

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
June 11, 2025**

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Amber Thibeault, President; Marcus Certa, Vice President; Tim Miller, Clerk; Brian Shelden.

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Diane Clemens, Nathan Doudera, Steve Eustis, Leslie Goldring, Finn Hamilton, Kevin Hamilton, Kim Hamilton, Jeffrey Kershner, Daniel Lignori, Nick Meyer, Taylor Newton, Warren Spinner, Dennis Thibeault, Resa.

1. CALL TO ORDER

City Council President Thibeault called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

None needed.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public

None.

5. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Large Water User Rate Public Hearing

Finance Director Morris presented on this item, which relates to setting the Large Water User Rate for Fiscal Year 2026. She reviewed the Large Volume Water User Rate Setting Policy, noting that it currently only applies to Global Foundries. She provided an overview of the City's Water Fund Budget for FY26, noting an 8.5% increase from FY25 that is largely driven by an increase in the Chittenden Water District's wholesale rate, an increase in state fees, an increase in salaries/benefits for positions, and an increase in planned transfers to the water capital reserve fund. She outlined the Large Volume Water User Rate for FY26 of \$0.671 per 1,000 gallons, noting that it represents an 8.74% increase over the rate for FY25. Steve Eustis, a member of the public, asked several clarifying questions, which were answered by Finance Director Morris.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to close the public hearing. The motion passed 4-0.

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion and Consideration of Setting All Utility Rates

Councilor Shelden asked for more information on the staffing cost increases noted as a driver in the budget increase. Finance Director Morris said that staff worked this year to allocate public works staff more precisely, and that the increased cost was due to a more accurate reallocation of the cost center for public works employees. Councilor Certa asked how accurate the estimated state fee increase is, and Director Morris replied that the estimate could be slightly high but should be fairly accurate.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to approve the FY26 utility raters as presented. The motion passed 4-0.

b. Interviews and Consider Appointments to Bike Walk Advisory Committee, Capital Program Review Committee, Development Review Board, Moderator, Planning Commission, and Tree Advisory Committee

The City Council interviewed Daniel Ligouri for a seat on the Bike Walk Advisory Committee. He spoke briefly about his background and interest in serving on the Committee. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and he was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

The City Council interviewed Nathan Doudera for a seat on the Capital Program Review Committee. He spoke briefly about his background and interest in serving on the Committee. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and he was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

The City Council interviewed Steve Eustis for the position of Moderator. He spoke briefly about his background and interest in continuing to serve as the Moderator. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and he was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

The City Council interviewed Diane Clemens for a seat on the Planning Commission. She spoke briefly about her background and interest in continuing to serve on the Commission. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and she was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

The City Council interviewed Finn Hamilton for a seat on the Planning Commission. Councilors and City Manager Mahony outlined the role of the Planning Commission in the City. He spoke briefly about his background and interest in serving on the Commission. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and he was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

The City Council interviewed Leslie Goldring for a seat on the Tree Advisory Committee. She spoke briefly about her background and interest in continuing to serve on the Committee. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and she was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

c. Update from Tree Advisory Committee

Nick Meyer and Warren Spinner of the Tree Advisory Committee (TAC) provided an update from the Committee. Mr. Meyer spoke about the Committee's work with Branch Out Burlington to grow its own trees for the Junction (rather than sourcing them from elsewhere), resulting in savings. He spoke about TAC's involvement in Arbor Day events, as well as the City's continued Tree City USA designation. He spoke about plantings in Maple Street and Calahan Parks. He expressed concern that the increased development in the City has not focused enough on green spaces, and asked that the Development Review Board place more of an emphasis on landscape planning and caring for green spaces. Mr. Spinner emphasized the importance of ensuring that developers' landscape plans are robust and that green spaces are cared for after development projects are completed. He suggested modifying the Land Development Code to focus more on sustaining green spaces, and Mr. Meyer noted that developers could allocate more of their landscaping resources to improving the soil volume underneath the sidewalks beneath the trees to help ensure their continued health and survival. Mr. Spinner spoke about emerald ash borer beetle (EAB) infected trees on the West Street extension and asked how the City is handling the removal of those trees, and City Manager Mahony noted that this is included in one of the projects in the FY26 Capital Plan and they are currently scoping what is feasible within the City's budget. Councilor Miller thanked the TAC for its work over the years in planting over 325 trees in Essex Junction, and acknowledged the vast breadth of knowledge that the TAC has.

The following public comments were received:

- Kim Hamilton commended the TAC's close work with the Junction's schools and getting children interested in trees and involved in the community.

- Steve Eustis suggested using the TAC to guide the Planning Commission and LDC more on what species make sense for landscaping and for the community's wants and needs, as well as holding developers accountable for replanting if their plantings fail.

d. Discussion and Consideration of Regional Future Land Use Map and Tier 1B (Act 250 Exemption) Status
Community Development Director Yuen and Taylor Newton of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) spoke on this topic. Mr. Newton noted that items for discussion tonight include the CCRPC's new Regional Future Land Use Map, Tier 1B status, and regional and municipal housing targets. He noted that Essex Junction expressed support for the housing targets in May. He then spoke about the Future Land Use Maps, noting that Essex Junction contains two land use categories from this map (Downtown Center and Planned Growth Area). He noted that both of these categories are eligible for Tier 1B exemption status, which allows for development of projects of 50 units or less to be exempt from Act 250 permitting. Councilor Certa spoke about the Pearl Street corridor and asked why it wasn't categorized as part of the downtown area, given the City's focus on developing the corridor. Mr. Newton replied that while the City is planning to include high density mixed uses in that corridor in the future, its City Plan hasn't quite caught up and CCRPC is taking a conservative approach to these designations. He also noted that there is currently very little distinction between these two designations in terms of benefits at this juncture. Director Yuen agreed, noting that there is enough flexibility between the Planned Growth Area and the Downtown Center to eventually extend the Downtown designation in the future.

The following public comments were received:

- Diane Clemens noted that the City's Comprehensive Plan is being updated for 2027, and that they plan to dovetail its updates with the Regional Plan in 2028.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council adopt the municipal resolution as presented and request that the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission seek the Land Use Review Board's approval to have the Downtown Center and Planned Growth Area qualify and be mapped for Act 250 Tier 1B area status. The motion passed 4-0.

e. Department Heads Brief to Council – Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director
Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director Snellenberger spoke about activities and accomplishments over the last year. She noted the commencement of the community newsletter last September, which is published in the Essex Reporter monthly. She spoke about the City's strategic planning activities, which were also started last year. She spoke about new budget engagement activities and the second year of the Community Dinner event. She said that the City has started the City's rebranding process, noting that they have received 31 bids in response to the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the rebranding scope of work and that they have narrowed the number of candidates for the work down to 4 of the bids. She said that staff are working on developing a Council Engagement Plan, which was one of the items that came out of the Council Retreat held last week. She said that staff are also working on development of new committees and engaging youth to participate on committees. Councilor Certa asked for more detail on the rebranding timeline, and Director Snellenberger replied that they hope to have a successful bidder chosen by the end of the month, and that the rebranding work is anticipated to last for between 4 and 8 months. Councilor Certa asked if there are other communication strategies that the City could be using to improve outreach and engagement, and Director Snellenberger outlined a number of potential strategies. She also spoke about ways to improve accessibility on the City's website. Councilor Miller asked for more information on accessing the Community Newsletter, and Director Snellenberger replied that individuals can subscribe through the website. She spoke about some of the most recent topics featured in the newsletter, noting it as one of the strategies to solicit and obtain feedback from the community.

8. CONSENT ITEMS

- Approve Meeting Minutes: May 28, 2025
- Approve Iroquois Ave Waterline and Roadway Replacement Project Bid Award

c. Approve 2025 Resurfacing Project Bid Award

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Thibeault, to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 4-0.

9. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**: City Manager Mahony noted that the City is continuing to adjust the timing of the traffic lights at Five Corners. She provided an update on the 2 Lincoln Street renovation project. Councilor Certa asked that residents be more mindful on the roads, given the increased bicycle traffic in the summer.

10. **READING FILE**

- a. Check Warrant #24073 – April 18, 2025
- b. Regional Boards and Committees Memo
- c. May Financial Reports
- d. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes – May 20, 2025
- e. Governance Committee Minutes – May 22, 2025

11. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. *An Executive Session May be Needed to Discuss the Appointment of a Public Official

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Thibeault, that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss appointment of public officials, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to include the City Manager. The motion passed 4-0.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to exit executive session. The motion passed 4-0 at 8:57 P.M.

12. **ADJOURN**

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 4-0 at 8:57 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt