. Form of government

The municipal government provided by this charter shall be known as council-manager form of government. Pursuant to its provisions and subject only to the limitations imposed by the State Constitution and by this charter, all powers of the City of Essex Junction shall be vested in an elective City Council, which shall enact ordinances, codes, and regulations; adopt budgets; determine policies; and appoint the City Manager, who shall enforce the laws and ordinances and administer the government of the City. All powers of the City shall be exercised in the manner prescribed by this charter or prescribed by ordinance. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 2: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

§ 201. Powers and duties of governing body

(a) The members of the City of Essex Junction City Council shall constitute the legislative body of the City of Essex Junction for all purposes required by statute and, except as otherwise provided in this charter, shall have all the powers and authority given to and perform all duties required of City legislative bodies or Councils under the laws of the State of Vermont.

(b) Within the limitations of the foregoing, the City of Essex Junction Council shall have the power to:

(1) Appoint and remove a City Manager and supervise, create, change, and abolish offices, commissions, or departments other than the offices, commissions, or departments established by this charter.

(2) Appoint the members of all boards, commissions, committees, or similar bodies unless specifically provided otherwise by this charter.

(3) Provide for an independent audit by a certified public accountant.

(4) Inquire into the conduct of any officer, commission, or department and investigate any and all municipal affairs.

(5) Exercise every other power that is not specifically set forth herein but that is granted to councils or legislative bodies by the statutes of the State of Vermont. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 202. Governing body; composition and terms of office

(a) There shall be a City Council consisting of five members.

(b) All members shall reside within the boundaries of the City of Essex Junction to be elected by the qualified voters.

(c) The term of office of a City Councilor shall be three years, and terms shall be staggered. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 203. Vacancy in office

In case of a vacancy of a Council seat, the vacancy shall be filled by the City Council until the next annual election pursuant to subsection 204(c) of this charter. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 204. Election of governing body officers

(a) The terms of the officers shall commence on the first day of the month following the month of election. At the first meeting of the month following the annual City meeting, the Council shall organize and elect a President, Vice President, and Clerk by a majority vote of the entire Council and shall file a certificate of the election for record in the office of the City Clerk.

(b) The President of the Council, or in the President's absence the Vice President, shall preside at all meetings of the Council and shall be recognized as the head of the City government for all ceremonial purposes.

(c) In the event of death, resignation, or incapacity of any Council member, the remaining members of the Council may appoint a person to fill that position until the next annual election. Incapacity shall be determined by a vote of the Council. Incapacity shall include the failure by any member of the board to attend at least 50 percent of the meetings of the board in any calendar year. At the next annual election, the vacancy shall be filled and the person so elected shall serve for the remainder of the term of office. In the event the Council is unable to agree upon an interim replacement until the next annual City election, a special election shall be held forthwith to fill the position.

(d) In the event that a Councilor is no longer a resident of the City prior to the expiration of the Councilor's term, the Councilor's office shall be deemed vacant. The Council may appoint a person to fill the vacant office until a successor can be elected at the next annual election. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 205. Compensation

(a) Compensation paid to the Council members shall be set by the voters at the annual meeting, with a minimum of \$1,500.00 a year each. Council members' compensation must be set forth as a separate item in the annual budget presented to the meeting. Council members may choose to forgo the compensation or a portion of the compensation.

(b) The City Council shall fix the compensation of all appointees and the City Manager. The Council shall review, approve, and ratify any collective bargaining agreements, which may be negotiated or fixed by the Manager or their designee. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 206. Conflict of interest; prohibitions

(a) Holding other office. No Council member shall hold any City employment during the term for which they were elected to the Council, unless allowed by State statute. A Council member may be appointed to represent the City on other boards except as pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2647.

(b) Appointments and removals. Neither the legislative body nor any of its members shall in any manner dictate the appointment or removal of any municipal administrative officers or employees whom the manager or any of the manager's subordinates are empowered to appoint. The legislative body may discuss with the Manager the appointment, performance, and removal of such officers and employees in executive session.

(c) Interference with administration. Except for the purpose of inquiries and investigations under subdivision 201(b)(4) of this charter, the legislative body or its members shall deal with the municipal officers and employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the Manager solely through the Manager, and neither the legislative body nor its members shall give orders to any such officer or employee, either publicly or privately. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022; amended 2023, No. M-18 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 13, 2024.)

§ 207. Governing body; meetings

As soon as possible after the election of the President and Vice President, the Council shall fix the time and place of its regular meetings, and such meetings shall be held at least once a month. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 208. Special city meetings

Special City meetings shall be called in the manner provided by the laws of the State, and the voting on all questions shall be by the Australian ballot system. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 209. Council meetings; procedure

(a) The Council shall determine its own rules and order of business.

(b) The presence of three members shall constitute a quorum. Three affirmative votes shall be necessary to take binding Council action.

(c) In accordance with Vermont's Open Meeting Law, the Council shall keep minutes of its proceedings. The journalized minutes shall be a public record.

(d) All meetings of the Council shall be open to the public unless, by an affirmative vote of the majority of the members present, the Council shall vote that any particular session shall be an executive session or deliberative session in accordance with Vermont's Open Meeting Law. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 210. Appointments

The Council shall have the power to appoint the members of all boards, commissions, committees, or similar bodies unless specifically provided otherwise by this charter. The terms of all appointments shall commence on the day after the day of appointment unless the appointment is to fill a vacancy in an office, in which case the term shall commence at the time of appointment. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 211. Additional governing body provisions

(a) No claim for personal services shall be allowed to the officers elected at the annual meeting, except when compensation for such services is provided for under the provisions of this charter or by the general law.

(b) The Council may authorize the sale or lease of any real or personal estate belonging to the City. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 3: OTHER ELECTED OFFICES

§ 301. Brownell Library Trustees

There shall be a five-member Board of Library Trustees who shall be elected to five-year terms using the Australian ballot system. Only qualified voters of the City of Essex Junction shall be eligible to hold the office of elected library trustee. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 302. Moderator

The Council shall appoint a Moderator who shall preside at the next City Informational Meeting. The term of Moderator shall be one year. Only qualified voters of the City of Essex Junction shall be eligible to hold the office of Moderator. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022; amended 2023, No. M-18 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 13, 2024.)

Subchapter 4: CITY MEETINGS

§ 401. City meetings and elections

(a) Annually on or before January 1, the Council shall set the date of the next annual meeting, at which time the voters shall vote for the election of officers, the voting on the City budget, and any other business included in the warnings for the meetings.

(b) Provisions of the laws of the State of Vermont relating to the qualifications of electors, the manner of voting, the duties of elections officers, and all other particulars respective to preparation for, conducting, and management of elections, so far as they may be applicable, shall govern all municipal elections, and all general and special meetings, except as otherwise provided in this charter.

(c) The election of officers and the voting on all questions shall be by Australian ballot system. The City Clerk and Board of Civil Authority shall conduct elections in accordance with general laws of the State. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022; amended 2023, No. M-18 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 13, 2024.)

Subchapter 5: ORDINANCES

§ 501. Adoption of ordinances

Ordinances shall be adopted in accordance with State law pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §§ 1972–1976, with the additional requirements noted in this subchapter. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 502. Public hearing

(a) The Council shall hold a minimum of one public hearing prior to the adoption of any ordinance.

(b) At the time and place so advertised, or at any time and place to which the hearing may from time to time be adjourned, the ordinance shall be introduced, and thereafter, all persons interested shall be given an opportunity to be heard.

(c) After the hearing, the Council may finally pass the ordinance with or without amendment, except that if the Council makes an amendment, it shall cause the amended ordinance to be published, pursuant to subsections (a) and (b) of this section with a notice of the time and place of a public hearing at which the amended ordinance will be further considered, which publication shall be at least three days prior to the public hearing. The Council may finally pass the amended ordinance or again amend it subject to the same procedures as outlined herein. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 503. Effective date

Every ordinance shall become effective upon passage unless otherwise specified. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 504. Rescission of ordinances

All ordinances shall be subject to rescission by a special or annual City meeting, as follows: If, within 44 days after final passage by the Council of any such ordinance, a petition signed by voters of the City not less in number than five percent of the qualified voters of the municipality is filed with the City Clerk requesting its reference to a special or annual City meeting, the Council shall fix the time and place of the meeting, which shall be within 60 days after the filing of the petition, and notice thereof shall be given in the manner provided by law in the calling of a special or annual City meeting. Voting shall be by Australian ballot. An ordinance so referred shall remain in effect upon the conclusion of the meeting unless a majority of those present and voting against the ordinance at the special or annual City meeting exceeds five percent in number of the qualified voters of the municipality. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 505. Petition for enactment of ordinance; special meeting

(a) Voters of the City may at any time petition for the enactment of any proposed lawful ordinance by filing the petition, including the text of the ordinance, with the City Clerk. The Council shall call a special City meeting (or include the ordinance as annual meeting business) to be held within 60 days after the date of the filing, unless prior to the meeting the ordinance shall be enacted by the Council. The warning for the meeting shall state the proposed ordinance in full or in concise summary and shall provide for an Australian ballot vote as to its enactment. The ordinance shall take effect on the 10th day after the conclusion of the meeting, provided that voters, constituting a majority of those voting thereon, shall have voted in the affirmative.

(b) The proposed ordinance shall be examined by the City Attorney before being submitted to the special City meeting. The City Attorney is authorized, subject to the approval of the Council, to correct the ordinance so as to avoid repetitions, illegalities, and unconstitutional provisions and to ensure accuracy in its text and references and clarity and precision in its phraseology, but the City Attorney shall not materially change its meaning and effect.

(c) The provisions of this section shall not apply to any appointments of officers, members of commissions, or boards made by the Council or to the appointment or designation of Council, or to rules governing the procedure of the Council. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 6: CITY MANAGER

§ 601. Manager; appointment and hiring

The Council shall appoint a City Manager under and in accordance with Vermont Statutes Annotated. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 602. Powers of Manager

(a) The Manager shall be the chief administrative officer of the City of Essex Junction. The Manager shall be responsible to the Council for the administration of all City of Essex Junction affairs placed in the Manager's charge by or under this charter. The Manager shall have the following powers and duties in addition to those powers and duties delegated to municipal managers under the Vermont statutes.

(b) The Manager shall appoint and, when the Manager deems it necessary for the good of the service, suspend or remove all City of Essex Junction employees, including the Treasurer, and other employees provided for by or under this charter for cause, except as otherwise provided by law, this charter, collective bargaining unit contracts, or personnel rules adopted pursuant to this charter. The Manager may authorize any employee who is subject to the Manager's direction and supervision to exercise these powers with respect to subordinates in that employee's department, office, or agency. There shall be no discrimination in employment, in accordance with applicable State and federal laws, including 21 V.S.A. § 495. Appointments, lay-offs, suspensions, promotions, demotions, and removals shall be made primarily on the basis of training, experience, fitness, and performance of duties, in such manner as to ensure that the responsible administrative officer may secure efficient service.

(c) The Manager, or designee, shall direct and supervise the administration of all departments, offices, and agencies of the City of Essex Junction, except as otherwise provided by this charter or by law.

(d) The Manager shall recommend hiring of a City Attorney with Council approval and shall hire special attorneys as needed.

(e) The Manager or a staff member designated by the Manager shall attend all Council meetings and shall have the right to take part in discussion and make recommendations but may not vote. The Council may meet in executive session without the Manager for discussion of the Manager's performance or if the Manager is the subject of an investigation pursuant to subdivision 201(b)(4) of this charter.

(f) The Manager shall see that all laws, provisions of this charter, and acts of the Council, subject to enforcement by the Manager or by officers subject to the Manager's direction and supervision, are faithfully executed.

(g) The Manager shall prepare and submit the annual budget and capital program to the Council.

(h) The Manager shall submit to the Council and make available to the public a complete report on the finances and administrative activities of the City of Essex Junction as of the end of each fiscal year.

(i) The Manager shall make such other reports as the Council may require concerning the operations of the City of Essex Junction's departments, offices, and agencies subject to the Manager's direction and supervision.

(j) The Manager shall keep the Council fully advised as to the financial condition and future needs of the City of Essex Junction and make such recommendations to the Council concerning the affairs of the City of Essex Junction as the Manager deems desirable.

(k) The Manager shall be responsible for the enforcement of all City of Essex Junction ordinances and laws.

(l) The Manager may when advisable or proper delegate to subordinate officers and employees of the City of Essex Junction any duties conferred upon the Manager by this charter, the Vermont statutes, or the Council members.

(m) The Manager shall perform such other duties as are specified in this charter or in State law or as may be required by the Council.

(n) The Manager shall fix the compensation of City employees.

(o) The Manager shall recommend appointment of the City Clerk annually, with Council approval. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 603. Manager; removal; hearing

The Council may remove the Manager from office for cause in accordance with the following procedures:

(1) The Council shall adopt by affirmative vote of a majority of all its members a preliminary resolution that must state the reasons for removal and may suspend the Manager from duty for a period not to exceed 45 days. Within three days after the vote, a copy of the resolution shall be delivered to the Manager.

(2) Within five days after a copy of the resolution is delivered to the Manager, the Manager may file with the Council a written request for a hearing; the hearing shall be in a public or executive session by choice of the Manager. This hearing shall be held at a special Council meeting not earlier than 15 days nor later than 30 days after the request is filed. The Manager may file with the Council a written reply not later than five days before the hearing.

(3) The Council may adopt a final resolution of removal, which may be made effective immediately, by affirmative vote of a majority of all its members at any time after five days from the date when a copy of the preliminary resolution was delivered to the Manager, if the Manager has not requested a public hearing, or at any time after the public hearing, if the Manager has requested one. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 604. Vacancy in office of City Manager

The Manager, by letter filed with the City Clerk, may appoint a staff member to perform the Manager's duties in the event of the Manager's absence due to disability, incapacitation, or vacation unless the Manager has previously appointed a staff member as assistant manager or deputy manager, who would automatically assume the Manager's responsibilities in the Manager's absence. If the Manager fails to make such designations, the Council may by resolution appoint an officer or employee of the City to perform the duties of the Manager until the Manager is able to return to duty. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 7: BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

§ 701. Board of Civil Authority

The Board of Civil Authority shall be defined by 17 VSA § 2103(5). (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 702. Board of Abatement of Taxes

The Board of Civil Authority shall constitute a Board of Abatement as provided by law. The Board of Abatement shall meet and discharge its duties as required by the applicable statutory provisions. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 703. Planning Commission

There shall be a Planning Commission, and its powers, obligations, and operation shall be under and in accordance with Vermont Statutes Annotated, as amended, and members will be appointed by the City Council from among the qualified voters of the City. Members of the Commission shall hold no other City office. The City Council shall have the authority pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4323(a) to set the terms of the Planning Commission members. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 704. Development Review Board

A Development Review Board shall be established, and its powers, obligations, and operation shall be under and in accordance with Vermont Statutes Annotated, as amended, and members will be appointed by the City Council for terms of three years from among the qualified voters of the City. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 705. Brownell Library Trustees

The Brownell Library Board of Library Trustees that holds office at the time of enactment of this charter shall serve until their terms are completed. Any existing policies of the Library Trustees at the time of the enactment of this charter shall become the policies of the new Brownell Library Board of Trustees. The five permanent, self-perpetuating Library Trustees shall function in accordance with the terms of the Brownell Trust agreement dated May 25, 1925. The Library Trustees shall have the authority to establish any new policy for the operation of the Library or repeal or replace any existing policy and shall otherwise act in conformance with the Vermont statutes. Notwithstanding the forgoing, the Library is required to follow all financial and personnel policies adopted by the City Council. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 8: ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS

§ 801. Personnel administration and benefits

(a) The Manager or the Manager's appointee shall be the personnel director. The Manager shall maintain personnel rules and regulations protecting the interests of the City and of the employees. These rules and regulations must be approved by the Council and shall include the procedure for amending them and for placing them into practice. Each employee shall receive a copy of the rules and regulations when the employee is hired.

(b) The rules and regulations may deal with the following subjects or with other similar matters of personnel administration: job classification, jobs to be filled, tenure, retirement, pensions, leaves of absence, vacations, holidays, hours and days of work, group insurance, salary plans, rules governing hiring, temporary appointments, lay-off, reinstatement, promotion, transfer, demotion, settlement of disputes, dismissal, probationary periods, permanent or continuing status, in-service training, injury, employee records, and further regulations concerning the hearing of appeals.

(c) No person in the service of the City shall either directly or indirectly give, render, pay, or receive any service or other valuable thing for or on account of or in connection with any appointment, proposed appointment, promotion, or proposed promotion. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 802. Real estate assessor

There shall be either a real estate Assessor who is a certified real estate appraiser or an independent appraisal firm, headed by a certified real estate appraiser, appointed by the Manager that shall carry out the duties of assessor in the same manner and be subject to all of the same liabilities prescribed for listers under the law of the State of Vermont in assessing property within the City of Essex Junction and that shall establish the grand list thereof and shall return such list to the City Clerk within the time required by State statute. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 803. Appraisal of property

Appraisals shall be reviewed periodically and kept up to date. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 804. Appraisal of business property for tax purposes

Appraisal of business personal property shall be in accordance with the provisions of 32 V.S.A. § 3618, as the same may from time to time be amended, provided that all business personal property acquired by a taxpayer after September 30, 1995, shall be exempt from tax. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 805. Purpose

The purpose of appointing an Assessor is in lieu of the election of listers. The City shall be governed by, and each taxpayer shall have rights granted by, the applicable State statutes concerning real and personal property taxation, appeal therefrom, and other statutes concerning taxation. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 9: BUDGET PROCESS

§ 901. Fiscal year

The fiscal year of the City shall begin on the first day of July and end on the last day of June of each calendar year. The fiscal year shall constitute the budget and accounting year as used in this charter. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 902. Annual municipal budget

With support from the finance department, the Manager shall submit to the Council a budget for review before the annual City Meeting or at such previous time as may be directed by the Council. The budget shall contain:

- (1) an estimate of the financial condition of the City as of the end of the fiscal year;
- (2) an itemized statement of appropriations recommended for current expenses, and for capital improvements, during the next fiscal year, with comparative statements of appropriations and estimated expenditures for the current fiscal year and actual appropriations and expenditures for the immediate preceding fiscal year;
- (3) an itemized statement of estimated revenues from all sources, other than taxation, for the next fiscal year and comparative figures of tax and other sources of revenue for the current and immediate preceding fiscal years;
- (4) a capital budget for not fewer than the next five fiscal years, showing anticipated capital expenditures, financing, and tax requirements; and
- (5) such other information as may be required by the Council. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 903. Governing body's action on budget

The Council shall review and approve the recommended budget with or without change. The budget shall be published not later than two weeks after its preliminary adoption by the Council. The Council shall fix the time and place for holding a public hearing for the budget and shall give public notice of the hearing. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 904. Budget meeting; warning

- (a) The Council shall hold at least one public hearing at least 30 days prior to the annual meeting to present and explain its proposed budget and shall give a public notice of such hearing.
- (b) The Manager shall, not less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting, make available the Council's recommended budget and the final warning of the pending annual meeting.
- (c) The annual City report shall be made available to the legal voters of the City not later than 10 days prior to the annual meeting. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 905. Appropriation and transfers

(a) An annual budget shall be adopted at the City Meeting by the vote of a majority of eligible voters by Australian ballot in accordance with section 401 of this charter. If, after the total budget has been appropriated, the Council finds additional appropriations necessary, the appropriations shall be made and reported at the next City Meeting as a specific item. The appropriations shall only be made in special circumstances or situations of an emergency nature. No specific explanation need be given for any normal annual operating expense in any office, department, or agency that may be increased over the budget amount by an amount not more than 10 percent of the office's, department's, or agency's budget.

(b) From the effective date of the budget, the amounts stated therein, as approved by the voters, become appropriated to the several agencies and purposes therein named.

(c) The Manager may at any time transfer an unencumbered appropriation balance or portion thereof between general classifications of expenditures within an office, department, or agency. At the request of the Manager, the Council may, by resolution, transfer any unencumbered appropriation balance or portion thereof within the Council budget from one department, office, or agency to another.

(d) Notwithstanding the above, no unexpended balance in any appropriation not included in the Council budget shall be transferred or used for any other purpose. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 906. Amount to be raised by taxation

Upon passage of the budget by the voters, the amounts stated therein as the amount to be raised by taxes shall constitute a determination of the amount of the levy for the purposes of the City in the corresponding tax year, and the Council shall levy such taxes on the grand list as prepared by the assessor for the corresponding tax year. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 10: TAXATION

§ 1001. Taxes on real property

Taxes on real property shall be paid in equal installments on March 15 and September 15. The Council shall send notice to taxpayers not less than 30 days prior to when taxes are due. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1002. Penalty

An additional charge of eight percent shall be added to any tax not paid on or before the dates specified in section 1001 of this charter, and interest as authorized by Vermont statutes. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1003. Assessment and taxation agreement

The Council is authorized and empowered to negotiate and execute assessment and taxation agreements between the City and a taxpayer or taxpayers within the City of Essex Junction consistent with applicable requirements of the Vermont Constitution. This section shall not be construed to supersede any provision of State law relating to the education property tax. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 11: CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

§ 1101. Capital programs

(a) Preparation of capital program. The Manager shall prepare and submit to the Council a capital program at least three months prior to the final date for submission of the budget.

(b) Contents. The capital program shall include:

(1) a clear general summary of its contents;

(2) a list of all capital improvements that are proposed to be undertaken during not fewer than the next five fiscal years, with appropriate supporting information as to the necessity for such improvements;

(3) cost estimates, method of financing, and recommended time schedules for each such improvement; and

(4) the estimated annual cost of operating and maintaining the facilities to be constructed or acquired.

(c) Revision. The information required by this section may be revised and extended each year with regard to capital improvements still pending or in process of construction or acquisition. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 12: AMENDMENT OF CHARTER AND INITIATIVES

§ 1201. Governing law

This charter may be amended in accordance with the procedure provided for by State statutes for amendment of municipal charters. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 13: GENERAL PROVISIONS

§ 1301. Savings clause

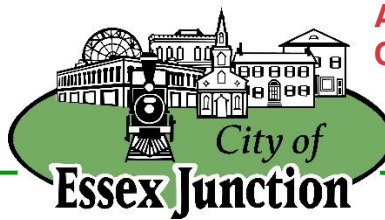
Repeal or modification of this charter shall not affect the validity of a previously enacted ordinance, resolution, or bylaw. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1302. Severability

The provisions of this charter are declared to be severable. If any provisions of this charter are for any reason invalid, such invalidity shall not affect the remaining provisions, which can be given effect without the invalid provision. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1303. Superseding language

The City of Essex Junction shall be formed notwithstanding the following language (“Notwithstanding the provisions of any other municipal charters, territory within the corporate limits [of the Town of Essex] shall not be annexed to or become a part of any other municipal corporation except by annexation procedures as set forth in the statutes of the State of Vermont.”) contained in chapter 117, section 101 of this title. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)



**Governance Committee
Purpose Statement
Approved by the City Council: September 25, 2024**

PURPOSE

Essex Junction is a welcoming community, home to a diverse population, including residents of all ages, ethnicity, nationalities, and backgrounds; and the City Council wishes to explore governance structures to ensure that voices are equitably represented at policy making tables. As such, the Governance Committee shall represent the best interests of the City and its residents by serving in an advisory capacity to the City Council for the purpose of studying governance considerations for the City such as, but not limited to, form of government, election of officials at-large or through wards or districts, governing body composition, term of office, term limits, and councilor compensation.

MEMBERSHIP

The City Council will appoint the members of the Governance Committee. Members shall be residents of the City of Essex Junction. The Governance Committee shall consist of up to 9 voting members to include two City Council members.

TIMELINE & TERM LENGTH

It is anticipated that the Governance Committee's work may result in recommended charter changes. The intent is to prepare these charter changes in time for them to be brought to the voters on the 2026 Annual Meeting ballot. Therefore, the work of the Governance Committee shall be complete and submitted to the City Council no later than November 1, 2025.

There may be additional work beyond this timeline to help with public outreach and engagement associated with any potential charter changes.

This will be a limited time Committee, to be established as soon as a minimum of 7 members can be appointed, and it will be dissolved upon completion of the work listed herein. Member terms shall be for the full length of time this time limited Committee is in existence.

OFFICERS

Officers of the Governance Committee shall be a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary. No two offices may be held by the same person. The officers shall be chosen at the first meeting of the Committee. The Chairperson shall preside at meetings of the Governance Committee. The Vice Chairperson shall fill in the duties for the Chairperson in their absence. The Secretary shall keep a record of the meetings in the form of minutes.

VOTING

Each member shall be entitled to one vote. Approval of any matter requires an affirmative vote from a quorum of the body which is established as a majority of the membership (4 if 7 members; 5 if 9 members).

MEETINGS OF MEMBERS

The Governance Committee shall meet as needed to achieve the work as stated herein within this limited time period; this may include sub-Committee work. A schedule should be established by the Governance Committee at it's first meeting.

All Governance Committee meetings, votes, and actions shall follow the laws of the State of Vermont. The Governance Committee is an advisory body.

APPENDIX 3: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

City of Essex Junction Governance Committee

Name

- 1 Thomas Coen
- 2 Steve Eustis, Chair
- 3 Deb McAdoo
- 4 Candace Morgan
- 5 Brian Shelden
- 6 Gabrielle Smith
- 7 Marlon Versasamy, Vice Chair
- 8 Elaine Haney, Secretary
- 9 Bethany Clark

Staff Administrator:

Brad Luck, Recreation & Parks Director

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Form of Government: Should we have a Council-Manager form of government as we do now, whereby the chief administrative officer is appointed? Should we have a Strong Mayor system like in Burlington where the chief administrative officer is an elected position? Should we have a Weak Mayor system whereby the elected leader of the council has some powers, but the role is mostly ceremonial, and the chief administrative officer is an appointed position?

I don't know.

Seems like our current setup with a manager is working and we can remove a manager relatively quickly if needed. It gives us the opportunity to have a manager that is trained in running a municipality. For me a professional manager is going to be less political and well trained. A professional manager also allows for "average" people to be on the council. I think we need to encourage non-political, not super-connected people to be on the council.

I don't have an opinion on this yet. I am not inclined to a Strong Mayor system, but I could be convinced otherwise once we have done our research.

I first want to understand what challenges we are experiencing under our current form of government. If our current structure is working well to meet our needs, then do not think we should be looking for change for the sake of change itself. If there are current challenges, then I would want to uncover which alternative forms of government address those challenges and what drawbacks they have. Personally, having apolitical professional staff run the city makes sense to me, particularly for a city of our size.

What are the added benefits of changing to a different model than current?

Challenges of strong mayor system resulting in frequent major changes.

Does a mayor (strong or weak) align better and provide clarity given we are a city?

What are the cost implications of different models? Concerns of a strong mayor model adding additional paid political layer within government on top of existing professionals.

Concerned about power – ensuring it is limited and gives room for more voices.

Value expertise in the chief executive.

I don't have a strong opinion here except for this: CM seems to be working. I haven't heard any strong objections to CM except "we're a city, why don't we have a mayor?"

Consider spelling out the role/responsibilities of the President of the Council or Mayor in the Charter

Is there a gap in leadership, visibility, economic development, and other roles as an extension of the staff that the President of the Council or Mayor can/should play?

Do some of the expected or desired roles or perceived gaps need to be written in the Charter or communicated/stated in some other way or document?

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Council Composition: How many elected officials should we have (currently have 5)? Should the leader of the Council be elected by the Council or the people?

7. I don't know about the leadership role.

I haven't seen a reason (or anyone even hinting more is better) to have more than 5. It is easiest if the council chair is elected by the councilors as it prevents a lot of hassle with dealing with special elections if council challengers win or lots of political games if people need to resign their seats to run for head of council. We had a lot of problems with our previous system. Have there been any perceived problems with the current system?

I don't have an opinion yet on either question. I am open to expanding to 7, especially if we combine that increase with wards or other district form.

Five seems like a reasonable number given the size of our city. We want to keep an odd number so the alternative would be moving to 7. That of course makes decision making harder, increases some administrative expenses/burden, and needs to be sufficient interest from residents to serve in those new positions. Based on our peer cities, 5 seems reasonable. But again, would like to hear from folks on how our system is currently functioning, including from city councilors.

Is five equitable? How many people should one representative represent?

Having more councilors allows for larger sub-groups/committees without triggering a quorum.

Consideration of advantages/disadvantages to staggered terms and number of seats up for election at one time.

Is a smaller team (i.e. 5 vs. 7) more effective and/or efficient vs. larger?

Is a smaller number better i.e. 3 or 4?

More councilors = more voices

Would we have enough people running for elections?

Admittedly with little experience here, but, it seems like 5 is working? But I'm open to any odd number. If the president / mayor / chair is elected by the people, you'd have to give them more power in some way. Someone elected at-large by the people would want more power than someone only elected by a subset of the people. Otherwise, why would you run at-large? It's more work – both to run and to serve – and more expensive.

More councilors could help spread out the workload better

Greater flexibility if elected by the Council for roles to change annually instead of on full-term cycles.

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Councilor Term Lengths: What is the right number of years for a councilor term? Should they all be the same or different lengths?

3-4 years

It takes a year or two to really get your feet under you to know the councilor job well. Therefore 3 years seems like a good amount of time because of this learning curve.

Don't have an opinion yet

For equity, councilor terms should all be the same length. I've never heard of different term lengths for the same elected position before. 3 years seems like a reasonable time and is aligned with our peers. But again, would want to get feedback from stakeholders — is that currently working, what challenges does it create? Current terms are overlapping (i.e. council members are up for election at different times). In general, I think this is a good idea as it brings continuity to the council while also ensuring regular participation from the public on council members. It also provides some insulation from short term political winds since not all seats are up at any one point in time. Also follows models from other cities.

Concerns of large turnover in any one given year.

Consideration of time that it takes for councilors to learn the role – learning curve.

Is a shorter term more appealing/less of a commitment for some community members?

Three (3) years seems a good trade-off between commitment (longer would discourage people to stand up) and ability to gain experience before re-election (shorter would be continuously up for election). The important bit here, to me, is that they overlap. I don't think we should have the whole council be up at the same time like the State Legislature or US Congress. Too easy to lose institutional knowledge.

Length and staggering are ways to consider stability, consistency, gradual change, and opportunities for new perspective

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Councilor Term Limits: Should there be a maximum number of years or terms that a councilor may serve?

No.

I generally believe term limits makes sense to keep fresh viewpoints on the council. If we add term limits, we might want to consider a number of years break before someone could run again. In other words not a lifetime limit, but rather "streaks". Perhaps 5 years off after becoming term limited.

I'm not a fan of term limits in general. Could be convinced otherwise for City Council.

Term limits are helpful if there are substantial barriers to participation and entrenched incumbency. I don't see that as current issues. Council campaigns are relatively low-cost and short. Council members have voluntarily not run again. With a small city, instituting term limits can also have the adverse effect of limiting institutional knowledge and limiting the pool of qualified candidates. It does not seem like there is an overabundance of candidates at the moment (only 2 ran for the most recent open council seat).

Concern of aggregation of power

Is it a barrier for new participation if people don't want to run against incumbents?

Value of institutional knowledge vs. new voices. Stagnation vs. fresh perspective.

Are these being used in other communities? What is the experience?

Is there a better opportunity for a smoother transition if a term limited councilor knows they cannot run again?

"When the playing field is leveled and the process is fair and open, it turns out we have term limits. They're called elections." –Aaron Sorkin, The West Wing S1E20

No. I don't think that term limits accomplish what people think they do. People just run for other things, and you lose institutional knowledge as they do.

https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/content/pubs/rb/RB_1104BCRB.pdf

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Election of Officials: Should officials be elected at-large (without regard to residence location within the City), or through districts/wards, an overlay of wards within districts, or a hybrid of some at-large and some through districts/wards?

At Large.

I am feeling that the city is small enough and similar enough to not need wards. I was able to follow all the Front Porch Forums prior to consolidation to one. Frequently and over long periods of time, similar issues were brought up all over the city. Without wards we can have the best people on the council regardless of where they live. It also eliminates the need to rebalance every 10 years when new census data is available. The city is also not so big that it is difficult to reach all the citizens if campaigning at-large. If we were a merged Essex (which we aren't), wards would make more sense to me since there are 3 very different regions in Essex.

I am very interested in exploring this with the committee.

I think there is a benefit to simplicity for voters, especially in a small city like Essex Junction. If we were larger, then I do see a benefit of having ward specific councilors, but based on our city size this again can have the adverse effect of limiting the pool of qualified candidates. If we did want to consider this, should be done in tandem with increasing the council size (which doesn't seem like a current need). Would also want to better understand if some areas of the city feel under-represented on the council geographically. And then what are some options to address that (i.e. through better community engagement/outreach).

I generally think that EJ is too small to justify wards, but I'm open to the idea.

Two counter arguments:

1) an EJCC seat has more constituents (11,000) than a Vermont State Representative Seat (4,100 or 8,200 in a two-member district). Meaning it's more work (and more expensive) to run for an EJCC seat than a State Rep seat. Is that what we want?

2) if we go this route let's make sure that any wards we draw are legal (one person one vote), follow the Voting Rights Act of 1968, and are redistricted regularly and fairly.

If we're considering wards seriously, let's start by breaking out some redistricting software to see what any legal wards would look like.

I have done this for our House Seats, but it's been a while. I used Dave's Redistricting to look at Essex Town and Essex Junction when the legislature asked the Essex BCA for feedback after the 2022 reapportionment. I learned some interesting things.

I think people are picturing drawing lines around, say, the South Summit neighborhood, Countryside, Rivendell, and the Fairgrounds / Grandview

neighborhood and calling those the wards. However, those neighborhoods are very different in sizes. And they are hard to connect together: nobody lives in the CVE, Global Foundries, or the High School.

Point is: I don't think legal wards would look like what people think they would look like.

If we go the ward route, I would recommend using the Austin, TX, ward and redistricting ordinance as a model.

(<https://www.austintexas.gov/content/independent-citizens-redistricting-commission>)

Happy to present on the Austin Redistricting Commission (and/or cut up some sample wards) if anyone is interested.

What would wards solve?

What is wrong with the current system and what would we gain from a change?

Concerns of challenges of finding candidates to run.

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Councilor Compensation: What is an appropriate amount to pay councilors annually for their service (currently \$2,500/year)?

I don't know.

\$2,500 seems like a fair amount of compensation. What are the reasons to think it is not enough? That much can certainly pay for child care, pet care, and other financial constraints of the position. It is nice to get something for your time and this seems to accomplish that.

I would like to see the compensation increased. I see the concept of volunteering for a significant time commitment like this to be outdated and exclusionary. Most residents are either full or over-employed or retired. We need to make the City Council an option for those who cannot afford to commit to the time required for free, or who wouldn't do it for free for whatever reason. I like the range of \$7,500 - \$10,000, but that is a pretty undereducated guess.

I think we should definitely increase councilor compensation. It is a huge time commitment and the limited remuneration is a barrier for participation for many individuals. I'm not sure yet what is the right level that is both affordable, practical, and appropriate, but maybe close to \$10k/year with built in annual inflationary increases? Would want to learn what peer cities are doing, but think in general pay across the board is too low if we want to broaden who is able to serve.

Well, I didn't run for this seat for the money.

What I would recommend, is, that whatever compensation we have be indexed for inflation. And/or for the midpoint of the merit increase staff gets.

It's very easy to demonize politicians voting to raise their own salary. Therefore, unless we want to find out that we're not paying people enough to consider a run in (say) 2045, when \$2,500 only buys a creemee :-) we should index it for inflation and forget about it.

Where are other communities at?

Does higher compensation draw or allow others to consider participating in this way?

Does a higher compensation make being a Councilor more accessible?

Is the current compensation a barrier to Council participation?

More generally, what are the barriers to participation (compensation, fear of attacks, etc.)?

How do you increase it over time? Automatic? Set period of time? Ensure a built-in method of annual/regular increases.

Can we track or get an estimate of number of hours that Councilors put in per month and assign an appropriate dollar amount to it?

Balance of money not being a motivator.

Other way of compensating? i.e. discount on property taxes

What are other communities doing?

Should the President of the Council receive a higher stipend?

Consider additional stipends for additional committee work

Considerations of equity and opportunity – does the amount (current or higher) allow others to consider serving

Should it be a per meeting stipend instead of a set amount – which could also count the extra meetings for the chair/vice chair?

Being a councilor involves a lot of time and work, not only for the individual, but also for their family

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Neighborhood Assemblies: Should there be neighborhood assemblies?

Yes. I am concerned about the attendance though.

I do not know enough about neighborhood assemblies. What are they trying to accomplish? What is the definition of a neighborhood? Is it better to just have city wide outreach, such as the annual meal meeting (January), and planning/zoning initiatives, celebrations (block party, etc.), etc.

I am very interested in exploring how this might work in EJ.

I think we definitely need some form of intentional community engagement strategy. I'm not sure that neighborhood assemblies are the answer (but they could be!) They strike me as a time- and resource-intensive approach and think other community engagement approaches could be more efficient at achieving the same results. But want to learn more.

I don't see exactly what these would accomplish. There's so little feedback given to the City now, adding a hierarchy seems like overkill. But, I'm listening.

What is a neighborhood?

What are we trying to accomplish? What issue are we trying to solve? Citizen access? Communication of City business? Increased opportunities for citizen input and engagement?

What role would we want them to play? Official City business/engagement/neighborhood relations?

Does this increase accessibility for residents – easier, more comfortable, more local point of access? Does this give people more of a voice?

Important to consider set-up, role, “power,” responsibility, follow-through, meeting frequency? Is it the same for all or does each neighborhood define for themselves?

What are we trying to address and once defined, are neighborhood assemblies the right solution? Is there another solution or avenue for people to have _____ (if the blank is better access to local government, better input, easier engagement, less intimidated engagement, less formal opportunities to participate, greater comfort in engaging in dialogue about municipal business)?

Are there other affinity group options to satisfy the goal(s)? What do other communities do?

For non-English speakers – added challenges of language barriers, fear, safety. Building cohesion, engagement, and input opportunities from people at a lower level – access points where people are comfortable talking

Are there non-charter related issues that we would like to address in terms of how meetings are run, information is communicated, how/when the community is engaged?

What is the “right” size of a neighborhood to accomplish goals?

Is this a charter change recommendation of some sort or something else?

COMMITTEE THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

Voting Date: Should we vote on the budget and elect officials on Town Meeting Day? In April as it is now? Regardless, be on the same day as the school vote?

Yes, move to Town Meeting Day.

I prefer to move both the school vote and city vote to Town Meeting Day. There is so much statewide hype and public interest in Town Meeting Day it would be great to take advantage of it.

Yes, move the vote to March Town meeting day, yes to voting on budget, elected officials and school vote on the same day.

We should definitely vote on budget, election officials, and the school budget all on the same day. Voter participation is already low — having separate dates creates greater barriers to participate and less incentive. We should consider moving all this to town meeting day in March to take advantage of statewide publicity of voting on town meeting day.

Yes, move to Town Meeting Day. This was part of my campaign platform, and I heard 0 objections and many supporters.

Value in aligning with broader Vermont voting. Hype/attention/interest about budgets and elections statewide in March.

School district expressed interest in moving to Town Meeting Day by spring 2027.

3. What other thoughts, comments, or questions do you have?

I have an open mind on things and look forward to debating the merits of the various proposals. I just listed my current insights based on my experience interacting with the city as a citizen, moderator, and member of the governing board. My general principals are to keep things as simple as possible, discourage politics and crony networks, and have as many average people involved in the governance, backed by a professional staff.

Excited to discuss, learn more, and meet with various stakeholders and officials from other cities!

Curious about other advisory/committee/etc. role for community members to engage other than Council but in a meaningful way that may address some barriers to being a councilor i.e. long-term lengths.

Engagement and communication

APPENDIX 5: COUNCILOR & TRUSTEE SURVEY RESULTS

Anonymous survey results from 7 current/former City Councilors/Village Trustees that have served on the Council between 2010-present. The survey was sent to 9 individuals. Individual responses alternate between highlighted and unhighlighted.

1. Form of Government: Should we have a Council-Manager form of government as we do now, whereby the chief administrative officer is appointed? Should we have a Strong Mayor system like in Burlington where the chief administrative officer is an elected position? Should we have a Weak Mayor system whereby the elected leader of the council has some powers, but the role is mostly ceremonial, and the chief administrative officer is an appointed position? What is working well now?
Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

We are a small municipality, less than 4 square miles, in my opinion, we do not need a mayor, nor do we need to change how the current council-manager form of government is working, and has worked, even before the town/village split. In a few words, if it's not broke, why try to fix it. I'd flip it around and ask, why isn't it working, and what is the driver to make the change.

Council-Manager has worked very well for us both as a village and as a city. Now that we're a city I think exploring the weak mayor model is worthwhile. A mayor could help with both communications and as an extension of the staff on certain issues, especially considering we are just barely staffed enough and do not have capacity to take anything else on. We are sorely in need of leadership on economic development and a mayor would be a logical and helpful resource on getting that work off the ground and establishing its importance.

Weak mayor is pointless and would function very closely to what the Council President does now. The only differences are breaking a tie for the council and that the resident vote on the person. Don't take the step to dip the toe into the water, either go full mayor or no mayor. Talk with Kristine Lott in Winooski, she'll tell you what it's like.

What works with the council manager form is the manager knows what they are doing. Let's be honest, could any of you really step into the role of the manager and know what you're doing on a day to day basis? There is a reason that Burlington, Newport, and Rutland have a strong administrative team, the mayor does not have the knowledge to run the day to day of the City, they rely on their finance, HR, community development, and other staff to make sure the policies they want to implement can actually happen.

The only positive to moving to a mayor of any kind is the VT Mayors group, but they are not a strong force in this state.

I believe the current system is working well and should remain in place. Our elected council members with input from community members are keenly aware of the needs of our city. They are best suited to make the decision of a manager who will work with them to address the needs of our city now and into the future.

The current form seems to work well. It doesn't loan itself to the type of staff turnover we see often times in a Mayoral system.

I think our current form of government has been effective as we've always had very strong managers. Our new planning personnel is also strong. Although I will continue to say that none of our personnel, while very strong, are extraverts spending time out and about in the community. I would be interesting in exploring a strong mayor form of government. Would this provide us more opportunities in development, in having our voice heard in state government, in having someone out in the public?

What is working well:

Our council-manager government is working very well and is an excellent fit for our community. We are very capably governed and I would hesitate to fix something that's not broken. The EJ Council/Trustees have a good track record of choosing qualified, effective managers, the present manager being a great example. A strong mayor system is absolutely unwarranted. Among other things, it risks putting someone with no grounding in municipal administration, finance, law, operations and planning in charge of our government.

Should we change it:

Creating a 'weak' mayor system would be problematic not only because it sounds awful (who wants to be known as a 'weak' mayor?) but it would also probably mean having the mayor elected separately from the city council, and thus the voters and not the council would decide who chairs the board, which is a terrible idea. We abolished that system years ago.

On the other hand, other than running the city council meetings, the council president's additional roles are not defined in the charter, such as working with the manager to set the agenda, overseeing the follow-through on council actions, and interfacing with media, developers, etc. Thus, it might be a reasonable idea to amend the charter to specifically spell out any additional responsibilities you want the council president to have besides being "... the head of the government for all ceremonial purposes." (What are "ceremonial purposes"? Parades? Funerals?) From my own experience I would suggest that the council president have clearly spelled out authority to: 1) work with the manager to set the agenda for upcoming board meetings; 2) work with the manager to monitor the status of city council actions; 3) work with the manager to respond to media inquiries and decide who, manager or

president, shall be the public face of the city on a case by case basis; 4) work with the manager to meet with developers, other political leaders, businesses, etc., to help promote the city's interests.

2. Council Composition: How many elected officials should we have (currently have 5)? Should the leader of the Council be elected by the Council or the people?

What is working well now?

Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

I would leave the 5 councilors and have the leader elected by the council. The leader is exactly that, the person who the council feels can lead the group to get the job done and unify the team, it is not a political position. If the residents chose the council, there should be criteria in which the people are voting on that position.

Considering the sheer workload of the council, I think having 7 members would be really helpful. It seems easier in recent years to find candidates and having 7 members would more easily allow for ad hoc and standing committees. Local government is way more complex than it used to be and the responsibilities are more intense. Councilors need to know that they will be expected to work.

Classic public administration question with no right answer. Moving to the people means closer democratic anchors and may built trust with the community because they could be voted out easier. Downside is the public doesn't know what they don't know. Does the public really know who the best person is to run the City?

Essex Junction is a small city with a relatively small population. I don't see the need to expand the council beyond 5 members at this time nor into the foreseeable future.

5 is generally fine. The shortcoming of it however is 3 members makes a quorum and that sometimes proves difficult for general discussion. I think leaving the Council to determine who their leader should be is the best option.

I think 5 council members is enough. I am concerned that we still have council members who do not attend meetings in person. This needs to change. I also think we could have community subgroups that don't need a staff member to attend - that may open up the ability for additional residents to be

involved. My understanding is that due to lack of staff some suggested committees haven't been created. Maybe that's old news.

What is working well now:

The five member council is working very well and should not be changed.

Should we change it:

Council Size:

I apologize for giving a lengthy answer, but I think this is an important question:

- There's a flawed view that municipal elected boards are supposed to unfailingly represent the will of the people. Therefore, having more board members means having more robust representation from the community. This is absolutely wrong. Board members are elected and entrusted by the people to study and understand the operations and nuances of local government and armed with this knowledge, make informed decisions on the peoples' behalf. Elected officers need to have the backbone and the chops to sometimes make decisions that their constituents don't like. This is why local boards are called selectboards, councils, and trustees, and not representatives.

- There's no evidence that you'll get better municipal decisions from a seven-member board than a five-member board. It just takes longer to get things done.

- I've heard the argument that having more seats would provide more opportunities for community members to serve. Keep in mind that the role of local government is to serve the community and not to accommodate someone's personal life journey. The board structure that best fits the size of the community in the most effective and efficient way is what you're shooting for.

- We traditionally have very few competitive races for these seats. This year was a good example. We had two people running for one seat. If you had two additional seats, you'd probably have to be reaching out to get people to run. City councilors have a lot more legislative authority than other city boards and commissions, so you want these seats to remain competitive and have high value. People shouldn't be running for the city council on a whim.

- Last, in all the years that I served on the trustees/city council, I never once heard any constituent complain that they felt underrepresented or that their particular neighborhood or section of Essex Junction was unrepresented or being ignored. I've never heard any constituent call for a larger board. Don't fix something that's not broken.

Leader of the Council:

When I was first elected to the trustees, the president of the board was elected by the voters. I was surprised to discover that the "village president" had absolutely no additional legislative authority or responsibilities than anyone else. It only meant that if a sitting board member wanted to chair the

board when the current president stepped down, they had to give up their seat and run for president. It made no sense, and so we abolished it.

Reinstating the old system, which I sincerely hope you do not recommend, could mean that someone with no leadership experience or someone with an ax to grind or a particular issue to settle could be elected to lead and set the agenda for an experienced, dedicated city council. So don't go down that path. The city council is by far the best body to decide who among them has the energy and commitment to lead the board.

3. Councilor Term Lengths: What is the right number of years for a councilor term? Should they all be the same or different lengths?

What is working well now?

Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

3-years is reasonable. There is a lot of work/money that goes into a campaign, even for city council, therefore, if the term is less, I think folks might be wary of spending that time and resources.

Three years seems fine, as does staggering them. Shorter or longer terms seems confusing to me and I don't recommend it.

3 years is good. Long enough to begin to know what is going on but short enough to still have a life if it's not your thing. Don't change this one.

The current process of offset three year terms has worked well. It allows community members enough time to become familiar with the elected council members and make an informed decision on whether to re-elect them. Lengthening terms to five years would stymie the process.

Three years feels like a good term. For someone new to politics, it takes a year to get their feet underneath them. I wouldn't advocate for terms any longer than three years.

The 3 year staggered terms work well - enough time to learn and get things done while not too long.

What is working well now and should we change it:

I think three-year, staggered terms are by far the best system. It provides a stable and consistent level of experience while allowing gradual change and opportunities for new perspectives. Great model, don't change it.

4. Councilor Term Limits: Should there be a maximum number of years or terms that a councilor may serve?

What is working well now?

Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

I don't think it's necessary to set term limits. We have attrition now, and having consistency on the council, isn't a bad thing.

Having term limits like maybe no more than 3 or 4 terms seems like a good idea. I think it would make the public feel good. I would want some kind of language about it that allows for non-consecutive terms to accumulate to no more than the limit.

Again, no right answer. George being around for as long as he was, I believe, was a great thing for the Village and City. There needs to be someone with history to know why things are the way they are. As municipal managers nationally and locally have shorter tenures the burden of "why do we do X that way" will fall on someone. I see a lot of value in no term limits. The public loves them though, except for when the elected official is doing great things. Imagine how much less federal assistance VT would have if Leahy had a term limit.

I don't believe there should be term limits for council members. The current and past city council members have been able to work with residents to bring about a lot of positive changes to our community. Most significantly separation from the Town of Essex. Term limits could result in losing the knowledge and experience of one or two members of the board during a key negotiation process.

We haven't run into this yet. This is a pretty thankless position. I would be surprised if people wanted to make a sustained run at it.

Interesting question. I can see both sides but do believe that institutional knowledge is needed. So if we were going to limit I would say 4 terms.

What is working well now:
Current system is fine.

Should we change it:

I can't think of any reason for term limits. It's not like you've got hordes of people lining up to run for city council. If someone's doing a good job and wants to continue serving, why force them to leave?

5. Election of Officials: Should officials be elected at-large (without regard to residence location within the City), or through districts/wards, an overlay of wards within districts, or a hybrid of some at-large and some through districts/wards?

What is working well now?

Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

Prefer to keep at-large. Again, we are less than 4-square miles, and I don't believe that having districts/wards is necessary.

At large. Adding wards and districts complicates everything and finding candidates in specific wards could be challenging. From an equity standpoint I understand this but from a practicality standpoint I believe it adds a lot of work to the clerk's office that frankly I don't think we're prepared to take on. I'd rather try out neighborhood assemblies for awhile to see how they work first.

EJ doesn't need wards. We are too small geographically. EJ needs neighborhood assemblies. Abdicate some basic planning responsibilities to the neighborhoods with a relatively small amount of money to help build a sense of community. It would also help with the pipeline of councilors, PC, DRB, and others.

Yes, electing members at large should remain in place. Geographically Essex Junction is a very small city, I don't see the need to divide a small city into tiny districts. It's already difficult enough to find people willing to dedicate the time and effort to run for office. Creating districts will further restrict the number of people who are able and willing to run for office.

This is a great question. Different neighborhoods have different needs but at the same time we're not a huge municipality. I'll be interested to see what the outcome of your discussion is on this as I don't wanna advocate one way or the other.

Now that we are our own city of approximately 10,000 people without a ton of space for continued growth, I like the elected at-large. It keeps the city together, rather than separating into smaller communities by artificial barriers.

What is Working Well Now and Should We Change it:

(Again, sorry for the long answer but it's important.)

The current at-large system is absolutely fine. There is no call for changing it. No one in the community has asked for it. No one has claimed that their neighborhood has been underrepresented.

If you haven't served on the city council, please look at the last five or ten city council agendas. How many issues do you see that have a "neighborhood" nuance – where people from one part of EJ might generally feel differently about something than their neighbors in another part of EJ? The answer is zero.

The difference between Essex Junction's neighborhoods is in average property values, not in racial/ethnic composition, or discernable political proclivities. We are a homogenous community with a strong sense of connection to each other. Cleaving this into wards/districts, besides being completely unnecessary, risks causing divisions, petty resentments, and politicizing things in a negative and unnecessary way.

In all the years I served, I never observed a trustee or councilor show bias or preference for their own neighborhood over another.

Burlington is a good example of what can go wrong when you do something like this. A little college town with 45K people has the same size council as Boston and Washington DC. Their eight wards and four districts have created politicized silos that compel council members to take politicized stances on every day, common sense municipal questions. At best, they should have a seven-member board with perhaps four wards. I don't know how they got themselves into this mess, but it's a massively inefficient and ponderous way to do things.

Wards and districts are for large cities with big, diverse populations and development levels. That's not Essex Junction. Maybe someday we'll find ourselves there, but this isn't a good idea for right now.

To repeat, I strongly urge you to look at actual agendas for the city council, keep in mind how difficult it already is to get people to serve in local government, and then ask yourself how chopping EJ up into voting wards and districts could possibly make things better.

6. Councilor Compensation: What is an appropriate amount to pay councilors annually for their service (currently \$2,500/year)?

What is working well now?

Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

I'd like our compensation to be in line with other SB's and CC's. I believe it is at this time.

The chair should get double what the rest of the council gets. It's an enormous amount of work, especially for someone who has a full time job. \$5k for president, \$3500 for vp, \$2500 for the rest.

No right answer. The President should get more though given the number of hours it takes.

The current amount is fine. I don't see the need to raise it any higher.

If you'd ask me this question before I served, I would've said it's more than enough. Most days I feel like it's fair, but there are times when I shake my head. Perhaps there should be additional compensation for president and vice president?

Such a hard question. I think there should be a base pay - \$2500 seems good to me - but with stipends if they pick up additional subcommittee work.

What is working well now:

I think the current compensation level is fine.

Should we change it:

Maybe a gradual increase from time to time, to keep up with inflation.

7. Neighborhood Assemblies: Should there be neighborhood assemblies?

What is working well now?

Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

I've attended these in Burlington, and while it's helpful to have neighborhoods with specific interests gather, I think this can and is done informally, and does not need to be formalized.

This is an experiment worth exploring, especially since it was recommended by the EGG report and is (I believe) the only recommendation that hasn't been implemented yet. I think residents would appreciate the additional opportunity to have their voices heard, and it's a way for the council to connect with different areas of the community in ways we haven't before. It would require staff time but I think it's a good interim step we could take to learn more before committing to wards/districts.

Already answered this. Here it is again. EJ needs neighborhood assemblies. Abdicate some basic planning responsibilities to the neighborhoods with a relatively small amount of money to help build a sense of community. It would also help with the pipeline of councilors, PC, DRB, and others.

I feel the current system is working well. People who are passionate about an issue can reach out to the city council in person or online. I can imagine scenarios where neighborhood assemblies or districts could be viewed as divisive and pit one area of our city against another.

Not sure how this would work if we don't have wards. It would be interesting to test this idea but do feel like we give a lot of public to be heard time in our meetings today. If we had wards, then I could see neighborhood assemblies being critical to community engagement.

What is working well now:

We don't have neighborhood assemblies right now and I don't hear anyone asking for them, so I'd say things are working fine without them, right?

Should we change it:

I'm not strongly opposed to the idea, but I don't know what it brings to the table. Again, I can't stress enough how we struggle to get people to serve, so this seems that you'd be adding a whole new layer of positions for people to fill. Also keep in mind that any city-sanctioned committee or 'assembly' would need administrative support to organize and possibly attend evening meetings, keep minutes, etc. Do we have the staff capacity for that, and would it be worth the commitment of resources?

And what do these assemblies do? I assume they discuss local issues and perhaps come to some resolution or conclusion? Then what? Would the city council be legally bound to follow their advice? Not unless you want to radically alter the structure of city government. And so, these assemblies are going to go through a lot of meeting time and discussion to achieve what? I appreciate the idealism of wanting to engage the community and garner their input, but I suspect you'll get very low participation and a lot of frustration.

8. Voting Date: Should we vote on the budget and elect officials on Town Meeting Day? In April as it is now? Regardless, be on the same day as the school vote? What is working well now? Could a change to this aspect of our local government improve things and if so what change would you recommend?

I'm all in favor of switching to Town Meeting day in March as long as we can get the school board to do so as well, as I do not believe it's helpful to have multiple election days - it's confusing for folks, and costs more money.

We need to move it to Town Meeting Day in March. It makes sense to do that along with the school district. I am really hopeful we will accomplish this so that in 2027 we'll all vote on TMD in March.

Only move if the school district moves too. Keep the alignment to reduce voting. In my utopia, it would move to November to align with national elections to increase turnout.

I would like to see the elections held on Town Meeting Day.

The school board has indicated that they're ready to move their elections in 2027 for FY 28. We should follow this move as we currently vote in April so that our citizenry isn't going to the polls twice and it saves dollars as well

I think we should move to Town Meeting day.

What is working well now:

Seems to be working okay now. I appreciated not having to vote twice – once in March and then again in April. I also really liked the city's public-input budget meeting at CVE. It was well organized and fun. I strongly urge you to mention that in your final report.

Should we change it:

Our annual meeting/town meeting used to be a big deal, when we met as a community, debated the budget and then voted on it. But that went by the boards when we moved to Australian balloting.

With that said, I guess it would be nice to have city elections on the same day as other VT cities and towns, but right now it's much more practical to have them on the same day as the EWSD vote. If we moved city elections back to March, that would mean the city clerk must coordinate and manage two different elections very close together. This includes mailing out two tranches of ballots, which

costs many thousands of dollars and could be much more expensive if we have another pandemic-like event in which all ballots must be mailed. Right now, she can wrap all this work – which is quite substantial – into one consolidated effort, which is a good thing. Moving it back to March without changing the EWSD April vote would also mean a lot of additional work for volunteers at the polls.

Therefore, I suggest we keep ourselves aligned with the EWSD vote. I know they used to have a statutory reason for holding it in April, but I'm not sure they still do, so you might want to check with them and make a recommendation that applies to both the city and the EWSD.

9. What other thoughts, comments, or questions do you have?⁴ responses

Thank you for the committee's work on this.

Good luck! I'm excited to see what comes out of this. I think it's an important look at the way we function.

Thanks for this work!

In summary, I urge you to resist the understandable temptation to recommend some innovative change in our government. As I suggested, if you're not familiar with city government, look at some city council agendas to see what kinds of things they actually deal with. How would imposing some new system – more council members, neighborhood assemblies, weak mayors, wards/districts – actually help them make better decisions? Look around Chittenden County, how many other towns our size have voting districts and neighborhood assemblies and mayors? Most towns have council-manager governments with five member boards because that's the most effective way of doing things for communities our size. Sometimes the most difficult but best course of action is to do nothing.

Governance Interview Questions for VT Communities

Form of Government:

Your community has a [council-manager/weak mayor/strong mayor] form of government. How does this model serve your community well? What are the gaps, challenges, or barriers you experience with this model?

Number of Elected Officials & Leader of the Elected Board:

Your community has [XX] members on the [selectboard/City Council/Board of Aldermen]. Does this number of elected officials serve your community well, why or why not?

In your community, the leader of the elected board is selected by the [Board/Council/electorate]. Has this system served your community well or not? Please explain.

Elected Officials Term Lengths:

In your community, elected officials' term lengths are: [explain system as you understand it]. Does this number and/or system of term lengths serve your community well or not? Please explain.

Elected Official Term Limits:

Does your community have term limits for elected officials? If so, what are they? Has this system served your community well or not? Please explain?

Elected Officials Compensation:

Can you please tell us how much elected officials in your community are paid each year and if they all receive the same compensation. Also, can you explain the process for increasing elected officials' pay?

Election of Officials:

In your community, officials are elected [at-large/through districts or wards/through an overlay of wards within districts/through a hybrid model of some at-large and some through districts or wards]. Has this structure served your community well or not? Please explain.

Neighborhood Assemblies or other neighborhood-oriented concepts:

Does your community have a charter-mandated Neighborhood Assembly or another neighborhood-oriented concept for community organization, input, or engagement?

Additional Questions:

- What are the three most effective ways that your local government engages with the residents and why do you think these are effective? Are there strategies that you have tried that have not been effective?
- Has your community done any recent community surveying or polling related to governance structure that you would be willing to share – the survey instrument and/or the public results?
- Do you have a way that you gauge resident satisfaction of government services and/or governance and if so, is this done with regularity?
- Bringing you back to your government, can you think of an example of a success in your community that was the direct result of the design of your community's government?
- Are there any other resources – people, communities, organizations, readings, etc. that you would suggest we seek out that would be helpful in our analysis?
- Is there anything that we didn't ask about or discuss that you would like to share?

APPENDIX 7: OTHER VERMONT COMMUNITIES

Comparing Vermont Communities

#	Community	Form of Government	Election System	Number of Elected Officials	Leader of Elected Body Selected by	Term Length	Elected Officials Term Limits	Elected Official Compensation	Population	Square Miles
1	Winooski	Weak Mayor	At-Large	5 (mayor+4)	Residents	Mayor (3yr), Councilors (2yr)	None	\$1,700/\$1,500	7,997	1.5
2	St. Albans City	Weak Mayor	Wards (6)	7 (mayor+6)	Residents	Mayor (2yr), Councilors (3yr)	None	No pay	6,887	2
3	Barre City	Weak Mayor	Wards (3)	7 (mayor+6)	Residents	2yr	None	\$2,000/\$1,000	8,491	4
4	City of Essex Junction	Council-Manager	At-Large	5	Board	3yr	None	\$2,500	10,590	4.7
5	Montpelier	Weak Mayor	Districts	7 (mayor+6)	Residents	2yr	None	\$4,080/\$2,040	8,074	10.3
6	Rutland City	Strong Mayor	At-Large	11	Residents	2yr	None	\$2,600	15,807	7.7
7	Barre Town	Council-Manager	At-Large	5	Board	3 (3yr), 2 (2yr)	None	\$2,000	7,923	30.7
8	Williston	Council-Manager	At-Large	5	Board	3 (3yr), 2 (2yr)	None	\$1,500/\$1,200	10,103	30.6
9	Burlington	Strong Mayor	Districts & Wards	12	Residents	2yr	None	\$5,000	44,743	15.5
10	Brattleboro	Council-Manager	At-Large	5	Board	3 (3yr), 2 (1yr)	None	\$10,000/\$8,000	12,184	32.4

OTHER VERMONT COMMUNITY INTERVIEW REPORTS

Community:	Burlington
Interviewee Position:	Head of Elected Body (Mayor)
Interviewee Name:	Emma Mulvaney-Stanak

Form of Government

- Strong Mayor with City council. Strong mayor has only been in place for about 20 years.
- Overall the structure works well, a strong mayor is needed to be able to run everything day to day in the City. So many things arise day-to-day that a part time elected official could not keep up with. Better community service and engagement
- Great from an accessibility, equity and inclusion angle as well. Allows anyone to be able to reach for the job.
- There are 18 depts under the mayor that they are in the process of reducing.

Number of Elected Officials

- 1 Mayor, 12 City Councillors - 8 Wards and 4 Districts
- Used to be 14 when the Mayor was on City Council
- Thinks that it could actually be less as it's hard sometimes to get everyone in any consensus, but believes that may stem more from the positions being partisan than anything else. Though feels like that people hid behind the partisan labels as an excuse for the dysfunction.

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- Elected by the board. The Mayor is there but does not lead the meeting, the City Council President does,
- There are some exceptions where the Mayor presides, such as appointments
- Council has struggled under the last few of City Council Presidents

Term Length Number/System

- Mayor is 3 years and City Council is 2 so that there is some continuity
- Thinks that the Council should be 3 as the first year you are still trying to figure things out and the second year, you're running again for office.
- Also worries though about losing the accessibility that 2 years provides

Term Limits

- Emphatic yes to term limits. In the past, things have gotten stagnant on the Council.
- None currently and doesn't have a specific number that comes to mind, but folks spending multiple decades in the same office isn't the best for a community.

Elected Officials Compensation

- \$5000 for Council Members
- Mayor makes appx \$125K
- Believes that stipends need to be increased for all the council/committee work and community engagement that folks do.
- Would like to see these eventually become full time paid positions, but knows with the current financial environment, that is not a possibility right now.

Election of Officials Method

- Wards and Districts, Mayor is at-large
- Some of the wards could be combined like the Districts are to give the Councilors a more wide ranging view of the community

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- Loves the idea of the Neighborhood Assemblies, but feels they are underfunded and under supported
- Some neighborhoods pair up for meetings, but have also had falling outs.
- Some issues with the same folks always at meetings and not drawing new or diverse swaths of the neighborhoods
- Can be a drain on resources. Staff time is needed to help run all the meetings
- Still would recommend exploring the idea

Anything Else

- The effectiveness of any government is dependent not just on the systems and structures, but the people. Failures in either can lead to widespread dysfunction.
- Lack of training and ongoing supports can undermine a Council/Selectboard.
- Strong relationship between the Mayor and Council President is key
- If you ever do go the route of Strong Mayor, you have to set the person up for success with a full staff, which could be difficult for the community to accept due to cost.
- For any engagement, be accommodating and inclusive, hybrid, child care and meals for in person.

- went to a mayor's conference and was surprised that there are cities much bigger than Burlington that use a weak mayor system

Community: Barre Town
Interviewee Position: Chief Administrative Officer
Interviewee Name: Chris Violette

Form of Government

- 5-member select board with a manager, been this way a long time
- Was one of the last councils to meet weekly — recently made the change to biweekly (better to meet biweekly)
- Structure works well, wouldn't change anything

Number of Elected Officials

- 5 currently, would not decrease to 3. 5 suits us well.
- Doesn't see a big need to move to 7 — would need to have a good reason.

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- Selected by board

Term Length Number/System

- 3 have 3-year terms, 2 have 2-year terms. Has worked well. There's always someone on the ballot every year.
- Have to run for a specific seat with a designated length

Term Limits

- No term limits
- Have had more tenured members on select board and has helped from an institutional knowledge standpoint (at least 3 members have been there 5+ years)
- Wouldn't want someone to be there for 30+ years but not sure what the cut point should be.
- Term limits not currently needed.

Elected Officials Compensation

- \$2,000 per year, same for all (including chair), paid twice a year
- Amount hasn't changed in a long time — outlined in our Charter, and the specific amount is determined annually. This decision is made through an article during the

annual voting by Australian Ballot in May. If the Selectboard wishes to request an increase in their pay, they must officially announce it and include it on the ballot. Additionally, if enough citizens support a raise, they could initiate a petition to bring it forward.

- Chair should get more given more work that occurs
- Amount could go up but still wants this viewed as a volunteer position, not sure what right amount would be, or exact process for changing it (am following up)
- Want to make sure people run for the right reasons

Election of Officials Method

- At large structure — has worked well
- Could see a benefit to shift to wards because Barre Town is made up of several unincorporated villages (each has its own post office) and board representation can be lopsided. There's a difference in affluence between areas.

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- Don't have these — think they would take up a lot of staff time. Town is laid back - not asking for this — and they use other engagement strategies (newsletter, front porch forum, social media)

Community:	St. Albans City
Interviewee Position:	Chief Administrative Officer
Interviewee Name:	Dominic Cloud

Form of Government

- 7 member city council with a weak mayor
- Main measuring stick for him is the ability as a community to remain consistent and not be subject to whims of 1 or 2 members of the council
- 7 members allows for them to manage through elections without massive swerves
- Mayor's job is to build consensus on the council; they never come out on a major initiative other than a 7-0 vote
- Political leadership is building consensus

Number of Elected Officials

- 7 members serves them well, as mentioned above
- Question shouldn't be to increase because of work - focus should be on how often you're meeting and what work you're asking the Council to do

- St. Albans meets once a month for two hours

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- Mayor presides over the Council but also as Council president
- Standing committees established by the Council: Public Safety and Finance & Administration
- Standing meetings are ad hoc, but most work happens here keeping the Council meetings shorter

Term Length Number/System

- Staggered; Council is 3 years; Mayor is 2
- Tend to have longer tenures - ensures stability & shorter meetings

Term Limits

- No term limits & wouldn't recommend
- Charter should be enabling and not constraining - charters are there to speak to circumstances unique beyond state law otherwise it will be inadvertently constraining you

Elected Officials Compensation

- No compensation, per the Charter
- Have thought about changing and acknowledges there's potentially an equity issue but has not been an issue for St Albans in terms of getting people to run

Election of Officials Method

- St Albans is divided along Main Street from old railroad days where executives lived vs workers
- Without wards it would have just been run by the hill section
- Charter follows Burlington pretty closely
- He feels wards are unnecessary for Essex Jct

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- St. Albans doesn't have these and something like it has come up overtime - but would not recommend it being added to a charter. You'd want to be able to turn the switch on or off depending on what's happening
- You need to have a really large city and population to do something like this and have them matter/be meaningful

- St. Albans is two square miles - not really large enough to require this

Anything Else

- Charters and Governance is mostly about process - our citizens are mostly concerned about outcomes
- Does the charter help us get greater outcomes or be more efficient
- Question should be how do we produce more not how do we engage more
- Vermont's problems are about outcomes & not about process/engagement
- The Merger/Separation discussion in EJ is a great example of an on again/off again political fluctuation driven by a few people - you need to put a team of people together and hold them together not keep swerving

Community:	Rutland
Interviewee Position:	Head of Elected Body
Interviewee Name:	Mayor Mike Doenges Rutland

Form of Government

- Strong Mayor (weird strong mayor). Might not recommend it!
- Gaps: losing institutional knowledge
- Elected treasurer / clerk. Appointed others
- Mayor is 4 roles: manage 150 staff / marketing & comms for Rutland / political baby kissing / development
- Would like to have a city manager

Number of Elected Officials

- 11 aldermen. Used to be ward based, now at-large; Thinks 7 would be a better number. 11 makes sense if the city had a much bigger population.
- All elections including mayor are non-partisan.
- 6 one year / 5 next. 2 year terms
- 2 years not really enough time to get work done. "18-month time frame." Large # of members—harder to get people to show up; diversity important. 11 is difficult.
- Voters have a nativist approach, though there are some non-Vermonters; last election a lot of repeat members were elected again. Very loud vocal minority.

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- Board of aldermen president is selected by board. Thinks it's a good system. Able to align mayor's vision with the president's and board's vision. Don't agree on everything. Beneficial for the board to have a representative to the mayor. Current president is the most recent mayor.
- Mike thought the voters picking the President is a bad idea because then it is about popularity and the board needs to work with the President so will have the best interest to pick the best President.

Term Length Number/System

- 2 year terms. 5 seats one year, 6 seats another year. 3 years is reasonable. Aligning appointment term lengths with elected term lengths would be good.

Term Limits

- No term limits. Personally thinks an 8-10 year term limit would be good. Long term members have an expectation that it's "their" board. Can become apathetic. Stuck in old ways. A term limit can spur more motivation to get things done.

Elected Officials Compensation

- Aldermen make \$2600/year. Mayor salary has fallen behind in terms of COL increases. Mayor now makes \$106k. Was \$89k when he came in. CEO of ~150 staff. A city manager makes ~\$140k. Some run for mayor to get the salary. If the mayor's salary were more in line with board salaries, different people would run. It's a FT position. In the budget as part of the executive department, approved by voters. Part of the pay grade table. 4 different unions (PW, rec, police, fire). Doing a salary audit soon; also uses VLCT salary survey.
- Despite mayor salary increase, he believes it is "too low" and should be more like \$130K. He mentioned some people running for office and others running for salary.

Election of Officials Method

- Used to have wards but they don't anymore. Mayor is considering merging city & town. Wards are good if you have geographic size. Wards could add value to properly representing a region however.
- Mentioned that Rutland as it currently exists is too similar across the city to justify wards. If there was a merger with another community, the extra diversity from a large community might mean wards could make sense.

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- Nothing in particular. Some people have started up things on their own. Police divide the city into sectors. Different purpose though. Closest thing is sector meetings for police and not a lot of people show up. [to define not a lot, he mentioned a handful of people show up]
- "Sometimes it's a discussion. Recently held a series of public safety events and hundreds attended. Town hall style meetings are important, making them smaller and in different places would probably not have worked. He said he thought it best that everyone received/participated in the same message at the same time.

Government Engagement

- Social media and national media have broken down communication on the local level. Too many methods (10-12) of delivery needed to actually reach people. Uses social most bc that's where most people seem to be. Sends press releases (Herald, 7D, VTDigger). TV stations are helpful. #1 effective but also most expensive is direct mail. \$4k each time, EDDM.
- No one showed up to a public meeting with the topic of comms.

Gauging Resident Satisfaction

- He uses some social media tools for this—sentiment, polls, etc. Calculated the most frequent posters/sharers/watchers. Lot of popcorn eaters out there.
- Downtown partnership and RPC and EDC also do a lot of this and they share results.

Example of Success

- Their new TIF committee. Can't have more than 2 aldermen be on the committee.

Anything Else

- Professionals, professionals, professionals. Decision makers guiding the day to day operations of the city should be professionals. That's why a city manager is so important. Don't want to clean up mistakes made by volunteers.

Community:	Williston
Interviewee Position:	Chief Administrative Officer
Interviewee Name:	Erik Wells

Form of Government

- works well

- clarity on roles
- no changes

Number of Elected Officials

- 5
- 3 is too small; hasn't thought about 7

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- by board
- works well
- long serving chairs

Term Length Number/System

- mix of 2 and 3 years terms
- good that <50% up for election each year (maintain institutional knowledge)
- exactly 2 of 5 up for election each year, but separate elections and not just top two vote getters.
- no contested race in 3-4 years

Term Limits

- none
- could help, but could hurt

Elected Officials Compensation

- \$1200 and inflation adjusted
- in budget
- no concerns raised from community

Election of Officials Method

- at large
- as Taft corners builds out, it could make sense to explore geographic representation since that area is so different than rest of Town

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- for large initiatives like new town plan, they hold meetings in different locations in order to get more engagement

Government Engagement

- always working to improve
- the more personal the better
- surveys
- being present at town events

Example of Success

- focus has been on land use.

Other Resources

- VLCT, ICMA, UVM MPA, Ctr for Rural Studies; Chris Koliba book on governance
- Government is working well for Williston

Anything Else

- Williston's government is working really for Williston

Community:	Williston
Interviewee Position:	Head of Elected Body
Interviewee Name:	Ted Kenney

Form of Government

- works well
- mgr does not get into politics
- no changes
- chair sets agenda

Number of Elected Officials

- 5 - is the right number
- no sub committees; sometimes an ad hoc committee

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- by board
- separate election by voters would create factions; board has to work with the chair and knows capabilities when selecting

Term Length Number/System

- mix of 2 and 3 year terms
- works really well
- always 40% of board up for election

Term Limits

- none
- has never been discussed

Elected Officials Compensation

- \$1200 (\$1500 chair)
- no drive to increase; reduced recently

Election of Officials Method

- at large
- no issues at this time

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- none
- They reach out for info in general
- If an issue affects a neighborhood, the mgr reaches out to that neighborhood

Government Engagement

- nothing special
- mgr channel 17 show sometimes
- Selectboard moves meetings around sometimes, but that doesn't always bring new people in to the meeting

Anything Else

- watch out for skewed version of what majority wants, in the cases of arbitrary trying to stack feedback by geography, income, etc.
- at end of day, Selectboard is responsible for a lot and each person can't know it all
- Williston's government is working really for Williston

Community:	Barre City
Interviewee Position:	Chief Administrative Officer
Interviewee Name:	Nick Storellicastro

Form of Government

- 7 member council; incl mayor + 2 councilors elected from each ward; terms are staggered so every year there's a ward councilor seat up; mayor's term is 2 years; clerk is also elected
- Mayor is the chair of the council; they vote on ties; preside over meetings; "outdated" provisions in charter that grant mayor some "strange" powers like ability to command police force in an emergency; council appoints manager, hired by contract;
- Weak mayor; hiring of staff and budgeting are the manager's responsibility; thinks this is a good model for Barre; apolitical—allows him to make independent, objective recommendations that the council then decides whether to take up
- Enjoys the network of other City / Town managers throughout Vermont: something we've heard before. Only issues have been relationships and not structural nature of the council; there's a residency requirement in the charter for the manager and he would change that; feels balance of power between manager and council is equalized.
- Nick ok with the 2-year terms and does not feel like Barre is losing institutional knowledge with terms shorter than some. Especially because every ward has an election every year; feels that that active election every year encourages participation with residents

Number of Elected Officials

- 6 members on the City Council & a mayor elected at large
- Feels it's the right number of voices in the room. The bigger it becomes the more unwieldy it can become.
- Some wards are won by/with only 120 votes. Making the wards any smaller might be problematic

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- Gives the mayor a bully pulpit (in a good way); value in someone who is the face of the city who can advocate and has the backing of the public as a whole, instead of being from one ward.
- Elected clerk was on the ballot to make it appointed but this was soundly defeated.

Term Length Number/System

- 2-year terms not too short; feels just about right; can do a lot in 2 years; meets every other week; enough time to learn what councilors' concerns and ideologies are; 3

years might be fine but he prefers that every ward has an election every year. 2 years is a good length if someone turns out not to be a good councilor

Term Limits

- "They don't have term limits; has experienced this in other jobs and thinks Barre is so small that term limits could be a problem; a lot of returning councilors (served previously and came back on the council); term limits would prevent that and in a small town that could be a problem; concerned about losing good people with a lot of institutional knowledge; implications for leadership—makes them less effective
- Nick has mixed opinions here. Watched term limits implemented in CO and lost a lot of good people. Later saw people serving for 40 years in the NY Assembly having stale ideas.

Elected Officials Compensation

- \$2000 for mayor and \$1000 for councilors; in the charter to pay them but not an amount; budget line item; Has been those amounts for the last few years; hasn't heard a lot of feedback on it; people have asked to compensate committee members and he's opposed to that; a councilor asked for an intern for a project and council rejected this; mayor and other councilors donate their stipends for a holiday party; staff do the research and legwork; work of the manager and staff depends on whether there's a majority on council who want to see it done
- Creates agenda in coordination with mayor; councilors can request items to go on agenda; also works on topics councilors want to work on; ratio is about 75% manager/city business 25% councilor ideas; having a good relationship between the manager and council is more important than even a clearly worded charter.
- Barre does not compensate committee members
- Interesting discussion about a councilor who wanted "leg staff." Nick did not think that that was a good idea. Prefers to have City staff do the policy analysis. Also: the example he cited was a minority idea. One councilor wanted to research a policy where the rest of the policy didn't agree. Nick thought it therefore inappropriate to use city \$\$ for a minority proposal

Election of Officials Method

- It's been 3 wards for a very long time; geographic and condensed around specific neighborhoods; each ward is very compact and walkable; interests and ideologies tend to align within each ward; elections are very competitive; officially nonpartisan but definitely party based; ward 3 has lowest turnout, which tracks with

demographics; each ward is distinct from the other when you look at the city as a whole; wouldn't change it; having a ward election every year gets people to the polls to weigh in on other important things like the budget

- Ward lines are reexamined every 10 years with the census; clerk's office does this; elected clerk is in charge of redistricting; Barre population is stable and so wards wouldn't dramatically change

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- No; people haven't called for it; will do public outreach based on wards; post-flood outreach an example; people don't necessarily associate with their ward; good unit of outreach and could be conducive to engagement in that way; subcommittees had existed in the past but have been repealed;
- As needed ward meetings but not often; some councilors will do them for feedback or a grant app for example
- are able to hold these ward meetings in each ward. Trade off is walkable vs parking

Government Engagement

- Has a new Barre alert app that's been very successful so far (Regroup); Facebook because that's how a lot of people get their news (not that it's very effective); city website is "poor" and they don't really invest in it and people don't use it; now does a full page ad in the Times Argus that serves as a newsletter of sorts; use FPF for agendas but not for anything timely—too much of a time lag (which means probably that Barre residents may not use FPF that much)
- #1 was Regroup which has 900 residents signed up, #2 was FB, and #3 was website (in that order of effectiveness)

Surveying/Polling

- Last year they did a web-based budget survey ahead of the budget process; Qs on services, how happy people were with them, received about 200 responses; used Regroup to notify people about the survey

Example of Success

- Just bought a PW garage in Barre Town that was owned by the current mayor; manager was able to engage with mayor as a private citizen and came to the council to get approval; mayor was able to recuse himself and manager's objective opinion on suitability of the building helped the council make the decision

Community:	Winooski
Interviewee Position:	Chief Administrative Officer
Interviewee Name:	Elaine Wang

Form of Government

- City Council/Weak Mayor
- Wouldn't change the form of government
- it is helpful to have a Mayor that is the clear focal point to open up contact with staff and government. A recognizable title is helpful in statewide networks. Benefits us.
- he Strong Mayor form of government in Vermont is not a good idea. If you don't know how to manage government, why would you have a strong mayor? You need a professional manager, and because we have one, it is a reason why we are doing well. Kristine - having a professional city manager is essential. Separation of policy and operations is a good thing.

Number of Elected Officials

- 5, including the mayor

Term Length Number/System

- 2 years

Term Limits

- With our dynamic and younger community (I didn't note the rest of her comment)

Election of Officials Method

- City Councilors are elected at large. What comes to mind - ICMA recommendation that if you don't have wards now, don't

Government Engagement

- Finding connectors, folks who are already well connected. For ex. I kept visiting the local mosque, took several visits, finally worked. Elaine spent time reaching out to business owners. Make the effort to find, build relationships with connectors.

Surveying/Polling

- Focus groups for spending ARPA money
- Reached out to unheard voices, focus groups on policy chief, also surveys

- Go to events, QR codes, go to where people are

Community: Winooski
Interviewee Position: Head of Elected Body
Interviewee Name: Kristine Lott, Mayor

Form of Government

- same, wouldn't change
- the title of Mayor has a certain weight to it, with pluses and minuses. Mayors get more airtime with legislators and be stronger advocates. For residents, assume that the Mayor is a strong mayor and can do more than they can. I am the point of connection and ensure an effective flow of information between the Council and staff. The Mayor is the voice of the Council.

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- The Mayor is elected by the voters, and this is the right course for Winooski
- Being the Mayor is a big responsibility. I set the agenda with staff, I facilitate the meeting, etc. Five has worked well. Getting bigger would be hard to fill seats, hard to manage the body, communicate with all members, etc. Use Committees to build interest in serving on the council.

Term Length Number/System

- 2 year term for councilors and 3 years for Mayor (just changed the Mayor's term to 3 from 2). This is a good idea, I think.

Term Limits

- there are no limits, and no one has overstayed their "welcome" Sometimes on the commissions we see lengthy terms. It has been discussed but no limits.

Elected Officials Compensation

- Set by voters, as long as you see it as a stipend for actual costs, not time served, it feels fair. For Mayor, I spend 8 - 15 hours a week.

Election of Officials Method

- Perception that it is hard to do and get people running. Thinks it might be harder with wards. We are so small, not as critical. However, we do have concentrations of race.

Example of Success

- The Finance Director created an engagement activity with residents to use Monopoly money to crowd source input into budgeting.
- The challenge is to spend the time. Staff maintains a spreadsheet to track engagement, contacts - this allows us to pay attention to groupings, identities. Explicit about engaging diverse populations.

Community:	Brattleboro
Interviewee Position:	Chief Administrative Officer
Interviewee Name:	John Potter, Town Manager

Form of Government

- Charter committee reviewing updating model to remove Representative Town Meeting.
- Charter is reviewed every 15 years as required by Charter.
- Community is challenged with high rate of social issues, addiction and the maladies that go along with it.
- Three newspapers helps with community engagement and outreach, town manager podcast that summarizes mtgs, town monthly newsletter, etc.
- More SB members would equal more staff required to support.

Number of Elected Officials

- 5

Term Length Number/System

- More younger Selectboard members running this past year, two new younger members as result.

Term Limits

- Term limits on Committee, not Selectboard

Elected Officials Compensation

- \$10,000 Selectboard Chair and \$8,000 Members per year.

- Previously worked in CO and sees stipend as still too low inspite of being highest in VT.

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- Not in favor of RTM model.
- issues with open meeting rules and compliance with remote mtg access.

Government Engagement

- described community as highly engaged.

Community:	Brattleboro
Interviewee Position:	Head of Elected Body
Interviewee Name:	Liz McLoughlin, Selectboard Chair

Form of Government

- Selectboard Chair compensation \$10k, Members \$8k per Charter, did not increase participation, and just got new, younger members.
- Term limits on Committee volunteers (9yrs, can come back in a year) but not Selectboard members-never had anyone hit the limit.
- Amazing civic culture in community.
- Brattleboro is a tri-state community and there are special issues that negatively impact their community e.g. homelessness and shelter policy.
- They had a mayor and it didn't workout for them, Selectboard replaced the Mayor.

Number of Elected Officials

- 5

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- Member elected.

Term Length Number/System

- Two 1-yr terms and three 3-yr terms, one year to get feet wet and then return for longer terms.

Term Limits

- Term limits on Committee, not Selectboard
- Volunteer vs. Elected determines term limits.

Elected Officials Compensation

- Acknowledged number of hours and need to support expenses, used example of budget not passing and number of additional hours required to rebudget and revote.
- Higher stipend did not change motivation of volunteers, money did not change motivation of service.
- Compensation in Charter and

Election of Officials Method

- vote at first meeting.

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- Representative Town Mtg similar idea, area districts have elected Town Mtg Representatives and these are the people who vote on the budget approval.
- Representative Town Meeting does not equate to one voice one vote.
- Representative Town Meeting is not working, politicized and not representing citizens

Government Engagement

- Social issues keep people engaged these days, community split on approach.

Community:	Montpelier
Interviewee Position:	Chief Administrative Officer
Interviewee Name:	

Form of Government

- agreed with mayor
- job is combo of policy-making and management

Number of Elected Officials

- 2 councilors in each voter district - 6 councilors total
- mayor and city manager meet weekly

Elected Officials Compensation

- last increase was 2017
- \$2040 for city council; \$4080 mayor

Neighborhood Assemblies or Concepts

- more council members have had district meetings to hear from constituents
- city councilors urged to engage where citizens are, at farmer's markets, kiosks, community forums
- no formalized community involvement or engagement

Community: Montpelier
Interviewee Position: Head of Elected Body, Mayor
Interviewee Name:

Form of Government

- city manager has extensive knowledge of city management
- ideal; enables active city council
- full-time administrator deals with complexities and carries out policy
- strong mayor is a huge job and difficult to find with turnover and salary

Number of Elected Officials

- city councilor has a number of bosses but mayor gives main point of contact

Leader of Elected Board Selection

- mayor is popularly elected

Term Length Number/System

- 2 year terms for city council and mayor; mayoral term could be longer
- mayoral elections in odd number years, city council in even so people can run for mayor without relinquishing council seat

Term Limits

- no term limits, have never been considered

Elected Officials Compensation

- city councilors are not paid enough
- pay for city elected officials is a line item in city budget so voters vote on it as part of voting for the budget annually

Election of Officials Method

- districts are small; make sense for size and population and neighborhood make up
- redistricting happens periodically but only minor changes are made
- 3 districts
- questions for districting: how much to spend on elections, ensure it's not too big

Surveying/Polling

- city councilors tend to hear from the same people; not representative polling
- best community forums when they are about specific issues

Miscellaneous (things you want to add)

- Montpelier's first woman mayor was in 1986; ever since then, it's alternated male and female

City of Essex Junction Governance Committee

Potential Governance Related Action Items



Governance Topic	Status Quo and No Proposed Change		Ruled Out
City Manager	<div>*Elected City Council hires manager who runs government</div> <div>*Apolitical, professional administrator</div> <div>*Manager selected for expertise and experience</div> <div>*Elected officials have less control over municipal operations</div> <div>*Opportunity for consistent/stable management; not having to change with election cycles</div> <div>NO CHANGE</div>		<div>*Mayor elected by residents serves as manager who runs government</div> <div>*Political administrator</div> <div>*Manager (Mayor) may not be qualified or lack expertise; holds position due to popularity</div> <div>*Power concentrated in one elected position</div> <div>*Manager (Mayor) may change frequently with elections</div> <div>RULED OUT</div>
Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option	
Leader of City Council	<div>President Elected by Councilors</div> <div>*City Councilors elect leader of Council (titled "President"); no direct public input</div> <div>*Greater flexibility to change leadership with annual election of President by Council; possible more frequent leadership turnover vs. just on election cycles</div> <div>*President has support from majority of Council; internal accountability</div> <div>*Needs to be responsive to Council dynamics in order to retain leadership role</div> <div>CURRENTLY</div>	<div>Mayor Elected by Residents</div> <div>*Residents elect leader of Council (titled "Mayor"); direct public input</div> <div>*Potential for leadership change only on election cycles; less flexibility, possibly greater leadership stability</div> <div>*Councilors do not select leader of Council</div> <div>*Mayor is visible/known representative of City for local, regional, and state affairs</div> <div>*Typically a Mayor is a more political leader of the Council; running on agendas; seeking votes from entire community to embrace as leader; serves as a symbolic leader of the City</div> <div>POSSIBILITY</div>	
Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option	Ruled Out
Number of City Councilors	<div>5 Members</div> <div>*Fewer people needed to run/elect</div> <div>*Fewer voices around table</div> <div>*Fewer people to spread work of Council</div> <div>*Lower number needed for consensus and votes to take action; more efficient</div> <div>*Fewer stipends and less admin resources to support Council</div> <div>CURRENTLY</div>	<div>7 Members</div> <div>*More people needed to run/elect</div> <div>*More voices around table</div> <div>*More people to spread work of Council</div> <div>*Higher number needed for consensus and votes to take action; less efficient</div> <div>*More stipends and more admin resources to support Council</div> <div>*Opportunity to form sub-committees of 3 Councilors to get work done; potential for less transparency</div> <div>POSSIBILITY</div>	<div>3 or 9 Members</div> <div>3 - Too few to represent a community of 11,000</div> <div>9 - Nearly doubles current Council size; much larger group to run effectively/efficiently</div> <div>RULED OUT</div>

City of Essex Junction Governance Committee

Potential Governance Related Action Items



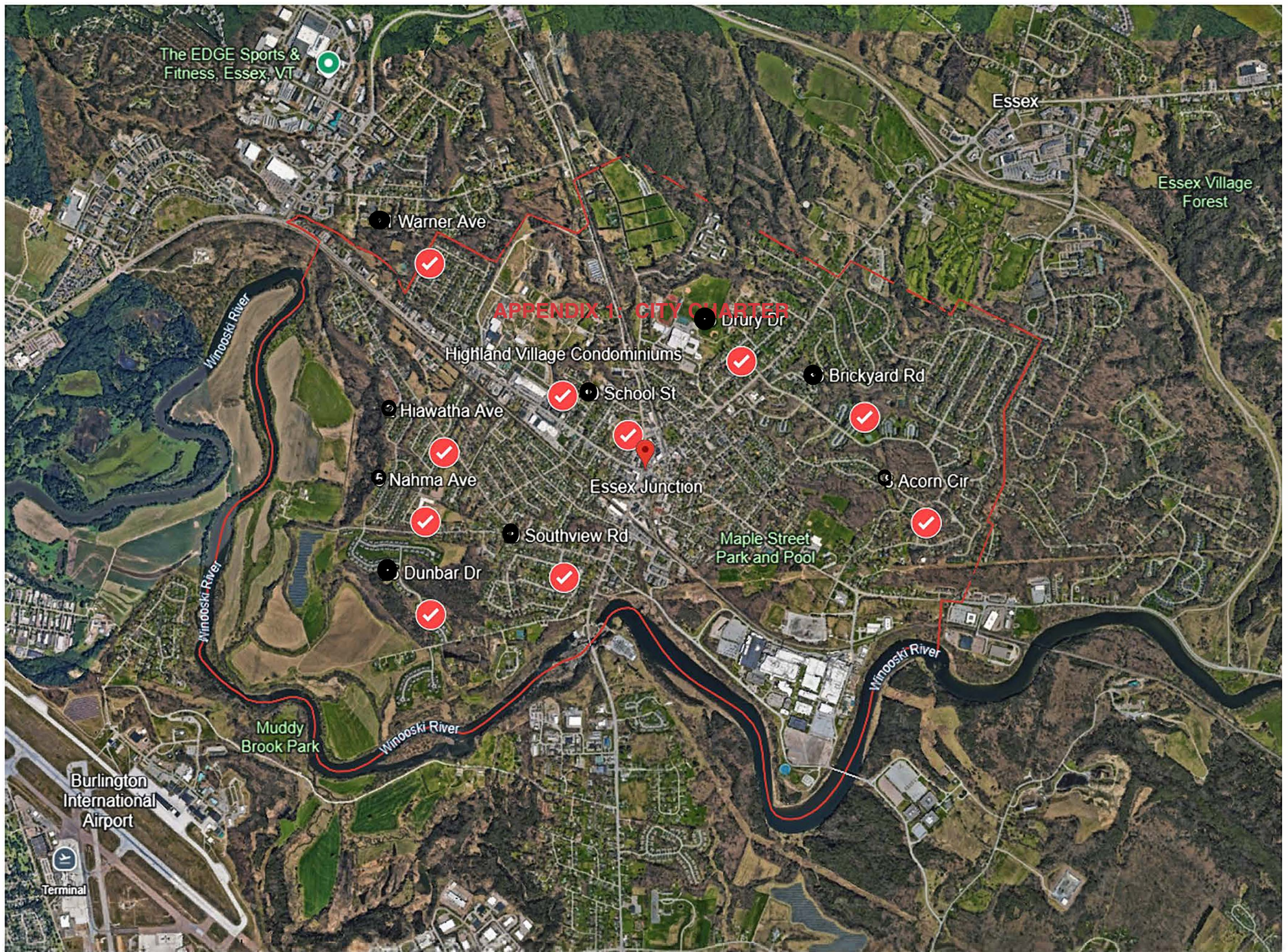
Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option	Ruled Out
Term Length for City Councilors	3-Years for All *More time to adjust to learning curve of Councilor role *More opportunities/experiences to hone decision-making skills *Greater Council consistency with terms longer and staggered *Focus on longer term gains with more time between elections *Less frequent accountability and slower to respond to shifts in public opinion *Simple with all same term length CURRENTLY	Some 3-Years, Some 2-Years *Keep advantages of 3-year terms while offering a shorter commitment option; which may appeal to more people *Less consistency with some shorter terms *Greater voter accountability and faster to respond to shifts in public opinion with 2-year terms *More complex with differing term lengths POSSIBILITY	1-Year, 2-Years, More than 3-Years *1- too short to grasp role before next election *2- could be more appealing for broader set of people willing to run with less commitment; all 2-years results in potential for more than half of Council to turnover at one time; less institutional knowledge; focus may be on short term gains before next election *3+ - a major commitment; smaller pool of people willing to run RULED OUT
Term Limits for City Councilors (and appointed committee members)	No Term Limits *Elections serve as accountability; voters' choice *Incumbency advantage CURRENTLY	Yes Term Limits *Inability to run beyond limit not based on performance or voter accountability *Forces turnover and new Councilors *Reduces incumbent advantage *Can force loss of institutional knowledge and experience *Can have "lame duck" terms for people in final term POSSIBILITY	
Stipend for City Councilors	\$2,500 Per Year *Councilors receive \$2,500 stipend per year for their service *Stipends recognize many hours of work required to be a Councilor *Stipends can provide money for food, babysitters, lost wages, and other essentials; may open doors for some to feel they have ability to serve if elected CURRENTLY	Higher Stipend *Higher stipend may attract a broader pool of candidates; reducing or eliminating financial barrier; may not improve economic diversity of Councilors *Increased costs *Financial gain could be motivation for someone to run *Compensation reflects time and effort required to serve POSSIBILITY	Lower/No Stipend *Being a City Councilor is a time-consuming role and people deserve to be compensated for their time RULED OUT

City of Essex Junction Governance Committee

Potential Governance Related Action Items



Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option
Stipend for Leader of City Council	Leader Receives Same Stipend as Rest *All Councilors treated equal *No financial incentive to serve as leader *No compensation for leader additional time and duties CURRENTLY	Leader Receives More *Leader compensated for additional time and duties *Councilors may seek role for compensation POSSIBILITY
Stipend Increases for City Councilors	Can Increase with Budget Each Year *During budget process, stipends can increase and be part of overall budget vote *Potential conflict of interest as Councilors initiate stipend increases for selves *Ability to change annually but historically not increased frequently CURRENTLY	Charter Defines Council Stipend Increases *Removes decision and conflict from Council *Could define frequency and/or rate *Once defined, difficult to change as requires community vote POSSIBILITY
Charter Review	No Built-In Charter Review *Charter can be reviewed at any point but no requirement that it be reviewed at any point; typically driven by a current issue CURRENTLY	Built-In Charter Review *Charter review frequency and process defined in Charter to require regular comprehensive review *Once defined, difficult to change as requires community vote POSSIBILITY
Election of City Councilors	Status Quo and No Proposed Change At-Large *Live in 4.6 sq. mile community; small enough to not need to break down further *No recent history of all Councilors coming from one part of City *Neighborhoods/areas are diverse *Councilors represent all, not just their area; more constituents *Interested candidates can run whenever an election, don't have to wait until their ward is on ballot NO CHANGE	Ruled Out Wards *Councilors represent smaller area, fewer constituents *Councilors guaranteed to be from different parts of City *Outcomes may focus on best for ward vs. best for City *No existing equitable formula for dividing community *Need to update wards each census, potentially changing representation and eligibility *Option to do some wards & some at-large RULED OUT



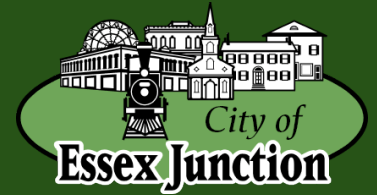
Recall Provisions

- **Recall Provisions** – there was a question about whether or not the committee had considered adding recall provisions for City Councilors to the Charter. This is the Town of Essex’s recently added recall provision:

§ 210. Recall of Selectboard members

- (a) A petition signed by 15 percent of the registered voters of the municipality, based upon the total number of registered voters at the last preceding municipal election, demanding the recall of the Selectboard member or members cited in the petition, shall be filed with the Town Clerk.
- (b) Within 60 days after receiving a valid petition, the Selectboard shall call a special meeting or, if annual meeting is within 60 days, include a question on the annual Town meeting ballot to vote on whether the elected officer shall be removed. The vote shall be held by Australian ballot.
- (c) The Selectboard member shall be removed only if at least as many registered voters of the Town vote as voted in the election wherein the officer was elected or at least one-third of the registered voters of the Town vote, whichever is greater, and a majority of that number vote for removal. The Selectboard member or members shall be removed from office immediately, and the Selectboard shall then name a successor in accordance with the replacement provisions of this charter.
- (d) A recall petition shall not be brought against an individual more than once within 12 months. (Added 2023, No. M-19 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 29, 2024.)

ESSEX JUNCTION GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



WE WANT YOUR INPUT!

NOW EXAMINING

Leader of City
Council

Stipend for
Leader of Council

Number of City
Councilors

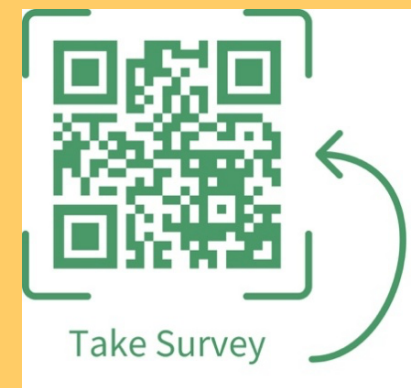
Stipends for City
Councilors

Stipend Increases
for Councilors

Term Limits for
City Councilors

Charter
Review

Term Length for
City Councilors



PLEASE JOIN US:

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ABOUT GOVERNANCE

LEARN MORE, ASK QUESTIONS, DISCUSS, WEIGH IN

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 6:30PM

ESSEX JUNCTION RECREATION & PARKS, 75 MAPLE STREET

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Call: 802-878-1375

Email: bluck@ejrp.org

Visit: www.essexjunction.org

Community Conversation About Governance

Wednesday, November 5

6:30p.m.-8:00p.m.

Essex Junction Recreation & Parks (EJRP), 75 Maple Street

Welcome, Introductions, Agenda for the Evening

Paired Conversation:

- Pick someone you did not come with.
- What's your connection to the City of Essex Junction and how long have you been connected?
- What's something exciting to you about the new City?

How We Got Here, Overview of the Governance Topics, What Happens Next?

Clarifying Questions & Answer

Gallery Walk With Governance Topics

Small Group Processing:

- What Stuck Out to You?
- What Is A Burning Question You Want Answered Tonight That Was Not Answered In Your Walk-Through or Group Conversation?
- Write Questions on Index Cards

Large Group Question & Answer From Index Cards

Closing – Thanks, Summarize, Next Steps

Survey



**KNOW SOMEONE WHO COULDN'T MAKE IT
TONIGHT BUT WANTS TO JOIN THE CONVERSATION:
Remote Community Conversation About Governance**

Wednesday, November 12

6:30-8:00p.m.

Governance Conversations Notes

We had 3 community members join our in-person community conversation, 2 community members join our virtual community conversation, 6 community members join our focus group, and 2 employees join our employee focus group. Below are some notes of new items that came up:

- **Leader of City Council** – there have been a few discussions, but to clarify the facts:
 - 10 Cities in Vermont.
 - 6 Weak-Mayors, 2 Strong Mayors, 2 Council-Manager forms of government.
 - The elected board chooses their leader for the two council-manager cities.
 - The residents elect the mayor in the six weak-mayor cities.
- **Leader of City Council** – some members of the citizen focus group were intrigued by the idea of a weak mayor but also articulated that their underlying issue was really about a lack of a clear, comprehensive shared vision of where the City is headed and a lack of leadership (either Council or staff or both) to engage with citizens and have a presence to advance that vision. There was a discussion if those desires could be met in another way through volunteers and/or staff, instead of moving to a weak-mayor model.
- **Number of City Councilors** – the idea of using three person sub-committees was appealing to staff in the sense that they could work with councilors and have engagement, buy-in and re-work information prior to presenting to the full council and community the first time and not knowing how information would be received.
- **Number of City Councilors** – there was a suggestion that the Council could utilize community volunteers to create sub-committees to do the work and that volunteers are not tapped as resources as often as they could. There was also a suggestion that instead of adding more City Councilor stipends, that the money could be better spent creating other committees and providing meeting stipends for those members. It was brought up that if broad and diverse representation is a desired goal there is a way to be more intentional on the committee level through intentional advertising and appointments of underrepresented groups – i.e. people of color, women, people under 40, etc.
- **Term Limits** – if there is a desire to implement term limits, there should be discussion if the limit defined has to do with consecutive terms or total number of terms/years (i.e. what does it mean if someone takes a break and then returns?)
- **Stipend for Leader of City Council** – staff could vouch for the observed amount of time that the President spends in weekly meetings, on emails and phone calls -

recognizing it is a lot. The way the City currently operates is that the Vice President is a part of agenda setting meetings and fills in for the President in their absence. There was a thought of three tiers of pay – President, Vice President, and the other Council members.

- **Stipend Increases** – there was a discussion of requiring Councilor stipend increases to be a separate line item on the budget vote.
- **Stipend Increases** – there was a thought that increases could be built in/indexed but they wouldn't have to increase every year (see chart example below).

City Councilor Stipend Increases

Avg CPI Change 2015-2024	2.72%
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Year	Every Year	Every Other Year	Every Three Years
2025	\$2,500	\$2,500	\$2,500
2026	\$2,568		
2027	\$2,638	\$2,568	
2028	\$2,710		\$2,568
2029	\$2,783	\$2,638	
2030	\$2,859		
2031	\$2,937	\$2,710	\$2,638
2032	\$3,017		
2033	\$3,099	\$2,783	
2034	\$3,183		\$2,710
2035	\$3,270	\$2,859	
2036	\$3,358		
2037	\$3,450	\$2,937	\$2,783
2038	\$3,544		
2039	\$3,640	\$3,017	

2040	\$3,739		\$2,859
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- **Charter Review** – there were a couple of suggestions of when the Charter should be reviewed: 1) in-between Comprehensive Plan updates. 2) with the Census.
- **Recall Provisions** – there was a question about whether or not the committee had considered adding recall provisions for City Councilors to the Charter. This is the Town of Essex’s recently added recall provision:

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- (c) The Selectboard member shall be removed only if at least as many registered voters of the Town vote as voted in the election wherein the officer was elected or at least one-third of the registered voters of the Town vote, whichever is greater, and a majority of that number vote for removal. The Selectboard member or members shall be removed from office immediately, and the Selectboard shall then name a successor in accordance with the replacement provisions of this charter.
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What is your connection to the City of Essex Junction?		
	Count	Percent
Resident	53	93
Work here	4	7

What street do you live on?

25 Dunbar Drive	Grandview	Rotunda Ave.
7 Lamoille Street	Grove	Seneca Ave
9 Fuller Place	Hawthorne circle	South Summit
Arlington Street	Hiawa	South Summit
Autumn pond Way	Hiawatha	Sugartree Ln
Beech	Jackson Street	Tamarack
Beech	Juniper Ridge	Tamarack Dr
Brickyard	Juniper Ridge Rd	Tyler Drive
Cascade St	killoran dr.	Tyler Drive
City	Lincoln	Villa Dr
Clems Drive	Park	Villa Drive
Corduoy Rd	Park	warner avenue
Drury Drive	Pearl	Waverly
Fairview	Pleasant	Wilkinson
FAIRVIEW DR	Pleasant St	Wilkinson Dr
Fairview Dr	Prospect	Wilkinson Drive
Gaines Court	Rotunda	Woodstock Lane

Leader of City Council		
	Count	Percent
Status Quo: President Elected by Councilors	31	54.4
Change to: Mayor Elected by Residents	19	33.3
I do not have a preference	6	10.5
No response / skipped	1	1.8

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: President Elected by Councilors

"Council works as a unit" is the goal; this is accomplished best if the leader builds consensus within council.
I think what we have now is working
let the council pick their leader
No Mayor
No, but I don't want a mayor. Keep politics out of it.
President not Mayor
Since councilors get elected, there is n reason to operate differently.
Someone who is driven by building consensus and not a personal/party agenda
The board will work together better with the leader elected by them.
The current system seems to be working well.
The system has worked for all the years that I've lived here
There is no need for a mayor in name only
what do you mean. If you mean-do I have a reason for voting for a leader of city council, or do you mean that the City council should have a President or a Mayor? Personally once you elect a mayor it means more dynasty, more money going into an unneeded heigherarchy thus more taxes. And city taxes are way too high now. For decades we were told that taxes would go down if we were separated or combined with town. Everywhere we were told taxes would go down. So we voted to separate and the taxes went up, and up, and up once again. We don't need a city pocket park, We don't need more employees. Let everyone take their own tree to the dump, let us seed our own lawn after a winter of city plowing. and the list goes on

Change to: Mayor Elected by Residents

A President coming from the Counsilors, is already in place with prejudices and personal agenda.
Any sort of accountability towards the public would be ideal, someone more accountable for Board decorum
I would like a leader that listens to reaidents
Power to the people
Support an efficient system with and empowered leader, who is empowered directly by voters and not other elected officials.
This will consolidate power by setting the council agenda and proprieties for the city which will improve community engagement through this controversy
Voters should choose the leader of City Council
We are a growing city, so having a mayor might give us more visibility in some issues.

Number of City Councilors		
	Count	Percent
Status Quo: 5 Members	38	66.7
Change To: 7 Members	17	29.8
I do not have a preference	1	1.8
No response / skipped	1	1.8

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: 5 Members

5 is fine
7 members would be cumbersome and not add significant value
City only has 11,000 residents--5 City Councilors are sufficient
Current system seems to be working well. Concern that adding members may slow deliberation/decision making.
EJ is a small community, I feel like a 6 member council would allow 2-person subcommittees to work on special projects or topics
Five is ample representation for a City the size of Essex; perfect example of more not being better
Having more councilors won't solve any city problem.
I fear we would constantly be recruiting because terrible candidates would constantly be running
I value transparency over number of councilmembers, with connection with voters to allow involvement.
I've had confidence in this group for years, and continue to feel the same.
keep it simple, 5 is enough
More people just increases the factions and difficulties getting votes.
not broken
Simpler, more nimble = better.
The five member council seems to be working well. I don't see a need to change it.
too much government now, people complain - well, compromise. we have too far left, too far right. Stick to the middle. Its a democracy, its slow, its messy but its the best there is...people don't like it - vote someone else in
Until there is more public participation, 7 seats won't be filled.
Yes, it has been working well so far.

Change To: 7 Members

Like the idea of more voices to increase the viewpoints making decisions
more opinions

Other

9 members desired

Term Length for City Councilors		
	Count	Percent
Status Quo: 3-Years for All	34	59.6
Change To: Some 3-Years, Some 2-Years	18	31.6
I do not have a preference	5	8.8

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: 3-Years for All

3 years works. Why change?
A 2-year term is too short in my view; it takes a while for new councilors to get used to the role, 3 years allows someone to make an impact
Added complexity and turnover does not seem to make shorter terms worth the switch.
current system is working
Current system works
I like the idea of shorter terms for some if voters make a bad decision then there is quicker redress... but voters should make a good decision to prevent that sort of thing so... keep it 3 years...
Keep it simple
Keep it the same, with how openings occurring when they become due. That way there is continuity, without a clean slate.
reasonable length and allows them to get good understanding of issues
Simple + consistent. Different terms feels arbitrary.
Simpler to have 3 years for all
so be it.
We need continuity.

Change To: Some 3-Years, Some 2-Years

Better to have a few years in cEe needs reevaluation from residents. Time changes
break it up for new comers
Having a shorter term might attract more people to consider serving.
I agree that some individuals may not want to commit to 3 years
More incentive to get things done.
More people might step up to run for 2 year terms, rather than 3 year terms

Term Limits for City Councilors (and appointed committee members)

	Count	Percent
Status Quo: No Term Limits	24	42.1
Change To: Yes Term Limits	25	43.9
I do not have a preference	8	14

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: No Term Limits

3-5; it takes time to get situated and familiar
City Councilors and appointed committee members seem to step down after a few terms. Don't see a need for term limits. fter
I think reasonable community minded people should be allowed to serve with the people's continued support.
If someone is doing a good job and continues to be elected, they should be able to serve.
I'm grateful to the folks who show up and make this such a great place. If people are willing to serve, I'm grateful. Longer service provides continuity, as many projects are ongoing over time.
Institutional knowledge is important
It's hard enough to get people to serve, no reason to run them out arbitrarily
just leave it to voters.
Term limits bad! Rrrrr!
The City currently needs all the engagement it can solicit, limits would constrain the pool of city residents able and willing to serve in this civic capacity.
There is a lot of institutional knowledge longterm members have brought to the table.
We get to vote councilors out, no need for *council* term limits

Change To: Yes Term Limits

2
2-3
12 years
12 years with a 3 year break before rejoining
15 years
2 terms
3 terms and take a break for a year and come back if you want
6 yrs, 2 terms
After a certain length of time, previous councilors could run again.
I think that a term limit is helpful to encourage new perspectives over time, But I feel that a term limit of 6 years is reasonable
No one is indispensable
Term limits like 4
term limits of 3x (9 years). The old timers can come and provide their input and that often works. No term limits means that someone could easily stay beyond his/her usefulness. New ideas are good, but we need to keep the ol' timers involved. Maybe an emeritus status so they feel like their comments are valuable. No vote, but always welcome.
Term limits. 3?. So 9 years max

Stipend for City Councilors		
	Count	Percent
Status Quo: \$2500 Per Year	34	59.6
Change To: Higher Stipend	16	28.1
I do not have a preference	6	10.5
No response / skipped	1	1.8

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: \$2500 Per Year

\$2500 is a nice compromise between not burdening the budget and helping councilors with their expenses for volunteering.
Although I recognize the value of a higher stipend (I know they are doing a LOT of work) I would rather my tax dollars went to the library or public works, etc.
City taxpayers are already struggling under current tax burden.
I certainly would not give a higher stipend.
I do not believe people are serving our community for the money. If that were true, you would have a different citizen stepping forward.
I'm open to higher stipend; however, I believe city councilors should be willing to serve to support community . Maximum stipend should not exceed \$4000.00.
If this is changed, suggest a community survey be conducted to understand if higher stipend would generate the intended increased participation. Also, amount should be based on analysis of income/cost of living data, not crowd sourced.
Incentive to serve
let the city councilors form or have city residents come to forums/respond to surveys/help councilor with duties/figure out good/bad of ideas. more involvement of community
serving shouldn't be about money
Since only the Council votes for their own stipend, this is a NO to increasing them.
Slippery slope... stipends honor the commitment... but they shouldn't be an incentive...
Taxes keep increasing, affordability for citizens is pushing people out.
This is a volunteer-based service. Compensation received should be a secondary, or not even, a consideration.
With taxes already so high, I am not comfortable suggesting a higher stipend.

Change To: Higher Stipend

\$5000
8k for leader, 6k for council members no increase till next charter review
City Councilors need to be compensated for their long hours. A higher stipend can also help open up the ability for some marginalized groups to participate.
I think it is reasonable to raise it but not more than \$4000 per year
Life is expensive and we should compensate more
lots of time commitment
The councilors work extremely hard and the time commitment is significant

Stipend for Leader of City Council		
	Count	Percent
Status Quo: Leader Receives Same Stipend as Rest	33	57.9
Change To: Leader Receives More	19	33.3
I do not have a preference	4	7
No response / skipped	1	1.8

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: Leader Receives Same Stipend as Rest

All councilors should be equal in this regard. If one doesn't want the increased workload that comes with being the leader they can choose to not take the position.
City taxpayers are already struggling with tax burden.
Do not want Council leader motivated by financial gain.
Equal pay for equal work
I selected keeping the status quo for now, since we might change to having a mayor.
keep it all the same, don't promote a dynasty, nor a bully leader. This way, there's no added incentive. let it rotate yearly if that is the councils wish. maybe even a 6 month rotation, each member could take on specific duties (which they do now but emphasize that).
Same answer. Folks don't do this for the money, nor should they. It's a civic duty that they feel compelled to serve. Ever grateful for their service
Why? No need for more...
With the City Mgr taking over more and more, this is a NO. If the leader isn't at a meeting, are you going to give the VP more for that meeting? Just no.

Change To: Leader Receives More

\$7500
10% more
Leader should be considered for more indicative of this work. Voters should approve as a ballot item
more time should earn more compensation
Not a lot more so it doesn't become a sought paid position, but maybe 10% more to acknowledge the additional responsibility?
Significant additional time commitment for the president
The leader should be clearly the leader, empowered in both perception and governance to actually lead the city
They do at least twice the work of a regular councilor if they are doing it well
Voters/taxpayers should be asked this on a ballot. At election

Other

Depends upon what and how much more leader is doing
I do not know enough about how much more the leader does if the leader spends a significantly greater amount of time and effort as leader then an increase is reasonable

Stipend Increases for City Councilors		
	Count	Percent
Status Quo: Can Increase with Budget Each Year	19	33.3
Change To: Charter Defines Council Stipend Increases	30	52.6
No response / skipped	4	7
I do not have a preference	4	7

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: Can Increase with Budget Each Year

A stipend increase vote would make me reconsider my support.
Charter changes are messy, take a long time and often ignored in Montpelier when it comes time to approve them.
flexibility if remains in budget, annual
I trust our civic leaders. There is opportunity for public input during budget process.
There's too much public discussion about stipends and automatic increases would help save time and reflect COLA in some way

Change To: Charter Defines Council Stipend Increases

aim high and reevaluate with charter review
annual COLA
avoid conflict of interest
Avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest.
Every 3 years, 10%
Every 5 years look at the current CPI
In the Charter, the frequency could be every 2 or 3 years, and the rate of increase could be linked to inflation.
Less arguing, its all defined ahead in writing
Putting it in the charter takes away the finger pointing or claims that Councilors may be unfairly giving themselves raises.
Remove (real or perceived) COI.
Residents should have a voice
simple COLA once a year, aligned with the organization meeting each year.
This should index to inflation
would like stipend increases to parallel all others (employees/other boards/firefighters) in detailing how monetary stipend/pay increases

Other

Council should NOT be determining their stipend! They can petition, voters can decide.
Put on ballot
Stipend increases should be a separate question on the City annual ballot.
vote on it separately each year. separate line item each year. showing the years when there were increases, and how much it was, when etc. be transparent.

Charter Review		
	Count	Percent
Status Quo: No Built-In Charter Review	24	42.1
Change To: Built-In Charter Review	26	45.6
I do not have a preference	7	12.3

COMMENTS:

Status Quo: No Built-In Charter Review

All 11 pages of the city charter should be provided at the Annual meeting to those who wish to have one. Someone should go over them briefly at the annual mtg. (10 minutes MAX) People can read it in total if they want. Have extras handed back to you for next year or at city office for visitors throughout the year. keep sending newsletters. Front porch forum is great but, but many are not on FPF. Many seniors and now more are off social media
Don't create busy work.
Don't waste time if there is no need for review or change.
Establish a Charter Change Committee that meets as needed. Doing so regularly may induce unneeded change just for the sake of it.
It would take time to review the Charter, so it can be done only when needed.
Since the legislature has to approve any changes, let's not do this unless necessary.
Status quo. I don't see a problem
Wait for a problem, then fix the problem. A set timeframe is only good if you predict 100% of the problems, which is not how problems work.

Change To: Built-In Charter Review

15 years
15 years
At least for a while, political and financial needs will require adjustments
every 10 years full review
Every 15 years
Review should occur at regular intervals, but at a frequency that fits with the schedule of other governing documents.
reviewing charter enables councilors to be more familiar with the charter

Other

we don't need to create more bureaucracy
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