



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

Online & 2 Lincoln St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Wednesday, February 8, 2023
6:30 PM

E-mail: admin@essexjunction.org

www.essexjunction.org

Phone: (802) 878-6944

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

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

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [6:30 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
 - a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda
5. **PUBLIC HEARING**
 - a. Public hearing on fiscal year 2024 Proposed Budget and Capital Program
6. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Discussion of FY24 Proposed Budget and Capital Program Budget
 - b. Discussion and consideration of moving the Annual Meeting date and discussion on the Annual Meeting Election/Preparation Schedule
 - c. Discussion and consideration of the Crescent Connector Bid Award
7. **CONSENT ITEMS**
 - a. Approve Check Warrants #17338 (1/27/2023)
 - b. Approve Minutes: January 25, 2023
 - c. Approve mailing of ballots
 - d. Approve Certificate of Highway Mileage for Year Ending February 10, 2023
8. **READING FILE**
 - a. Council member comments
 - b. Restorative Justice in Essex Report – First half of FY23
 - c. Planning Commission Minutes: January 19, 2023
 - d. Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Minutes: January 23, 2023
 - e. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes: December 20, 2022
 - f. Letter from Elaine Haney and Harlan Smith (ADDED)
9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
 - a. None anticipated
10. **ADJOURN**

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

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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
February 8, 2023**

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Andrew Brown, President; Raj Chawla, Vice President; Dan Kerin; Amber Thibeault; George Tyler.

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Wendy Hysko, Library Director; Brad Luck, EJRP Director; Susan McNamara-Hill, City Clerk, Jess Morris, Financial Director;

OTHERS PRESENT: Dorothy Bergdal, Danielle Brown, Alise Certa, Annie Cooper, Cheri Davis, Helen Donahey, Rick Hamlin, Tamara Jacques, Resa Merritt, Toni Morgan, Bridget Myer, Nick Myer, Ken Signorello, Harlan Smith, Jason Struthers, Andy Suntup, Linda Suntup, Carmon Verasamy, Marlon Verasamy, John Willey, Heidi.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Councilor Brown called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

Councilor Chawla requested moving the minutes of January 25, 2023, from the Consent Agenda to be Business Item #6d. Councilor Brown requested adding emails from Elaine Haney and Harlan Smith to the Reading File.

3. **APPROVE AGENDA**

GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, to approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

a. Comments from public on items not on the agenda

Harlan Smith spoke about the difficulty of absentee ballot voting for overseas, deployed military, noting that he is planning to testify on potential legislation around this at the State level.

Resa Merritt asked about the process for voters to weigh in on any proposed changes in stipend for City Councilors that Councilors may propose. Councilor Brown replied that as part of the next fiscal year's budget, he advised that public comment be submitted during the public hearing portion of the agenda. He said that once the City Council approves the budget for voter consideration, voters may only vote yes or no on the budget in its entirety.

5. **PUBLIC HEARING**

a. Public hearing on Fiscal Year 2024 Proposed Budget and Capital Program

City Manager Mahony began the summary of the General Fund budget by noting that there is not a good past budget for the City to compare the FY24 budget to, given that this is the City's first budget as a separate entity from the Town. She said that for a baseline, staff prepared a FY22 mock City budget with adjustments for inflation. She noted that the FY24 budget is proposed at \$11,428,241, which is a 7% or \$737,149 change from the FY22 mock budget. She noted that the tax rate would increase by 1.4% or \$27.51 on a \$280,000 City property. She noted contributing factors to this increase, which include new positions in administration, Community Development, and EJRP, increases for stormwater, Essex Rescue, the Essex Junction Cemetery Association, an annual capital transfer increase, and a line item for Memorial Day/4th of July celebrations. She noted one-time expenditures, including rebranding, strategic planning, and banners and signs (all of which will be paid for through local option

54 tax revenues). She then walked through each department's budget, changes, and reasons for each
55 change.

56
57 Finance Director Morris then provided a summary of the Capital Program and its funds for FY24. She
58 noted that funding would total \$1,513,265 for FY24 and would consist of funds within the capital reserve,
59 rolling stock, EJRP capital, water capital, wastewater treatment facility capital, and sanitation capital.
60 She noted that the water, wastewater, and sanitation funds are enterprise funds and do not influence
61 the tax rate or use tax dollars. She provided a summary of estimated utility rate changes for water,
62 wastewater, and sanitation, noting that the total increase between FY23 and FY24 is \$49.62 or 8.47%.

63
64 Harlan Smith asked if rates and fees are increased based on inflation indexes like the budget does or if
65 they remain static. Councilor Brown replied that certain fees, like dog licensing fees, are set in State
66 statute, and the municipality does not have control to set that rate. He said that building fees are under
67 the control of the municipality and can be looked at and changed.

68
69 Diane Clemens noted that adding an additional planning FTE is of interest and would like more
70 information. Councilor Brown replied that the Community Development Department had traditionally
71 been overseen by two staff with different duties (planning versus enforcing), and this would provide the
72 link between that, and that an additional staff could help staff more municipal committees.

73
74 John Willey spoke about the importance of the senior van and the senior center, encouraging the City
75 to take care of its seniors. Councilor Brown clarified the City's intent and rationale around discontinuing
76 the senior van service after the end of its current term. City Manager Mahony clarified points around
77 how one qualifies for Special Services Transportation Agency (SSTA) services (which could, in certain
78 circumstances, be used in lieu of the senior van).

79
80 Andy Suntup asked if the budget is in the parameters of that which was discussed when the Village was
81 contemplating separation, and asked how much money is being saved on taxes when compared to what
82 the budget would have looked like had separation not occurred. Councilor Brown said that there is no
83 comparison to what the Village budget would have been had it not separated from the Town. He
84 additionally replied that there are several items in the current budget that are new or have arisen due to
85 separation (which could be one aspect of quantifying the cost of separation). Councilor Kerin added that
86 by separating, the City is only paying for services for residents of the City.

87
88 Councilor Brown closed the public hearing.

89
90 **6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

91 a. **Discussion of FY24 Proposed Budget and Capital Program Budget**

92 City Manager Mahony began by noting that there will be a second public hearing on February 22, 2023,
93 and that the budget and ballot items must be set on March 8, 2023.

94
95 City Manager Mahony noted several items that have been adjusted since the January 25, 2023, budget
96 was prepared. These include an increase in the election budget of \$17,000 to include mailing ballots
97 and reflecting actual expenses from the last two years, separating committee stipends from Council
98 stipends in the legislative budget, and adding committee stipends for three additional City committees
99 at a cost of \$10,500. Councilor Chawla expressed support for the flexibility in the budget for additional
100 committees or community outreach, as needs arise. Councilor Tyler urged the creation of a recreation
101 oversight committee to obtain community input and guidance on future budgets, given the significant
102 increase in EJRP's budget over the last three years.

104 Councilor Brown spoke about the proposed stipend change for Councilors. He proposed a stipend of
105 \$5,000 per Councilmember. Councilor Chawla noted that his original proposal was for \$6,500 per
106 Councilmember. He discussed his rationale for putting this proposal together, saying that it would
107 decrease barriers to serving on the Council and increase the diversity of candidates and perspectives.
108 Councilor Kerin said that he disagreed about increasing the stipend. He said that there is no guarantee
109 that an increased stipend would lead to a more diverse Council. Councilor Tyler said that it seems
110 unethical for any municipal board in charge of a municipal budget to give itself a raise, since anyone
111 who disagrees with this would have to vote down the entire budget in order to oppose this one section
112 of it. He proposed putting a question on the ballot regarding whether the FY2025 budget should include
113 a proposal to increase City Council stipends to \$5,000. He said that this would also distance the current
114 City Council from the pay increase that would occur. Councilor Thibeault said that she is struggling with
115 a larger increase in the stipend. She noted that another barrier for Council participation is the time
116 commitment, in addition to the financial component.
117

118 Members of the public made the following comments:

- 119 ▪ Marlon Verasamy said that from the equity lens, an increased stipend would lower barriers
120 for everyone to have a seat at the table.
- 121 ▪ Bridget Myer said that putting this on the ballot may not have the effect that the Council wants,
122 unless there is education that goes along with it. She additionally asked about Councilor
123 Tyler’s comment about establishing an oversight board for recreation. He clarified his
124 recommendation.
- 125 ▪ Alise Certa spoke in support of the budget and Marlon’s position regarding the increased
126 stipend for Councilors. She added that it would also be important to reduce other barriers
127 (such as lack of childcare) to serving on the Council and other roles. She said that she could
128 support an advisory committee for EJRP, but would need more details on the role and level
129 of oversight that body would hold.
- 130 ▪ Annie Cooper said that having a thriving recreation department is great, and that having more
131 community input on individual departments’ budgets is important.
- 132 ▪ Harlan Smith said that community input regarding a stipend is important, but placing an
133 advisory question on the ballot may not be the best way to obtain that input.
- 134 ▪ Resa Merritt said that \$6,500 with an additional inflation increase is too much for a stipend,
135 given how much higher of a wage that is than what the average person makes. She said that
136 this is a question that should go to the community for more input prior to including it in the
137 budget. Councilor Brown clarified that any inflationary increase associated with this would
138 need to go into the charter and be debated every year.
139

140 b. Discussion and consideration of moving the Annual Meeting date and discussion on the Annual
141 Meeting Election/Preparation Schedule

142 Councilor Brown said that in the future, the City would be using a more inclusive calendar when setting
143 the preparation schedule, in order to take more holidays and significant dates into account.
144

145 City Manager Mahony said that staff are recommending changing the Annual Meeting date to April 11th
146 (actual voting day) and that the informational meeting take place the night prior on April 10th. She said
147 that staff are recommending having an online informational meeting, given that the high school will be
148 holding the School Board informational meeting in their physical space.
149

150 **GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, that the City Council move the Annual**
151 **Meeting from Wednesday, April 5, 2023, to Tuesday, April 11, 2023, to vote for the City Officers**
152 **and transact any business involving voting by Australian ballot. The motion passed 5-0.**
153

154 c. Discussion and consideration of the Crescent Connector Bid Award
155 City Manager Mahony said that the City is ready to award the bid for Phase 2 for the actual construction
156 of the roadway itself. She said that they have identified a low bid and are recommending that the Council
157 move forward on that award. She said that they have also identified a number of non-participating items
158 that the City will need to cover but that they do not yet know the full extent of the cost of those (such as
159 contaminated soils).
160

161 Rick Hamlin said that this project is funded entirely by State/federal funds (except for the non-
162 participating costs). He said that the bid has been analyzed based on VTrans standards through a
163 rigorous process and that they have determined that there is no disadvantage to selecting this bid. He
164 spoke briefly about the contaminated soils along the railroad tracks and noted that VTrans is currently
165 analyzing the soils and how the City has handled mitigating contamination in the past. He said that staff
166 hope that the State or federal funding will cover more than half of the costs related to contaminated soil
167 remediation, given how diligent the City has been about handling those areas in the past. He noted that
168 Phase 1 of the work was completed this summer.
169

170 Councilors spoke about how exciting it is that this project is moving into a second phase.
171

172 **GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, that the City Council award the**
173 **Crescent Connector Phase 2 Project to the lowest bidder, Engineers Construction, Inc., and**
174 **authorize Hamlin Engineering to manage the construction phase of the project and authorize the**
175 **City Manager to execute the contracts. The motion passed 5-0.**
176

177 d. Approve Minutes: January 25, 2023

178 Councilor Chawla requested the following amendments to the January 25, 2023 meeting minutes:

- 179 ▪ Line 115 – correct the spelling of Bridget Myer’s name
- 180 ▪ Line 104 – change “vision” to “appearance.”

181
182 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by GEORGE TYLER, to approve the minutes from**
183 **January 25, 2023, with the proposed amendments. The motion passed 5-0.**
184

185 7. **CONSENT AGENDA**

186 a. Approve Check Warrants #17338 (1/27/2023)

187 b. Approve Minutes: January 25, 2023, **now Business Item #5d**

188 c. Approve mailing of ballots

189 d. Approve Certificate of Highway Mileage for Year Ending February 10, 2023
190

191 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, to approve the consent agenda. The**
192 **motion passed 5-0.**
193

194 8. **READING FILE**

195 a. Council member comments: Councilor Brown noted that the Board of Civil Authority met tonight and
196 made the decision that voting will no longer occur in 2023 or 2024 at the high school but at Champlain
197 Valley Expo, which will have increased access, better climate conditions, and won’t disrupt school.

198 b. Restorative Justice in Essex Report – first half of FY23

199 c. Planning Commission Minutes: January 19, 2023

200 d. Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Minutes: January 23, 2023

201 e. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes: December 20, 2022
202

203 9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

204 a. *An executive session is not anticipated

205
206 10. **ADJOURN**

207
208 **DAN KERIN made a motion, seconded by GEORGE TYLER, to adjourn the meeting. The motion**
209 **passed 5-0 at 9:07 P.M.**

210
211 Respectfully Submitted,
212 Amy Coonradt