



**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 2 Lincoln St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Wednesday, January 24, 2024
6:30 PM

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
 - b. Rental Registry Public Hearing
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Discussion and Consideration of Rental Registry and Inspection Ordinance
 - b. Discussion of FY25 General Fund Budget and Public Hearing Warning
 - c. Discussion and Consideration of Neighborhood Development Area Expansion
 - d. Discussion of 2 Lincoln Renovation Plan Update
 - e. Approve Adding VMERS Defined Contribution Option-Revised
6. **CONSENT ITEMS**
 - a. Approve Meeting Minutes: January 10, 2024
 - b. Acting as Local Cannabis Control Commission: Approve Passion Fruit Farms License Renewal
 - c. Acting as Local Cannabis Control Commission: Approve Sweetspot Cannabis Retail License
 - d. Approve Liquor License Renewals
 - e. Approve Submittal of Certificate of Highway Mileage
7. **READING FILE**
 - a. Council Member & Manager Comments
 - b. Approve Check Warrant #24030 01/12/24
 - c. Pephlo Article from NEWEA Journal
 - d. CVE Annual Permit Application
 - e. December Financial Reports
 - f. Planning Commission Minutes January 4, 2024
 - g. Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Minutes January 11, 2024
 - h. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes January 16, 2024
 - i. FY25 Initial Draft of the Enterprise Budgets
8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
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.

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
JANUARY 24, 2024**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Chris Gaboriault, Fire Chief; Wendy Hysko, Library Director; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director; Harlan Smith, Interim Building Coordinator; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Beth Abustan, Jean Allard, Meg Armstrong, Lee Barnett, Michelle Barnett, Leslie Bashaw, Greg Bates, Dorothy Bergdahl, Deb Billado, Viktorija Blanchard, Jeff Bourdeau, Sharon Bourdeau, Alexis Brown, Heidi Clark, C. Collins, Kevin Collins, Norbert Collins, Annie Cooper, Christina Corodimas, Cora Delucia, Jackie Dibartolomeo, Howard Druckerman, Elton Ernest, Steve Eustis, Anne Flanke, Kathy Flynn, Buddy Gammal, John Giroux, Jeff Goodrich, Brett Grabowski, Jeanne Grant, Sean Handy, Karen Hergesheimer, Michael Hopwood, Tamara Jaques, Jacob Jones, Lydia Kenney, Rick Knapp, Ron Lafountain, Roland Lamore, Andy Lawrence, Madison Lebrun, Jean MacBride, Kristofer McEwing, Michael Meehan, Tim Miller, Darryl Montague, Bridget Myer, Alfred Parrella, Cecilia Polansky, John Provoncher, Cindy Provost, Brad Rubman, Jeff Rubman, Sara Shaw, Richard Smith, Diane Stevens, Jason Struthers, Willem Trowbridge, Ann Wadsworth, James Waite, Alex Weaver, Taylor Wessels, Joan Williamson, Marcus Wilson, Bruce Wisinski, Jessica Wisloski, Kahlil Zaloom, Beauregard, Leslie, Michelle, Resa, Scott, Sheila.

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Councilor Certa requested that consent agenda item #6a (January 10, 2024 City Council Draft Meeting Minutes) become agenda item #5f.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, to make consent agenda item #6a business item #5f. The motion passed 4-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

Dorothy "Dottie" Bergdahl spoke as a Library Trustee to note that the Brownell Library budget that was worked on two weeks ago was inaccurate in its calculation of salaries. She said that the supposed 8.7% increase is really 5%. She noted that the FY25 budget did not get to the Library Trustees in time for its review at its November meeting and that they did not have enough time to review the budget closely to notice this error. She said that they will endeavor to do better in future, and hopes that information comes to the Trustees more quickly in future.

Annie Cooper said that she hopes the City Council and staff will offer the Brownell Library an apology about the errors in its budget and for the attack and confusion this incurred toward the Library unnecessarily. She said she wants to maintain public trust in the good work that staff conducts on a daily

53 basis, and advocated for the equitable treatment of each department in the City during the budget
54 season.

55
56 b. Rental Registry Public Hearing

57 Director Yuen began by describing what a rental registry and inspection program is, noting that they
58 have registration requirements and regular inspections toward a set standard. He said that municipal
59 registry programs are active in Barre, Brattleboro, Burlington, St. Albans, St. Johnsbury, and Winooski.
60 He noted that South Burlington is also currently working on a rental registry program. He spoke about
61 rental property's prominence in Essex Junction's housing supply, saying that about 40% of housing units
62 in the City are rentals and the new housing stock is predominantly rentals (which is not surprising, given
63 the low vacancy rate). He showed where the rental units are generally located in Essex Junction. He
64 spoke about the history of the proposed program, noting that one of the objectives of the 2019
65 Comprehensive Plan for Essex called out the need to identify funding to compile a rental registry and
66 rental inspection program, as well as ensuring thoughtful growth in the Junction. He spoke about the
67 formation of the Joint Housing Commission (City and Town) in 2020, which created a task force to
68 explore the creation of a rental registry and inspection program. He noted that at the state level, the
69 legislature translated primary responsibility for the Rental Housing Code to the Division of Fire Safety,
70 which added several State Fire Marshalls to provide a limited complaints-based inspection program. He
71 spoke about the City Planning Commission's work in 2023 to examine other municipal rental registry
72 and inspection programs and draft an ordinance for the City Council's consideration.

73
74 Director Yuen then spoke in more detail about the proposed ordinance. He said that it would protect the
75 life and safety of all residential renters, develop an inventory of residential rental properties in the City,
76 and improve opportunities to connect landlords to adequate resources for improving their properties. He
77 provided a definition of the rental housing that would be regulated under this ordinance, which would
78 include long-term and short-term rentals. He noted that owner-occupied dwelling units containing one
79 or two rooms rented out would be exempt from registration and inspection requirements. He spoke about
80 inspection procedures, noting that every unit would be inspected every five years, but that inspection
81 frequency would be determined based on risk factors, such as past violations, age of the building, and
82 complaint history. He said that if deficiencies are found, the landlord is notified and given time to address
83 the issue, and re-inspections within 90 days are free. He noted that this program is intended to be self-
84 funded, and would entail a \$120 fee per year to landlords. He spoke about public engagement activities
85 with landlords, which included informational postcards mailed out and communications through the
86 City's website, social media, and print media.

87
88 City Manager Mahony said that this has been contemplated since the FY24 budget development, which
89 has been to address the Council's desire to increase capacity to do code enforcement more broadly for
90 the Land Development Code (LDC). She also noted the potential for the Fire Department to host this
91 responsibility, and that there are pros and cons of this. She said that a pro of having the Fire Department
92 host this is that they could devote a staff member to it immediately, and that the program would have a
93 vehicle available to conduct this work already if housed in the Fire Department.

94
95 Councilor Chawla opened the public hearing.

96
97 The following public comments were made:

- 98 • Bridget Myer spoke in support of a rental registry, noting that she owns a rental registry in
99 Winooski. She said that they have established a rental registry in Winooski and that the quality
100 of rental housing in Winooski has improved tenfold since then. She said that there is substandard
101 housing in Essex Junction and that a rental registry would improve housing quality for everyone.
102 She said that the Fire Department seems the best-equipped to handle inspections, which is how
103 it occurs in Winooski. She said that she hopes this program is self-supporting.

- 104 • Andy Lawrence said that one of the City’s biggest problems is the cost of living for renters and
105 non-renters and said that this would be an extra cost and that he is a landlord of one unit attached
106 to his house. He said that there could be value for larger landlords with more units, but said that
107 he does not support it.
- 108 • Jess Wislowski said that small-time landlords will be the most impacted financially and that many
109 of them are near retirement age and that income from a unit is potentially what is allowing them
110 to be able to retire. She said that these units are also some of the most affordable units on the
111 market. She asked what types of code changes will trigger an inspection, since State code
112 requirements change often.
- 113 • Taylor Wessels said that all people deserve safe housing and that people don’t rely on complaint-
114 driven enforcement for cars or licenses and shouldn’t rely on it for something as important as
115 housing. He said that proactive enforcement is the most equitable way to ensure safe housing.
- 116 • Jeff Rubman spoke as the owner of the Autumn Pond development. He spoke about the various
117 inspections that the development must go through every year already, including a sprinkler
118 system inspection, fire alarm inspection, fire extinguisher inspections, boiler room inspections,
119 and elevator inspections. He said that this addition inspection would add \$50,000 to their cost
120 per year, which they would pass on to their tenants. He spoke about the difficulty of implementing
121 this inspection system for a development with 400 units. Brad Rubman also noted that the
122 revenues from this are estimated to be more than what it would cost to implement, so that should
123 be looked at.
- 124 • Lydia Kenney expressed concern that this fee would be passed on to renters, and said that it
125 should be prevented from being passed on to renters.
- 126 • Lee Barnett spoke against this proposal, citing the massive gentrification that has occurred in
127 Winooski, and said that this is a power grab by the government. He expressed concerns about
128 the hidden costs of this, saying that they will likely be passed on to renters.
- 129 • Buddy Gammal agreed with Lee, saying that there are mechanisms in place to ensure safety
130 already. He said that landlords who agree with this will register but those who don’t agree with
131 this won’t, therefore making the inventory inaccurate, and noted that this seems like an extra
132 level of bureaucracy with no added benefit. He noted that he did not receive a postcard or notice
133 of this, despite being a landlord in the Junction.
- 134 • Meg Armstrong spoke as the owner of two units at Whitcomb Farm and spoke against this
135 proposal, given that there are regulations in place at the state level. She said there is no reason
136 to implement additional regulations at the Village level, and that the costs will ultimately be
137 passed on to the tenants and will lead to higher rental costs. She said that there could be a
138 situation where property is bought and rental units within it won’t be available to rent for the first
139 three months after the sale, given the time that would be needed for the inspection and
140 processing.
- 141 • Michael Meehan spoke in opposition to this proposed ordinance. He said that while he agrees
142 with improving rental quality, this is already in place at the state level. He said he has issues with
143 a complaint-based system, given that he has had neighbors who make false claims about what
144 he has done to his home. He said that renters have all sorts of mechanisms of protections from
145 the state. He expressed concern about implementing a system with opportunities for corruption
146 and that wouldn’t solve the City’s housing problems and would ultimately be a waste of taxpayer
147 resources.
- 148 • Cindy Provost said that she owns two properties in Essex and used to own property in Burlington
149 (where they have had a rental registry for some time). She said that she is opposed to this and
150 that it will only increase costs for tenants and for landlords. She said that landlords have a difficult
151 time as it is, both ensuring that buildings are up to code and dealing with all of the tenant issues
152 that they have. She said that landlords have no recourse because tenants have all of the rights.
- 153 • Mike Hopwood spoke as a landlord in Essex Junction. He said that there is a lot of data around
154 how many rental units exist in Essex Junction but that there is no data on how many complaints

155 have been made to the City by renters. He said that this will be a serious cost to landlords that
156 will be passed on.

- 157 • Cecilia Polansky and John Herman spoke against this proposed new regulation, as landlords in
158 Essex Junction. Mr. Herman urged the Council not to add this regulation and expressed concern
159 that it could also open the door for corruption.
- 160 • Richard Smith expressed concern about how this would be staffed and spoke as a resident and
161 landlord. He noted that there is already a state-based complaint system up and running, but that
162 this would create an additional system at the local level at an additional cost, which will be felt by
163 landlords and passed on to tenants. He also said that if this is housed in the Fire Department, it
164 would create a safer community for all residents (not just renters), because it would allow for a
165 position that is there 24/7 instead of there on an on-call basis.
- 166 • Diane Stevens said she is not in favor of this proposed program. She said that the ordinance has
167 too many grey areas and that it doesn't make sense to put so much pressure on the landlords,
168 as they can only absorb so much.
- 169 • Skip Lamore spoke as the owner of a small duplex in Essex Junction, saying that they have a
170 young family of tenants and that they keep costs down in order to try and help them out. He said
171 that this regulation will only push costs on to tenants. He said that increasing these costs will only
172 decrease the supply of housing. He also asked for more information on the criteria for inspection.
173 He said he opposes this proposal.
- 174 • Al Parrella spoke in opposition to this proposal, saying that it is purely financial. He said that
175 many Section 8 tenants have an extensive inspection program already. He said that he previously
176 owned units in Burlington but sold them to avoid their rental registry regulation. He said that this
177 is in direct opposition to affordable housing.
- 178 • Brett Grabowski spoke as a property-owner in Essex Junction. He spoke in opposition to this
179 proposal, saying that it will increase costs for landlords that will be passed on to tenants. He said
180 that this proposal also duplicates what is occurring at the state level. He said that many units are
181 already subject to extensive inspections. He asked why the City would develop a rental inventory
182 and for what purpose.
- 183 • Elton Ernest spoke as a resident and in opposition to this proposal. He said that this feels like an
184 attack on homeowners by the government, and that they are being accused of having poor-
185 quality properties. He also spoke about stigma around short-term rentals. He noted that this
186 proposal would be inflationary.
- 187 • Kris McEwing spoke as a property manager in Essex Junction, and spoke in opposition to this.
188 He said it is attempting to solve an issue that doesn't exist, and would duplicate activities already
189 performed at the state level. He said that this will increase the cost of housing.
- 190 • Sean Handy spoke about a situation in which he had a tenant with hoarding tendencies who
191 couldn't close their windows and ended up with frozen pipes, which ultimately led to him being
192 fined as the landlord. He said that this proposal could ultimately lead to more evictions and
193 increased cost of housing, since landlords will be penalized for tenant-driven unsafe situations
194 and that is their only recourse. He said that tenants already have a number of mechanisms to
195 lodge complaints about the condition of their housing.
- 196 • John Provoncher spoke as a former landlord, current renter, and resident, as well as a plumber.
197 He said that Essex Junction seems like it has high-quality rentals already, and that it doesn't
198 seem like there is a good reason for this proposal other than for financial reasons.
- 199 • Darryl Montague spoke as a property-manager in Essex Junction and said that this is a solution
200 looking for a problem. He asked how many actual issues there have been related to rentals in
201 Essex Junction. He said that this inspection activity is already covered by the state and asked
202 why duplicate it at the local level.
- 203 • Joan Williamson spoke against this proposal, as the owner of an accessory apartment. She said
204 that she will pass the costs associated with this on to renters if this is passed. She also expressed
205 concern about being fined for non-compliance if contractor work is needed, given that there is a
206 lack of contractors and long wait times for contractor work as it is.

- 207 • Rick Knapp spoke as a landlord in Essex Junction, and spoke in opposition to this proposal. He
208 said that the costs will be passed down to the tenants. He said that he would not buy rentals in
209 Burlington or Winooski due to the regulations.
- 210 • Deb Billado spoke as a landlord in Essex Junction. She said that she had previously owned
211 property in Burlington but spoke against their rental registry, saying that it felt like it was just
212 another way for the City to make money, and that this proposed ordinance feels similar to her.
213 She said that this would only pass on costs to the people who can least afford it, especially given
214 the housing shortage and affordability issues throughout the state.
- 215 • Steve Eustis spoke against the proposed ordinance, advising the Council not to create a
216 bureaucracy if it is not needed. He asked how many complaints about rentals have been lodged
217 with the City that haven't been resolved in a timely manner through the state process. He said
218 that if the data doesn't show that there is a problem, it's difficult to support.
- 219 • Jeff Goodrich agreed with those who have spoken prior to him, in opposition to this proposal. He
220 said he does not agree with those who have spoken who hold a monopoly of rentals in the area.
221 He asked whether potentially increasing impact fees has been a consideration, if the City is
222 looking for more revenue. He also said that this does not seem like good timing, given potentially
223 significant increases in property taxes coming from Montpelier. He said that this proposal is trying
224 to fix something that isn't broken.
- 225 • Kevin Collins said that any proposal that makes things more complicated for the landlord
226 ultimately makes them more complicated for the tenant. He said that he does not think many
227 tenants would support this, given that these costs would be passed on to them.
- 228 • John Giroux spoke against this proposal, saying that it will lead to more regulation, higher cost,
229 and duplicated effort. He said that often, tenants are the ones who cause the problems and
230 destroy the property, and that landlords have no recourse other than to evict. He said that this
231 proposal is wrong.
- 232 • Bruce Wisinski said he owns units in Burlington and spoke about his experience with inspections
233 in that City. He said that the inspections are not consistent and are a hassle, which is frustrating
234 for landlords, and seems like a waste of time. He said that there are already avenues for tenants
235 to lodge complaints. He said that Vermont is a renter state rather than a landlord state in terms
236 of rights, and that many small-time landlords are one mortgage payment away from losing their
237 properties.
- 238 • Harlan Smith spoke as a renter in Essex Junction. He said that he is not for or against this
239 proposal, but expressed concern about costs being passed on to him as a renter. He asked how
240 many complaints have been made in the City of Essex Junction. He noted that many renters do
241 not know how to fix issues in their apartments, and that this added cost could almost be like
242 insurance, in that they know that their apartments are safe and have been inspected. He said
243 that the rental registry may be good from a safety standpoint, but that he has questions about
244 the fees and the process around inspection.

245
246 Councilor Chawla closed the public hearing.

247
248 **5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

249 a. Discussion and Consideration of Rental Registry and Inspection Ordinance

250 Councilor Haney asked for more clarity on whether this program should be included in the Community
251 Development Department versus the Fire Department. City Manager Mahony replied that this came from
252 the concept that the City Council wanted to enhance the services around code enforcement more
253 generally for the LDC. She noted that a position was included in the FY24 budget for code enforcement,
254 the rental registry, and health officer duties, which is being paid for through local option tax revenue. He
255 said that staff researched how these programs are operationalized for other municipalities. Director
256 Yuen noted that while some municipalities include this program in their Fire Department, others have
257 separate departments or include them in their Code Enforcement Departments. Councilor Chawla noted
258 that some of this has come about because Essex Junction's long-time volunteer health officer retired,

259 coupled with a desire for stronger ordinance enforcement in the City. He noted that municipalities are
260 required to have health officers, and that it has been difficult to recruit one. He said that they had pursued
261 this under the Community Development Department for these reasons, as they had also not begun to
262 explore what it would look like to add full-time staff to the Fire Department. He said that it could make
263 sense to house this program under either department.
264

265 Councilor Chawla asked whether the Fire Department would be able to look into the steps needed and
266 possible timeline to house a program like this within the Fire Department, and asked whether the Fire
267 Department is interested in doing so. Fire Chief Gaboriault replied that the Fire Department would be
268 interested in looking into housing this program. He said that if this position were to come to fruition, the
269 data that is gathered would benefit the Fire Department. He said that the Department has a database
270 within its software platform and could incorporate this data. He said that it would make sense to have
271 this position within the Fire Department.
272

273 Councilor Certa recalled that during this ordinance development process they received information on
274 examples of the types of complaints that the health officer fielded (in response to some of the public
275 comment asking about complaints). He said he is sensitive to any potential costs being passed on to
276 renters. He acknowledged that the majority of landlords in the community are good landlords. He
277 recalled an example of an elevator being broken in one of the City's apartment buildings for an extended
278 period of time, and wondered whether the state-based system is adequate to deal with complaints, given
279 that this occurred. He said that a proactive process to get ahead of some of these issues may be what
280 is needed. He said he would like to continue this conversation and gather more information prior to
281 making a decision on the proposed ordinance.
282

283 Councilor Chawla suggested asking the Fire Department to review what's been proposed and determine
284 how it could envision that scope of the program within its own department, and any similarities or
285 differences between the proposed current structure and what would be feasible if implemented under
286 the Fire Department. He noted that the budget needs to be warned by February 14th, and asked whether
287 this is feasible. City Manager Mahony said that as proposed in the FY25 budget, this program is cost-
288 neutral to the General Fund regardless of whether it sits in the Community Development Department or
289 the Fire Department. She said it makes sense to internalize the feedback and seek answers to the
290 questions heard tonight and to allow the Fire Department to think through what this would look like if it's
291 under their department.
292

293 Councilor Thibeault asked about the budget implications of not pursuing this program at all, given that
294 the City would still like more rigorous code enforcement and health officer activities to be covered. She
295 also noted questions about what kinds of additional inspections this program would entail, and said that
296 this would pertain to inspections related to rental housing code. She suggested that this information be
297 presented to the public for their awareness as well. City Manager Mahony said that if the Council chose
298 not to pursue this program, staff would need some direction about what to do in the budget around code
299 enforcement and a health officer, so they would need to have this clarity by February 14th. Councilor
300 Thibeault asked staff for cost scenarios related to status quo (part time health officer) versus the impact
301 on the budget of having a full-time health officer or a full-time code enforcement position.
302

303 City staff will research the feasibility of housing this program within the Fire Department, and City
304 Councilors and staff will work to obtain answers to the questions posed tonight during public forum. This
305 item will be tabled until these two processes have been conducted.
306

307 b. Discussion of FY25 General Fund Budget

308 City Manager Mahony said that this is the third version of the General Fund budget being presented for
309 FY25. She noted that with the incorporated changes discussed at the Council's prior meetings, the
310 budget represents a 7.0% budget increase and a 7.4% tax rate increase from FY24. She pointed out

311 that there were some errors identified in the budget, which has resulted in a reduction in the overall
312 budget of \$53,000, and which largely impacted the Library’s budget. She apologized for this. She also
313 noted the inclusion of an analysis showing the impact of level-funding the Library versus a 2% increase
314 to its budget. She further noted a Council request for an administrative allocation from EJRP to the
315 General Fund, and that this is feasible if the Council would like to make this change. She also noted
316 initial enterprise budgets in the reading file.

317
318 Councilor Certa asked about the proposed changes to the Clerk’s Office to reduce hours to 32 hours
319 per week and the impact to residents that that may have. City Manager Mahony noted that as proposed,
320 the City Clerk’s hours would decrease to 32 hours per week while the Assistant Clerk would remain at
321 40 hours per week and the Clerk’s Office itself would be open 40 hours per week.

322
323 Councilor Haney expressed concern about the cost of the community meal, and asked whether some
324 of that cost could be reduced or eliminated. Councilor Chawla said that he finds the community event to
325 be valuable and that the community does, too. He noted that CVE is donating some of their space to
326 Essex Junction for polling, strategic planning, and the community dinner. Councilor Haney said that she
327 does not want to eliminate an opportunity for community engagement, but said that she thinks they need
328 to do more to address their budget gap. Councilor Certa said that he thinks the community meal and
329 engagement are important and that they should keep it in the budget.

330
331 Councilor Certa said that given that there is a projected budget increase from last year of over \$700,000,
332 nickel-and-diming may not be the right approach to building the FY25 budget and that they may be
333 cutting the wrong items or pursuing the wrong strategy. He said that he can clearly defend increases for
334 only a handful of departments, such as the Fire Department. He said that he would like to see more
335 information on how funding is being spent at EJRP, for example, since it is larger than other comparable
336 municipalities’ recreation departments. He asked for feedback from each department head on what it
337 would look like to level-fund their budgets for FY25. Councilor Chawla noted that this is only the second
338 City budget and that the City is still trying to figure out the right level of funding for each department. City
339 Manager Mahony noted that a portion of EJRP is funded through their enterprise fund, and that cutting
340 certain components of their budget would not affect the General Fund tax rate or increase. Councilor
341 Certa said it would be helpful to have all budgets (General Fund and enterprise) available for review
342 when talking about strategic budgetary conversations, since then they will have the full picture of each
343 department’s activities and funding in order to make informed decisions.

344
345 Councilor Chawla suggested presenting the budget on Saturday at the community meal without the
346 scenarios incorporated, given that they just received this information and have not had time to review
347 and discuss it. He asked whether the Council is comfortable moving forward with the current iteration of
348 the budget. Councilor Certa said that he is comfortable moving forward with the current budget, knowing
349 that Saturday’s discussion is an opportunity to incorporate further feedback and that changes can still
350 be made to the budget based on that feedback.

351
352 Dorothy Bergdahl, Library Trustee, thanked City Manager Mahony for her apology for the error regarding
353 the Library’s budget. She then spoke about the impact of level-funding the Library budget, which would
354 reduce hours to 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM, 5 days per week, and would not include evening programming.
355 She said that a 2% increase would allow for an addition 4 hours (10:00 AM to 2:00 PM) on Saturdays.
356 She noted that a 3% increase would allow for maintaining the Library’s current hours. She asked for
357 community feedback on each of these three scenarios during Saturday’s community meal and budget
358 meeting. She also clarified what services are offered to patrons based on their affiliation with the library
359 (Essex Junction patrons, patrons with a HOME card, and patrons without a library card). Library Director
360 emphasized the importance of library services for the community and said that the Library is currently
361 at minimum staffing levels. She also noted increased demand for services provided by the library, as
362 well as noted that the library is a large building that requires a certain level of staffing to address safety

363 issues. She spoke about staffing for certain programming and how the hybrid offering of this
364 programming has changed the dynamic of it, given that staff need to stay later to be on hand while Media
365 Factory personnel pack up their equipment.
366

367 Councilor Certa asked about year-over-year increases on Library salaries. He also asked for more clarity
368 on safety issues at the library. Director Hysko replied that full-time staff are being pulled into patron
369 interactions more, as well as having to deal more with certain personalities at the library. She said that
370 in terms of safety issues, ideally they like to have two staff on hand to both enforce and back up any
371 enforcement of rules or policies in case there are escalated issues, another staff on hand to call for
372 services if needed, as well as another staff to manage the library desk. She said that as staff are being
373 pulled into more interactions with patrons, they have less time to do desk work and standard library
374 operations such as interlibrary loans and other day-to-day tasks. Councilor Certa said he looks forward
375 to continuing this conversation, saying that it would be nice to show an increase in services that
376 corresponds to an increase in costs. Director Hysko noted that this budget does not include hours of
377 operation on Saturdays during the summer, which would require a budget increase.
378

379 The following public comments were received:

- 380 • Steve Eustis expressed hope that feedback from Saturday’s meeting is taken into consideration
381 when informing the budget development for FY25. He pointed out that one feedback mechanism
382 is the budget vote itself, and that the budget does not need to be fine-tuned to address everyone’s
383 concern prior to the vote, and that if people do not agree with the budget they’ll vote it down. He
384 spoke about the valuable services provided by the library.
- 385 • Annie Cooper spoke about how valuable the library is to the community, especially as a safe
386 place for kids to go after school.
- 387 • Karen Hergesheimer spoke about the importance of the library to her and her family as a
388 community center in Essex Junction. She said that it is a binding part of the community and is
389 integral to the City.
390

391 Councilors agreed to incorporate the changes presented in the memo on page 1 into the budget for
392 Saturday’s budget discussion. They agreed to the administrative allocation changes presented on page
393 2 of the memo into the budget as well.
394

395 The following public comments were received:

- 396 • Richard Smith said he would be interested to see whether the City has gotten rid of duplicate
397 systems, or whether staff are still using duplicate systems because that is what they are most
398 comfortable with. Councilor Chawla replied that subscription services are one area that this
399 Council is deeply interested in realizing efficiencies and that they are looking at this intensely.
400

401 **MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, that the City Council approve**
402 **the Preliminary Budget with any amendments discussed. The motion passed 4-0.**
403

404 c. Discussion and Consideration of Neighborhood Development Area Expansion
405 Director Yuen noted that the Planning Commission has been examining this expansion for a while, and
406 that they have put together an application to the state for this designation. He said that this designation
407 would have some benefits for homeowners and landowners that want to develop, as well as some
408 benefits to the City. Councilor Chawla said that this would extend the downtown core further up certain
409 streets (Park Street, Main Street, Pearl Street, Route 2A, and Maple Street). Director Yuen noted that
410 these boundaries were designed to mimic the boundaries of the design overlay district, and that the
411 state allows up to a 0.250-mile radius extension from the Village Center designation.
412

413 **MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, that the City Council authorize**
414 **the application for the expansion of the Neighborhood Development Area boundaries through**

415 the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development designation program. The
416 motion passed 4-0.
417

418 d. Discussion of 2 Lincoln Renovation Plan Update

419 Building Coordinator Smith began by speaking about the beginning of this process, which started in
420 March 2022 with bringing on an architect to develop initial floor plans and solicit input from staff on
421 design. He said that this work continued through 2022 and that they brought on an engineering team in
422 early 2023. He said that they developed RFPs and draft contracts through July 2023 and conducted
423 exploratory demolition on the 2 Lincoln Street building. He said that since July of 2023, they have been
424 working on securing a construction manager, developing a first draft budget, continuing exploratory work
425 on building, changing the initial designs to lower the projected cost of the project, and working on
426 scheduling and planning. He said that in terms of budgeting, they are currently estimated at around \$2.4
427 million with out-of-pocket costs in the \$500,000-\$800,000 range. He said that because the budget for
428 this project is approximately \$2.5 million (including out-of-pocket costs) they are working to try and
429 reduce the project costs further so that they can have a comfortable contingency amount for any
430 unanticipated costs. He spoke about next steps, which include bringing construction drawings to a 50%
431 level, obtaining a second cost estimate of the project from the construction manager (around late
432 February), developing a proposed construction schedule, identifying all out-of-pocket costs, and
433 developing a transition plan to run municipal services smoothly during construction. He said that they
434 are hoping to have most staff work from home during this time, with essential in-person staff working out
435 of the senior center area and the large open space to be used for storage. He said that they would also
436 propose to make certain fire parking spaces to be temporary municipal service parking for visitors
437 needing municipal services. He spoke about alternative parking for staff during construction to minimize
438 impact for the Fire Department and Brownell Library. He said that they are anticipating beginning
439 construction in August of 2024, and would anticipate completion in February or March of 2025. He said
440 that the senior center and teen center would pause their programming at the 2 Lincoln Street location in
441 June to adhere to this timeline, and that the senior center will be relocated through EJRP to maintain
442 programming.
443

444 Councilor Haney asked staff to ensure that they are connecting with the Clerk's Office to make sure that
445 the August primary and November general election are not negatively impacted by this renovation.
446 Building Coordinator Smith spoke about the arrangements being made for the Clerk's Office to ensure
447 that they have what they need throughout the renovation period.
448

449 Councilor Certa asked whether the construction would occur at once or in a phased way. Building
450 Coordinator Smith replied that the construction will occur at once, as a phased approach would add 30-
451 40% to the cost of the project. Councilor Certa asked what was removed from the project plan to get the
452 budget to decrease. Building Coordinator Smith said that they had originally planned to run the building
453 through three-phase power and upgrade and move the generator, but that they have decided to keep
454 the generator where it is and run on single-phase power to get the cost estimate down. He said that they
455 also modified certain design elements to decrease costs.
456

457 Christina Corodimas, Director of Essex CHIPS, noted that the program's two main spaces are not being
458 touched or improved by this project, which is a shame. She asked if there is any consideration for the
459 City's office to be moved to the Library rather than the CHIPS space. Councilor Chawla said that the
460 offices were intended to go into the senior center space, not the CHIPS space, and that the large room
461 will be used for storage. Building Coordinator Smith said that there are improvements that will be made
462 to other sections of the Teen Center offices, and some security upgrades. Ms. Corodimas also
463 expressed concern about lack of storage for food for the Little Free Pantry out front, meaning that the
464 pantry will not be able to operate during construction. Building Coordinator Smith said he will stay
465 connected with Ms. Corodimas to try and determine whether they can accommodate this during
466 construction.

e. Approve Adding VMERS Defined Contribution Option-Revised

RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, that City Council approve adding the addition of the VMERS DC plan to the City retirement benefit package effective 7/1/24. Current VMERS eligible employees will be given a one-time irrevocable option to switch to the VMERS DC plan on 7/1/2024; all VMERS eligible employees hired after the date of this vote will be enrolled in the respective DB group, and a Notice of employment will be sent to VMERS. The motion passed 4-0.

f. Approve Meeting Minutes: January 10, 2024 **was Consent Agenda item #6a**

The following amendments were made to the January 10, 2024 minutes:

- Add Chris Gaboriault, Fire Chief, to the list of attendees;
- Line 71: strike “and John O’Brien” from the first motion;
- Line 83: Note that Fire Chief Gaboriault will have access to the program.

MARCUS CERTA made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to approve the minutes with the proposed amendments. The motion passed 4-0.

6. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes: January 10, 2024 **now Business Item #5f**
- b. Acting as Local Cannabis Control Commission: Approve Passion Fruit Farms License Renewal
- c. Acting as Local Cannabis Control Commission: Approve Sweetspot Cannabis Retail License
- d. Approve Liquor License Renewals
- e. Approve Submittal of Certificate of Highway Mileage

ELAINE HANEY made a motion, seconded by MARCUS CERTA, to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion passed 4-0.

7. READING FILE

- a. Council Member & Manager Comments: Councilor Haney pointed out that Chelsea Mandigo was an author of the article from NEWEA Journal, and congratulated the Water Department for its innovative work. Councilor Certa said that next Monday and Tuesday there will be a number of conversations related to six pillars for Essex Junction, as well as conversations this weekend at the community meal this Saturday. He encouraged residents to review the strategic plan and the six pillars, and to participate in this community engagement process. He said that the six pillars are housing and density, public services and facilities, economic development, transportation and connectivity, environment, and community engagement. City Manager Mahony added that there is a Coffee Chat on February 6th to discuss the budget.
- b. Approve Check Warrant #24030 (01/12/24)
- c. Pephlo Article from NEWEA Journal
- d. CVE Annual Permit Application
- e. December Financial Reports
- f. Planning Commission Minutes January 4, 2024
- g. Bike/Walk Advisory Committee Minutes January 11, 2024
- h. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes January 16, 2024
- i. FY25 Initial Draft of the Enterprise Budgets

8. ADJOURN

518 **ELAINE HANEY** made a motion, seconded by **MARCUS CERTA**, to adjourn the meeting. The
519 **motion passed 4-0 at 10:36 P.M.**

520
521 Respectfully Submitted,
522 Amy Coonradt