



CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA- REVISED Wednesday, September 27, 2023
6:30 PM

Online & 2 Lincoln St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452

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. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Discussion of Strategic Planning Update
 - b. Discussion of 2025 Annual Meeting Date
 - c. Discussion of Amendments to the Policy Regarding City Council Meetings
 - d. *Discussion regarding the City Manager Annual Evaluation
6. **CONSENT ITEMS**
 - a. Approve Check Warrant # 24010 (09222023)
 - b. Approve Minutes: September 13, 2023
7. **READING FILE**
 - a. Council Member & Manager Comments
 - b. Reappraisal Update including Sample Letter
 - c. Essex CHIPS' Sponsored movie – Our American Family
 - d. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes: August 31, 2023
 - e. Planning Commission Minutes: September 14, 2023
8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
 - a. *An executive session may be needed to discuss the evaluation of an employee
9. **ADJOURN**

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

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
SEPTEMBER 27, 2023**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Ashley Snellenberger, Director of Communications & Strategic Initiatives;

OTHERS PRESENT: Heidi Clark, Annie Cooper, Melissa Ham-Ellis, Resa Mehren, Tim Miller.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

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

2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

None.

3. **APPROVE AGENDA**

None needed.

4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

a. Comments from public on items not on the agenda

None.

5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**

a. Discussion of Strategic Planning Update

Director Snellenberger provided a brief update on the strategic planning project and timeline. She noted that Future iQ was selected as the project consultant for this work at the Council's August 9th meeting. She spoke about the goals for the project, which include the community vision and strategic action plan to measure the City's progress throughout the next five years. She noted that she has begun having weekly meetings with the Future iQ team, and that they are working to establish the project's Steering Committee and set up monthly meetings, create timelines for the project's launch and future workshops, and gather information through interviews and reports. She noted important upcoming dates related to the project, which include the launch of the strategic plan (October 6), seeking community feedback at the EJRP Pumpkin Palooza (October 28), Think Tank Workshops (week of October 30th), seeking community feedback at the EJRP Train Hop (December 8), and a Workshop Charette (week of December 4). She noted that January and February will also have events and milestones, but will be a subsequent phase of the project.

Councilor Certa asked if feedback from the community will be gathered throughout the project or will only be solicited through the survey or workshops. Director Snellenberger replied that there will be several surveys throughout the project and that there will be additional opportunities for the community to give feedback to staff during various community events. She also noted that there are opportunities on the project's website for the community to give feedback and sign up for updates on the project.

b. Discussion of 2025 Annual Meeting Update

City Manager Mahony said that this is to solicit feedback to move the Annual Meeting beginning in 2025 to the traditional Vermont Town Meeting Day in March, rather than the April date that Essex has traditionally used. She noted that the School District is considering this and is putting the question to voters in 2024. She noted that Essex Junction asked voters whether the Junction could change the charter to allow the Council to set the annual meeting date, but noted that this charter change is being

54 considered by the legislature when it reconvenes in January, so they do not have final resolution on
55 whether that authority has been granted yet.

56
57 City Manager Mahony outlined the pros and cons of moving the Annual Meeting to March or keeping it
58 in April. She noted that if they align with the School District, it simplifies processes for voters (only
59 needing to remember one date for voting), provides the opportunities to share costs for producing
60 ballots, and provides the ability to leverage Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT)
61 communications about voting, since they use the Town Meeting Day date when putting together
62 communications. She noted that a con is that it shortens the City's timeline for putting the budget
63 together by one month, though this shouldn't make or break any major decision-making.

64
65 Councilor Chawla expressed support for having the community vote on the same day. Councilor Certa
66 and others agreed that there is a certain momentum and excitement on Town Meeting Day in general,
67 and it would be great for the City to be able to participate in that by holding its voting on that day.

68
69 Councilor Thibeault asked whether the polling place would remain at the Fairgrounds, and asked
70 whether this would pose problems for the Champlain Valley Expo. City Manager Mahony said that she
71 and Clerk McNamara would touch base with CVE to confirm that it wouldn't pose problems.

72
73 c. Discussion of Amendments to the Policy Regarding City Council Meetings

74 City Manager Mahony noted that at Council Orientation in May, the City identified two policies in need
75 of updating, which included the Communications Policy and the City Council Meeting Policy. She noted
76 that the former has already been discussed and that this is an opportunity to review a first draft of
77 amendments to the latter. The City Council discussed the following proposed changes:

- 78 • Section 1c - Emergency Meetings. There is proposed language to add that they are held at the
79 call of the President and City Manager, to be consistent with language around Special Meetings
80 (Section 1b). Councilors agreed with this change.
- 81 • Section 2c – Agenda/Reading File. There is a question about whether check warrants should be
82 included in the Reading File rather than the Consent Agenda, since they have already been cut
83 at the time of the meeting. Councilors agreed that it should be in the Reading File.
- 84 • Section 2e – Meeting Location. Councilor Certa asked where the third physical location of posting
85 for the agenda and meeting packet should be, given that the third used to be the Town Offices,
86 and also asked whether there could be a digital location. The Council decided to use EJRP as a
87 third physical location, but agreed to explore using Mac's Market or the Post Office as well.
- 88 • Section 3a – Business. There was a question about whether the Pledge of Allegiance should be
89 included as part of the Council meetings, and City Manager Mahony noted that some other
90 surrounding municipalities stopped saying the Pledge in their meetings during Covid due to equity
91 and inclusion concerns raised about some of the Pledge language. Councilor Chawla said that
92 the Council and participants demonstrate good work and allegiance to the government without
93 reciting the Pledge, and would be comfortable continuing to omit it from meetings. Other
94 Councilors concurred.
- 95 • Section 3a – Business. There was a question about pulling Councilor/Manager comments from
96 the Reading File and having it be its own section of the agenda. As an aside, Councilor Chawla
97 said that in future, part of the strategic work around increasing community engagement should
98 look at how they interact with the Council during meetings in formal and informal ways. He said
99 that for this immediate conversation, he would be comfortable separating comments from the
100 Reading File. Other Councilors concurred.
- 101 • Section 5 – Chairperson. Councilors discussed the language about election of Vice Chairperson,
102 and Councilor Brown recommended reviewing the charter and aligning with that language.
- 103 • New Section (between Section 5 and Section 6). City Manager Mahony said that a new Clerk
104 role was created and that a section should be added to reflect that role and its meeting duties.

- 105 • Section 6 – Public Participation. Councilor Certa recommended allowing the public to provide
- 106 comment on any item (on the agenda or not on the agenda) during the Public to be Heard section
- 107 of the agenda, so that the public has a dedicated time to address any issue, rather than waiting
- 108 potentially until later in the evening until that agenda item comes up. Councilor Chawla said that
- 109 this is a valid point, but said that waiting until an agenda item is discussed allows for further
- 110 explanation of that item by staff and Council, and also expressed concern about time constraints
- 111 for City Council meetings (which could also raise equity concerns). Councilor Haney said that
- 112 she likes the idea of having public comment both at the beginning of the meeting and during each
- 113 agenda item. She noted that the Council does have the ability to put time limits on public
- 114 comment, if many individuals want to speak to an agenda item. She suggested adding a link to
- 115 the agenda where written public comment could be submitted ahead of time. She and Councilor
- 116 Thibeault agreed with Councilor Certa’s suggestion not to limit Public to be Heard to items not
- 117 on the agenda. Councilor Certa said that the comments during Public to be Heard portion could
- 118 be just public comments, whereas the public comments during each agenda item could be
- 119 viewed as an opportunity for more dialogue and clarification about specific agenda items between
- 120 the Council and the public.
- 121 • Section 6 – Public Participation. City Manager Mahony discussed the process for restoring order
- 122 and decorum of a meeting in the case of an unruly participant. She noted that Winooski
- 123 establishes a process in its Rules of Procedure, which has been helpful.
- 124 • Section 9c – Minutes. Councilors discussed having an abstract of their remarks on any subject
- 125 entered into the minutes from a previous meeting. They noted that they have not exercised this
- 126 privilege because they do not want to run the risk of editorializing after the fact, but they agreed
- 127 that providing clarifying amendments or capturing salient previously-omitted points is acceptable.
- 128 • Councilor Haney volunteered to draft a narrative summary for the website to welcome the public
- 129 and introduce them to the procedures around City Council meetings.
- 130

131 The following public comments were received:

- 132 • Annie Cooper said that in terms of physical locations for meeting materials, she asked that equity
- 133 and inclusion be taken into consideration when making this decision. She said that with respect
- 134 to opportunities to give public comment during meetings, she suggested establishing timeframes
- 135 for each agenda item so that members of the public have a general sense of when each agenda
- 136 item will be discussed. She also suggested having written comments read aloud at the meeting
- 137 during their respective agenda items. She further suggested designating a moderator on the
- 138 Council in case a meeting gets contentious or there are unruly participants.
- 139 • Melissa Ham-Ellis spoke about the process around removing a disorderly individual. She said
- 140 that the decision should not be left to one Chairperson, given that it’s likely that the Chairperson
- 141 does not know the person or the conditions that may have inadvertently offended them. She said
- 142 that giving the person time to calm down before law enforcement is called is much more civilized.
- 143 She also noted that “obeying the Chairperson” is strong language.
- 144

145 d. *Discussion regarding the City Manager Annual Evaluation
 146 See item #8a below.

148 6. **CONSENT AGENDA**

- 149 a. Approve Check Warrant #24010 (09/22/2023)
- 150 b. Approve Minutes: September 13, 2023
- 151

152 **ANDREW BROWN made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY to approve the consent agenda**
 153 **as presented. The motion passed 5-0.**

155 7. **READING FILE**

- 156 a. Council & Manager member comments: City Manager Mahony noted Longevity Awards for the
157 following staff: Mary Dennison, Library, 10 years; Ron Bundy, Public Works, 10 years; Katelyn Faye,
158 EJRP, 10 (technically 11) years; Carol Bushor, Library, 15 years; Wendy Hysko, Library, 15 years;
159 Brad Luck, EJRP, 15 (technically 16) years; Ricky Jones, EJRP, 35 years. She noted that ANR
160 completed their first state inspection of the Wastewater Facility in 4 years, that it was a positive
161 inspection, and that the follow-up report will be provided to the City with any action items. She noted
162 that Chelsea Mandigo will be working at the Wastewater Facility with two Norwich University students
163 to explore more solar expansion at the facility. She provided an update on the Brickyard, Crescent
164 Connector, and Main Street water line construction projects. She said that the City is hoping to move
165 forward with code enforcement for sandwich boards later in October. Councilor Chawla noted the
166 screening of the Essex CHIPS movie.
- 167 b. Reappraisal Update including Sample Letter
- 168 c. Essex CHIPS' Sponsored Movie – Our American Family
- 169 d. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes: August 31, 2023
- 170 e. Planning Commission Minutes: September 14, 2023
- 171

172 8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 173 a. *An executive session may be needed to discuss the evaluation of an employee
- 174

175 **MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by ANDREW BROWN, that the City Council enter**
176 **into executive session to discuss a personnel evaluation, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to**
177 **include the City Council. The motion passed 5-0 at 7:56 PM.**

178

179 **ELAINE HANEY made a motion, seconded by MARCUS CERTA, to exit executive session. The**
180 **motion passed 5-0 at 8:10 PM.**

181

182 9. **ADJOURN**

183

184 **ELAINE HANEY made a motion, seconded by ANDREW BROWN, to adjourn the meeting. The**
185 **motion passed 5-0 at 8:11 P.M.**

186

187 Respectfully Submitted,
188 Amy Coonradt