

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
August 12, 2026**

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Amber Thibeault, President; Tim Miller, Vice President; Bethany Clark, Clerk; Raj Chawla, Brian Shelden.

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Ron Hoague, Police Chief, Essex Police Department; Lt. Mike Chistillin, Essex Police Department;

OTHERS PRESENT: Marcus Certa, Gwendolyn Evans, Colby LaMarche, Reed Nye, Mike, 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

Michael McDonald noted that they recently moved back to Essex Junction and that they are happy to be here.

5. RECOGNITION

a. Resolution of Appreciation for Erna Deutsch

Councilor Chawla read a resolution of appreciation for Erna Deutsch for their work at the Brownell Public Library, and thanked Erna on behalf of the Council and staff for their work, and expressed hopes for a wonderful retirement.

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. *Interview and Consideration of Appointment to the Police Community Advisory Board

The Council interviewed Kolby LaMarche for an open position on the Police Community Advisory Committee. The applicants spoke about their relevant experience, involvement in the community, qualifications, and interest in participating on the Police Community Advisory Committee. Councilors asked the applicant questions related to whether the applicant would be interested in serving on other committees.

b. Department Head Brief to Council with Essex Police Department's Chief Hoague

Chief Hoague and Lt. Chistillin spoke to this agenda item. Chief Hoague began by noting challenges with recruitment to the department, given that they have lost several staff to retirements and movement to other careers. He noted that they have been working with a company from Albany to create video content to broaden the public and potential job applicants' understanding of what it's like to work in the department and what the application process is like. He noted that they currently have 25 out of 31 positions filled, though they will be down to 24 positions shortly. He noted that they still have a full complement of dispatchers and part-time officers. He provided an update on the recently-created crime reduction team, which was formed to address property crime in Essex. Lt. Chistillin spoke further about the crime reduction team, noting that the impetus was repeated theft at several businesses in the community and attempted larceny or trespasses into vehicles. He noted that a group of officers have made contact with a number of businesses to introduce a plan and process for trying to curb these thefts. He noted that they have been seeing a number of repeat offenders, the majority of whom are not from Essex but have ties to Essex. He spoke about challenges that some businesses have due to their own corporate policies around theft, sometimes resulting in delays in investigations. He spoke about attempts to be proactive and have officers on site to intercept potential thefts.

He spoke about challenges with staffing levels to be as proactive as possible with vehicle trespassing. He noted that they have intercepted 4-5 people in the last 6 months in attempted vehicle trespassing, but noted that this continues to be a persistent issue. Councilor Chawla asked how much time this crime reduction team spends on its work, and also asked about the type and level of theft occurring at businesses. Lt. Chistillin said that for one individual who lives in Essex, their retail thefts have been approximately \$1,200 to \$1,500 over the last month, or between \$25 and \$150 per instance. He said that with certain businesses, such as Lowe's, they will compile a number of cases to share with the Police Department, meaning that some of them will already be several weeks old by the time the Police Department is involved. He noted that for non-local offenders, they try to work with other surrounding agencies to assist in locating individuals and issuing them citations. Councilor Chawla asked if the amount of time and resource being put into this team is diverting resources from other Police Department work at a time when the Department is strained in terms of workforce and capacity. Chief Hoague noted that the team conducts this work as it is able to, and isn't diverting resources from other areas. He noted that a retail theft case takes between one and four hours of an officer's time.

Chief Hoague then spoke about crime statistics for 2026 for the Town of Essex and City of Essex Junction. He noted that property crime incidents, other than retail theft, have been on a downward trend since 2024. He said that this is likely due to being proactive about advising the public to lock their vehicles, and that officers have been doing increased patrols at night as they are able to. He also noted that the Chittenden County Accountability Court has resulted in repeat offenders having their cases resolved. He also noted a downward trend in vehicle theft, likely driven by offenders being arrested or no longer being in the area.

Chief Hoague then spoke about crime statistics for 2026 for the City of Essex Junction specifically. He noted that retail theft for the City is higher than it was for 2025, and the Council spoke about how this could be driven by the opening of the Tractor Supply Company location in Essex Junction, and Lt. Chistillin spoke about engaging with that business specifically on targeted areas for improvement. Chief Hoague noted that there have been general downward trend for other types of crime, including domestic assaults and other types of assault. He spoke about traffic statistics, including vehicle stops and tickets and warnings. He noted that the Department's traffic officer has returned and has been active in conducting traffic stops, and that other officers are also patrolling and conducting proactive enforcement. Councilor Sheldon asked if the Department is finding that crime incidents are generally split equally between the Town and City, and Chief Hoague replied that retail theft incidents are slightly more frequent in the Town, given the location of a number of prominent businesses and business sites, including the Essex Experience.

Chief Hoague then spoke briefly about other items, including the Community Justice Center (CJC) transition and dog issues. He noted that CJC operations were transferred to the Chittenden County CJC, and that they have been good partners in handling cases given to them by the Essex Police Department. He noted that the Town has been dealing with issues related to dog handling, resulting in potential ordinance amendments on this topic, and that the Police Department will likely come to the City to request ordinance amendments for the sake of consistency, should the voters approve amendments for the Town.

Councilor Miller asked about alcohol and drug use and electric bikes (e-bikes). Chief Hoague replied that this is a prominent public safety topic, noting that there may potentially be language introduced in the next legislative session to try and address this more specifically. Councilor Chawla asked if the Department has the authority under the City's current ordinances for enforcement, and Chief Hoague replied that yes, there are current ordinances and current enforcement mechanisms. Councilor Miller also noted that the Champlain Valley Fair is occurring later this month, and that the officers working the fair are paid by the fair to be there, and that this will not negatively impact the Police Department's patrol shifts or other capacity.

c. Police Community Advisory Board Update to Council

Gwendolyn Evans, the Chair of the Police Community Advisory Board (PCAB), spoke on this agenda item. G. Evans spoke about the development of the Board's annual work plan, noting that the PCAB has committed to attending at least six community events per year and representing the PCAB at such events. They spoke

about wanting to host events themselves, and other strategies to further engage with the public and community. They noted the ICE raid in South Burlington in March and spoke about hosting a series of Know Your Rights trainings to help educate the community and prepare for such an event, should it occur in Essex. They spoke about becoming more active and attending more City-specific events, including Meet Me On Main. They spoke about the PCAB as an opportunity to be a bridge and a healing element between the community and the Police Department. Councilor Chawla suggested having some PCAB educational training about the types of surveillance tools that the Essex Police Department uses, given the heightened national concern about certain surveillance technology and whether it is used by municipal law enforcement agencies.

d. **2026 Legislative Update**

City Manager Mahony spoke about this agenda item, which pertained to a summary of the 2026 legislative session and highlighted acts of relevancy for Essex Junction. City Manager Mahony began by summarizing legislation related to planning, zoning, housing, and energy, including the Housing Omnibus Bill (Act 179), which continues Vermont's housing production strategy, Act 250 Tier Jurisdiction (Act 152), which repealed the road rule and eliminated Tier 3, Municipal Regulation of Agriculture (Act 166), which clarifies and narrows municipal authority over agriculture, Portable Solar Energy Devices (Act 149), which authorizes the installation of small plug-in solar devices without a PUC permit, and Potable Water Supply and Wastewater Connections (Act 174), which establishes a streamlined process for local permitting of water and wastewater connections. City Manager Mahony then spoke about miscellaneous legislation that affects the City, including Act 162, which designates the Fire Chief as the Fire Warden, Act 163, which allows municipalities to retain the authority to establish and operate local stormwater utilities even if regional stormwater utilities exist, Act 168, which is the FY27 Transportation Bill, Act 170, which relates to substantial education and state property tax reforms, and Act 144, which is the Appropriations Bill. City Manager Mahony then spoke about other bills of interest, including Act 98, which revamps a new county and regional governance study committee, and Act 176, which establishes cannabis sales at events requiring permission from municipal cannabis control boards. Councilor Chawla suggested that it may be good to conduct some education on Act 176 cannabis requirements, to ensure that the City's cannabis control board is aware of the legislation.

7. **CONSENT ITEMS**

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes: July 22, 2026 & July 28, 2026
- b. Accept Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grant for Cascade Park
- c. Approve Essex High School Homecoming Bonfire Burn Permit Request

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

8. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony noted that tax bills were mailed to residents on August 7, including educational inserts. City Manager Mahony noted that if an individual filed a grievance with the Assessor's Office, tax bills are based on the original abstract filed in June. City Manager Mahony noted that the first installment of the tax bill is due by September 15, 2026. Councilor Miller noted a large fire at 197 Pearl Street and spoke about the Fire Department's work to handle the fire, as well as thanked other municipalities for their mutual aid.

9. **READING FILE**

- a. Check Warrant #24125 – July 24, 2026
- b. July Financials Report
- c. Regional Boards and Committees Memo
- d. Development Review Board Minutes – July 17, 2026
- e. Tree Farm Management Group Minutes – July 13, 2026
- f. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes – May 26, 2026

10. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. *An Executive Session may be needed to discuss the appointment of public officials

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Clark, that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss the appointment of public officials pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(A)(3) to include the City Manager. The motion passed 5-0.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Clark, to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:14 P.M.

11. **ADJOURN**

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Clark, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:14 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt