

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA OPEN FORUM
MINUTES OF MEETING
July 23, 2025**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Wendy Hysko, Library Director; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Dorothy Bergendahl, Steven Eustis, Jeanne Grant, Sheila Porter, Resa.

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Councilor Shelden requested moving Consent Item #7b to the Business Item portion of the Agenda.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to move Consent Item #7b to be Business Item #6g. The motion passed 5-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public

Steven Eustis spoke about the need for road improvements on Route 15 between Pearl Street and the Interstate, especially the ruts in the road that become hazardous during rainstorms. He asked that this be raised with the City's Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) representative, given the safety concerns. City Manager Mahony noted that the City is paving the outbound side of Pearl Street from the West Street Extension to Susie Wilson Road. She said that the City has communicated with VTTrans in the past about having that road paved more quickly, and said that they will communicate this need to CCRPC as well.

5. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Proposed Amendments to Municipal Code Chapter 9: Enforcement and Chapter 18: Ordinance regulating control of litter, refuse, garbage, junk, junk motor vehicles, trash, and solid waste

City Council President Thibeault opened the public hearing.

Chris Yuen, Community Development Director, provided an overview of the proposed amendments for Chapters 9 and 11 of the City's Municipal Code. He said the purpose of the proposed amendments is to clearly designate additional chapters of the Code as civil ordinances rather than criminal ones, given that enforcement of civil ordinances is generally simpler and less administratively burdensome. He said that they are also intended to address inconsistencies in penalty amounts between Chapters 9 and 18, authorize the Zoning Administrator as municipal officials approved to issue tickets for civil ordinance violations, to clarify certain definitions, extend responsibility of maintaining litter-free properties to occupants and lessees, incorporate technical changes, require the proper maintenance of backyard composters, and remove reference to a non-existent Ordinance Appeals Board.

The following public comments were received:

- Steven Eustis asked how the City would handle situations where certain properties become places where many people leave discarded items for free (though not necessarily under the purview of the property-owner). Director Yuen replied that if this is occurring in the City's right-of-way it is the City's issue, but that if it occurs on private property, it becomes a private property issue. City Manager Mahony said that ultimately the property-owner needs to be held accountable, and it could be tricky to prove that the property-owner is or isn't responsible for the discarded items. Director Yuen said

that the enforcement process is extremely involved, and that it is unlikely that the property would be incurring fines without the City becoming involved and working with them to resolve the issue prior to that point.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to close the public hearing. The motion passed 5-0.

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion & Consideration of FY26 Tax Rate

Finance Director Morris began by noting that the grand list decreased slightly from 2024 to 2025, which is driven by a change at the state level in how utility properties are valued. She noted that this decrease was mostly offset by increases in value to other types of properties, such that the decrease was around \$82,000. She noted that the General Fund tax rate for FY26 stands at 1.008%, the Tax Agreement rate for tax stabilization agreements is 0.0022%, and the Economic Development tax rate is 0.0100%. She said that this represents an overall tax rate increase of 3.5% over FY25, or a roughly \$96 increase on a \$280,000 assessed property.

The following public comments were received:

- Dorothy Bergendahl asked why the tax impact example used is a \$280,000 property, given that home values have significantly increased from this. Councilor Miller noted that this is the averaged assessed value of an Essex Junction home as of the last Citywide reappraisal, and that the example figure will increase once the next reappraisal is completed.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, that the City Council approve the FY26 General Tax Rate at \$1.0080 and the Tax Agreement Rate at \$0.0022. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Presentation of the FY2026 – 2030 Brownell Library Strategic Plan

Jeanne Grant (chair), Dorothy Bergendahl (treasurer), and Sheila Porter (secretary) of the Brownell Library Board of Trustees presented on this item, along with Library Director Hysko. Ms. Grant noted that the Library Trustees update the Library's strategic plan every five years. Ms. Grant spoke about the process updating the Library's Strategic Plan for 2026-2030, the focus of which was to align library services with community needs, municipal goals, and future growth. She noted that a survey was fielded to the community, which had around 500 responses, and the results of that survey guided the strategic plan update. She noted the goals that the plan prioritizes, which include fostering community and belonging, improving access and innovation, reimagining the library spaces to support flexible and inclusive use, and investing in staff growth and ensuring good long-term resource stewardship. She provided an overview of the demographics of survey respondents and then summarized survey responses. She spoke about the demographics of those who use programming, noting that they are trying to get more adults to attend and participate in programming. Councilor Certa asked about this and what could be driving the lack of engagement. Ms. Bergendahl noted that this could be an after-effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, where many older adults don't feel comfortable attending in-person events with large crowds still. Councilor Certa suggested possibly holding topical conversations at Brownell related to the City's strategic goals and priorities.

The following public comments were received:

- Resa thanked the Trustees for making Brownell one of the best libraries in the state. She noted that she used to attend programming at the Library in person but has not done so since prior to the pandemic, given the continued prevalence of Covid-19.

Councilor Miller spoke about the Library's recent potluck event, commending it and noting that it will be a recurring event.

c. Discussion & Consideration of Amendments to Municipal Code Chapter 9: Enforcement and Chapter 18: Ordinance regulating control of litter, refuse, garbage, junk, junk motor vehicles, trash, and solid waste

Councilor Certa noted that the proposed amendments will allow for designees for certain authorities, and asked how the public will know who the designees are. Director Yuen noted that all staff in the Community Development Department are also assistant zoning administrators, so they are already designees by extension. He noted that all enforcement is conducted via mail and phone and noted that staff are generally not permitted on private property without a warrant. He spoke about situations where staff are allowed onto properties to conduct inspections (such as when there is an active zoning permit). City Council President Thibeault sought clarity about the language used between Sections 902 and 1802, noting that Section 9 authorizes the Community Development Director or designee to issue a fine, and that Section 1802 states that the City Manager is responsible for enforcing compliance with the ordinance. She asked whether Section 1802 would also allow for the Community Development Director (as a designated municipal officer) to enforce compliance. City Manager Mahony suggested seeking clarity from legal counsel on this language prior to adoption.

City Council President Thibeault made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council adopt the amendments to the Essex Junction Municipal Code Chapters 9 and 18 as presented, pending legal review. The motion passed 5-0.

d. Amtrak Update and Consideration of Submittal of Fund Obligation

Director Yuen noted that the project team has completed the scope, budget, and schedule needed for submission to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to pursue grant obligation, pending a final piece of documentation from the New England Central Railroad (NECR). He provided an overview of what parts of the scope of the project have changed since the 2016 scoping study and what will remain the same. He noted the central feature from the scoping study, that of a continuous roof canopy that will cover both the bus loading area and part of the train platform. He noted that the 2016 study also suggested establishing a two-way traffic pattern, but that they have determined that there are ways to improve traffic circulation without establishing this new traffic pattern. He noted that the preliminary engineering team have proposed a donut-shaped canopy that would extend out to the exposed pedestrian areas around the building but wouldn't cap the entire roof (to ensure minimal disruption to the HVAC and rooftop utilities for the building). He noted that removing the existing vestibule is not currently in scope, but that a through path could be created. He noted circulation patterns that would be minimal impact but would be improvements over current state. He noted a handful of "add on" elements that are included in the scope but that would be implemented only if the budget allows, which include demolition of the disused ATM vestibule, façade improvements, new furnishings, and renovation of the existing waiting room. City Manager Mahony noted that this \$3 million federally-funded project requires a \$550,000 match from the City (once the downtown transportation grant is taken into account). She said the decision before the Council tonight is whether to obligate the City match and move forward with the project.

Councilor Certa acknowledged that this project has been discussed since 2016, but expressed skepticism about funding a project that will essentially be doing the railroad a favor and be to their economic benefit. He asked how many people are actually using the train station on a daily basis. Director Yuen replied that 16,001 used Essex Junction Station on Amtrak in 2023. He noted that the station is used more frequently by Green Mountain Transit, given that it is the terminus of Route 2 (the second busiest in Chittenden County). City Manager Mahony said that though neither the City nor Amtrak own the building, the structure is within the downtown of the City and it continues to be an eyesore in its current state. She spoke about the City's commitment to multi-modal travel, and said that if the City won't do this, no one else will. Councilor Certa asked if there are other multi-modal projects in the City's capital project lineup that could be more impactful. Director Yuen noted that the project would be a functional improvement in addition to an aesthetic improvement, and also noted that rail in the U.S. is largely owned by freight companies, which lease their tracks and some stations to Amtrak. He said that NECR does not have financial interest in improvements to the station, but the community benefits greatly if station improvements increase ridership and multi-modal outcomes in the City. Councilor Haney said this project was a high priority for the Village Trustees for many

years, and spoke about the prodigious amount of lobbying community members conducted with Senator Leahy's staff to obtain these federal funds. She said that from an economic development standpoint, improving this station has many benefits. She said the more welcoming it looks, the more people will want to use it and be in that area. She expressed support for this improvement. Councilor Miller noted that Amtrak had 17,817 riders out of Essex Junction in FY25, and that the federal government's ADA-compliant ramp was \$4.86 million. He said that this project is low-risk and potentially high-reward for the City. Councilor Shelden expressed support for these station improvements. He suggested keeping the vestibule for extra seating and exploring whether solar panels could be put on the building (if funding and flexibility allow for this).

The following public comments were received:

- Resa spoke about the number of people who judge Essex Junction based solely on the train station and surrounding area, given that that is the extent of their exposure. She expressed support for this as an important investment.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council direct staff to pursue the federal grant obligation for the Essex Junction Train and Bus Station Improvements Project as presented. The motion passed 5-0.

e. Discussion and Consideration of Crescent Connector CAP Ordinance & Set Public Hearing
City Manager Mahony noted that this is a new ordinance and relate to a corrective action plan for the contaminated soils under the Crescent Connector Road. She said that this ordinance would require that anyone who needs to excavate within the right-of-way moving forward needs to do so in compliance with the Corrective Action Plan set forth in the ordinance. Councilor Shelden suggested language removing the City Council and adding the Zoning Administrator and designees to the ordinance so that the City Manager or Zoning Administrator could delegate authority to a municipal officer more quickly to approve an excavation permit.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, that the City Council warn a public hearing on August 13, 2025 at 6:30pm to receive comment on the new proposed Essex Junction Municipal Ordinance Chapter 22 Ordinance Regulating Earth Work within the Crescent Connector Right-of-Way as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

f. 2025 Legislative Update

City Manager Mahony provided an overview of the legislative activity in 2025 and acts of relevance for Essex Junction. She noted that Act 51 contains amendments to Open Meeting Law that clarify the types of bodies covered—"public body" and "advisory body", requirements to prohibit virtual-only meetings for public bodies, and modifications to executive session requirements. Councilor Certa asked whether all of the City's public meetings could be put onto YouTube, and City Manager Mahony said they could look into this. City Manager Mahony then spoke about Act 57 (the Flood Bill), which contains amendments related to revisions for the Local Option Tax formula and the authority to create and maintain an Unassigned Fund Balance. She spoke about Act 69 (related to Housing and Development) and the creation of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program, which allows for the use of future tax revenue of housing projects to pay for the costs of capital projects needed to support that housing development. She then spoke about Act 37 (Stormwater Management), which contains amendments related to compliance with the 3-acre permit rule and associated deadlines. She spoke about Act 70 (Miscellaneous Changes to Election Law). She then spoke about Act 73 (Transforming Vermont's Education Governance, Quality, and Finance Systems), noting that implications for the City include reappraisal changes and property classification changes. Councilor Haney suggested a joint conversation with the School Board about this bill and implications for property tax increases that could come out of future reappraisals. City Manager Mahony spoke about Act 43 (the FY2026 Transportation Bill), which contains a reduction in State paving funds.

- g. Approve Continued Use of Per Capita Cost Share for the Essex Police Department Services with the Town of Essex **was Consent Item #7b**
- Councilor Sheldon expressed concern that the City is paying for 50% of a contract that it has no say in negotiating, though he expressed support for the financial agreements themselves.

Councilor Sheldon made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council approve the allocation of costs on a per capita basis under the Police Services Agreement that the City has with the Town of Essex. The motion passed 5-0.

7. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes: June 25, 2025, and July 9, 2025
- b. Approve Continued Use of Per Capita Cost Share for the Essex Police Department Services with the Town of Essex **now Business Item #6g**
- c. Appoint Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Board Representative
- d. Approve Questica Software Subscription Renewal

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 5-0.

8. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony noted that Crescent Connector signals have been adjusted, but said that the smart signal is still being fixed and the emergency emitter at Park and South is also still being worked on. She noted that the water line replacement project on Iroquois Road has started. She noted that the library roof project is starting soon. She noted that the project on Pearl Street between the West Street Extension and Susie Wilson Road will be presented to the Planning Commission on August 7th. She noted that repaving will begin on August 7th. She also spoke about national night out. She further noted that the wastewater team found a wedding ring in the grit collector and will hold it until its owner comes forward. Councilor Haney spoke about Super Sucker 7000 activity in her neighborhood. Councilor Miller thanked the workers responsible for night street marking in the Crescent Connector area.

9. READING FILE

- a. Check Warrant #24078, June 25, 2025; #24080, July 11, 2025
- b. June Financials
- c. Connect the Junction Online Forum is Open
- d. PCAB Minutes – June 17, 2025
- e. PC Minutes – July 10, 2025
- f. Gov Minutes – June 12, 2025
- g. CJC Restorative Reading Series
- h. City Council Open Forum Responses

10. ADJOURN

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:45 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt