

CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2023

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

**ADMINISTRATION and STAFF:** Regina Mahony, City Manager; Brad Luck, Recreation Director; Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality Superintendent; Jess Morris, Finance Director

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Paul Bohne, Green Mountain Transit; Alise Certa; Annie Cooper; Pat Murray; Frank Puleo; Cody Racine; Janelle Racine; Ken Signorello; Jason Struthers; Kate Vanni; Jenna P.; Bridget; Heidi; Robin; RSM

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Brown called the meeting of the City Council to order at 6:30 PM.

**2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/ CHANGES**

Mr. Brown requested that item 5g. Discussion of the FY24 General Fund Budget and Consideration of Warning the Public Hearing and item 5e. Discussion and Consideration of Moving the 2023 Annual Meeting swap places on the agenda. Mr. Chawla requested that an additional memo be added to item 5e. Mr. Tyler noted that he had comments to share in item 7a, Board Member Comments.

**3. APPROVE AGENDA**

**GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed 5-0.**

**4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

None.

**5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Discussion and consideration of Health Officer Applicant, Faith Foley**

Ms. Foley said she is interested in this position because she is looking for a fulfilling part-time opportunity. She enjoys working with people to problem-solve and has experience in rental inspections through her previous work at the Burlington Housing Authority. Mr. Tyler asked Ms. Foley what she feels is the most common conflict or concern regarding rental housing. She said disagreements between tenants and landlords over repairs and bedbug infestations. Mr. Chawla and Ms. Mahony spoke of the “in-between” nature of this appointment, saying that this role could be served at some point by a full-time staff position. Ms. Foley said that she works full-time and would be able to address concerns on evenings and weekends. Ms. Mahony said that the Town and City health officers would provide backup services to one another as needed.

**GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to approve Faith Foley as the City’s Health Officer. Motion passed 5-0.**

**b. Discussion of Green Mountain Transit Service Changes, Paul Bohne**

48 Mr. Bohne said that he has served as the Town of Essex’s representative for the past five years and has  
49 held a variety of other positions at Green Mountain Transit (GMT). He said that difficult financial  
50 situations forced GMT to cut services, including in Essex Junction. Mr. Bohne said that GMT would be re-  
51 instituting fares in June of 2023. There is a strong desire for more bus services from Essex Junction to the  
52 UVM Medical Center, and GMT is working to see if this would be possible. He said that GMT is short  
53 about six drivers and has had to spend a significant amount on overtime costs to keep existing routes  
54 running, becoming both a cost and employee morale issue. Mr. Chawla clarified that the “service  
55 additions” Mr. Bohne referenced were really adding back services that had been cut previously. He also  
56 asked if a community cost increase could help add services back. Mr. Bohne said that GMT is already  
57 asking for a 5% increase this year. Mr. Chawla said Essex Junction’s community plan relies heavily on  
58 public transportation. He also raised the possibility of Essex Junction paying more for additional services.  
59 Mr. Brown said he would like to have a conversation with the GMT Board to learn more about this.  
60

61 **c. Discussion and Consideration of a Wastewater Capital Plan Modification, Chelsea Mandigo**

62 Ms. Mandigo said that the Wastewater Treatment Facility has a co-generation system that produces heat  
63 and electricity for the plant. Originally, it was thought that only the generator needed replacement.  
64 However, it was found that the engine also needs to be replaced. If it is ordered promptly, the engine will  
65 arrive in June. Mr. Brown said that this product should pay for itself in a few years and will significantly  
66 reduce monthly power and natural gas bills. Ms. Mandigo said that this equipment would help to capture  
67 excess methane rather than release it into the environment.  
68

69 **DAN KERIN made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, that the City Council amend the**  
70 **Wastewater Capital Plan to allocate funds not to exceed \$150,000 for the emergency replacement of**  
71 **the co-generation engine. Motion passed 5-0.**  
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73 **d. Discussion of the FY24 Enterprise Budgets**

74 Water, Wastewater, and Sanitation

75 Ms. Morris said that the most notable change in the Water, Wastewater, and Sanitation Funds for the FY24  
76 budget is an increase in the amount each fund is charged for administrative fees. These fees are calculated  
77 based on the costs for salaries and wages for administrative and finance staff, as well as a portion of  
78 building maintenance for Lincoln Hall. She said that the rate calculations from the last meeting were  
79 incorrect and thus have dropped since the last meeting. The proposed utility rates will result in an 8.47%  
80 increase which calculates to \$49.62 per year on an average bill.  
81

82 Senior Center Fund

83 Ms. Morris said that the Town provides this budget and that membership fees fund this. The Senior Center  
84 will maintain the status quo in FY 24.  
85

86 EJRP Program Fund

87 Mr. Luck said that this fund is an enterprise fund, and it is fully funded by user fees. Seventeen of the full-  
88 time EJRP staff are paid for out of this fund. Mr. Brown said the budget appeared to spend \$16,000 more  
89 than it brought in. Ms. Morris said that it is due to estimated Worker’s Compensation insurance increases.  
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91 **e. Discussion of the FY24 General Fund Budget and Consideration of Warning the Public Hearing**

92 Ms. Mahony discussed the Council’s progress thus far in creating the FY24 budget. She said there is a  
93 1.6% tax increase from FY23 to FY24 or \$42 for an average home. She detailed five new positions,  
94 programmatic increases, and the uses of the Local Option Tax funds. Mr. Brown noted that the public

95 hearing process is the opportunity for members of the public to have input on the budget and that there is  
96 no longer the option to make changes at the annual meeting.

97

98 Mr. Chawla discussed a memo regarding raising the City Council stipends to \$6,500 a year. He stated that  
99 this change would help to allow more diverse representation on the Council. Paying Councilors more  
100 would remove barriers to serving on the Council from traditionally unrepresented groups. Mr. Chawla said  
101 that he estimates the average City Councilor works 21 hours in this capacity. Investing in these stipends  
102 will show that the community is serious about bringing more voices to the table. Mr. Kerin said that he is  
103 opposed to increasing stipends. He said that all City Councilors will need to be elected and that it seems  
104 like this could be perceived as an effort of the Council to create a future Council with a certain vision. He  
105 said it is difficult to get public participation and that putting more money towards the issue will not help.  
106 He discussed his experience serving on Boards as a single parent working a varied schedule. He expressed  
107 concern that taxpayers cannot afford the increase that this would bring. Mr. Kerin said that more people are  
108 involved in local government than ever before due to remote participation options. Mr. Brown said that  
109 while this stipend will not take away all barriers, it may help some people participate in government who  
110 have not done so before. Mr. Tyler said it is important that potential counselors be interested in a genuine  
111 care for the community, not a potential financial gain. He also expressed concern that it could be seen that  
112 the City needs to pay people interested in serving on the Council. He also said that the City has no idea  
113 who would be elected and that the desired result could be very different from what actually happens.

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115 Mr. Brown requested public comment. Ms. Mahony read the following comment from Bridgit, “I support  
116 the incremental stipend increase for City Councilors. I think it might entice younger people to run and  
117 serve. We need to be proactive about this. I’m appreciative of the conversation you’re having.” Mr.  
118 Murray expressed his support for this proposal. He said that he feels that some people in the community are  
119 being prevented from participating in leadership positions due to financial constraints.

120 Mr. Struthers suggested using stipend money to help to fund City Council campaigns. Ms. Cooper said that  
121 she was put off by Mr. Chawla’s lack of professionalism towards his colleagues, but she does support his  
122 idea. Mr. Brown requested that the issue be tabled until the next meeting. Mr. Chawla also offered the  
123 proposal that the stipend could be listed as “up to \$6,500” and said it could be an individual’s choice of  
124 whether to take the funds.

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126 Moving on to the rest of the budget, Mr. Brown suggested offering a one-time inflation adjustment to staff  
127 rather than a permanent salary percentage increase.

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129 **DAN KERIN made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, that the City Council warn a public**  
130 **hearing for the fiscal year 2024 proposed budgets and capital programs for the City of Essex**  
131 **Junction to be held Wednesday, February 8, 2023, and Wednesday, February 22, 2023. Motion**  
132 **passed 5-0.**

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#### 134 **f. Discussion and Consideration of Moving the 2023 Annual Meeting**

135 Ms. Mahony said that Annual Meeting is scheduled for the first night of Passover. Voters decided upon this  
136 at the last Annual Meeting. She suggested moving the meeting to April 10, 2023. However, she noted that  
137 this evening is also the Essex Westford School District’s meeting night. It may be possible to combine  
138 these two meetings. However, there are some associated complications. Mr. Brown said he would like to  
139 bring back some of the excitement of the Annual Meeting, such as the community dinner and community  
140 organizations tabling. The Council discussed the possibility of having the meeting on the same evening,  
141 and Mr. Tyler said that this has happened in the past. Mr. Chawla stated that the Council did not intend to

142 hold a meeting on Passover and intends to make it right. The final decision will be made at a future  
143 meeting.

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145 **g. Discussion of Charter Changes**

146 Mr. Brown said that four charter changes are proposed. The first is to change the charter to allow the Chair  
147 to serve as Health Officer, which is technically considered an employment position with the City. The  
148 second is to remove the line that would prevent Councilors from holding City employment for a year after  
149 their term ends. The third is to remove the role of moderator, as the annual meeting is an informational  
150 meeting now. The position could be appointed if need be. The fourth change is to no longer have the  
151 community vote on when to hold the annual meeting a year in advance. This would make it a City Council  
152 decision and ideally be scheduled to combine the municipal and school votes.

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154 **h. Discussion of Dog Ordinance & Rules of Procedure**

155 Ms. Mahony said that the City held its first dog bite hearing on January 11, which has brought forth several  
156 procedural and policy-level questions. She recommends that Rules of Procedure be established to handle  
157 these hearings. She discussed the pros and cons of amending the ordinance and the possibility of aligning  
158 with the Town of Essex, so the Police Department has the same rules to follow in both communities.

159 Mr. Chawla and Mr. Tyler expressed support for both procedural and policy changes to prevent dogs from  
160 repeatedly biting other animals. Mr. Tyler said that he would like to see some set conditions for specific  
161 types of bites. Mr. Brown said that the Council is not animal control nor animal behavior experts and that  
162 some expert guidance needs to be provided moving forward. Ms. Thibeault suggested that the Council  
163 participate in state trainings on the issue. Mr. Brown requested public input. Ms. Racine encouraged the  
164 adoption of the Town ordinance, and Mr. Racine encouraged the Council to take vicious dog attacks  
165 seriously. Ms. Certa said she is a dog owner and has fostered thirteen dogs. She encouraged the Council to  
166 utilize animal control to determine bite levels. She said that dogs bite other dogs frequently and much more  
167 often than they bite humans. Ms. Mahony said that she would have legal counsel review the current Town  
168 ordinance and bring it back to a future meeting.

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170 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

171 **Motion by RAJ CHAWLA, second by DAN KERIN, to approve the consent agenda. Motion passed**  
172 **5-0.**

173 **a. Approve Check Warrants #17336 (1/13/2023) and #17337 (1/20/2023)**

174 **b. Approve Minutes: December 6, 2022, and January 11, 2023**

175 **c. Main Street Waterline Bid Award**

176 **d. Resolution for 1 Main Street Park Downtown Transit Fund Application**

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178 **7. READING FILE**

179 **a. Board member comments:** Mr. Tyler said that he and Mr. Kerin have always wanted to have an indoor  
180 recreation facility and to make better use of Stevens Park. He superimposed a picture of the Miller Building  
181 at the Champlain Valley Expo on Stevens Park and said there would be no loss of the wooded area for  
182 adjoining property owners. He said that this location would be easily accessible in the center of the City  
183 and could be used for after-school and senior programs. He encouraged the Council to consider this idea  
184 for the future and said that the use of the park has declined in the last 30 years. Mr. Kerin described issues  
185 at the park and said that nefarious activity occurs there. Mr. Brown requested public comment. Ms. Certa  
186 said she would like to see this area utilized better and suggested how this space could be used for arts. Ms.  
187 Cooper said that the City has not had a Recreation Advisory Committee in seven years and suggested that  
188 this be reimplemented as soon as possible. Mr. Tyler discussed the long-term possibilities associated with  
189 the current EWSD building adjoining Stevens Park.

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Mr. Brown encouraged members of the public who are interested to review the dates of Champlain Valley Expo events and said that it would also be available on the website.

- b. Champlain Valley Expo Annual Permit Application 2023**
- c. December Library Report**
- d. Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Housing Convening Agenda**
- e. Joint Housing Committee Minutes: January 4, 2023**
- f. Development Review Board Minutes: January 12, 2023**

**8. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. An executive session may be needed to discuss the appointment of a public official**  
An executive session was not held.

**9. ADJOURN**

**DAN KERIN made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 9:14 PM**

Respectfully Submitted,  
Darby Mayville  
Recording Secretary