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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
May 8, 2024**

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

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ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

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OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Cornacchia, Brett Grabowski, Bridget Meyer, Nick Meyer, Dennis Thibeault, Resa.

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1. **CALL TO ORDER**

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City Manager Mahony called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

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2. **REORGANIZATION**

a. Election of President, Vice President, and Clerk

Councilor Thibeault made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to nominate Raj Chawla as City Council President. The motion passed 5-0.

Councilor Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to nominate Amber Thibeault as City Council Vice President. The motion passed 5-0.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Chawla, to nominate Tim Miller to be City Council Clerk. The motion passed 5-0.

City Council President Chawla said that in previous meetings, members of the public have made racist, anti-Semitic comments, noting that comments have disrupted presentations during the public comment portion of the meeting. He said that the City Council does not condone such language and opposes it. He said that such language is harmful and is entirely inconsistent with the community's values. He said that while it is not possible to prevent harmful speech during public comments, the Council will continue to condemn such comments publicly.

3. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

City Manager Mahony noted that that agenda item #6g is no longer necessary. Councilor Thibeault also requested moving the minutes from April 18th from the consent agenda to be business item #6e. City Council President Chawla requested moving consent item #6c to be business item #6a.

4. **APPROVE AGENDA**

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney to approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

5. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

a. Comments from public on items not on the agenda

Joe Cornacchia spoke about forming neighborhood watches in the City. He noted that he and his neighbors are interested in obtaining Neighborhood Watch signs, but that the City is responsible for the cost of purchasing these signs for the City. City Manager Mahony said that she will inquire with the Essex Police Department and Public Works Department on this.

Bridget Meyer spoke about obtaining speed cone signs for neighborhoods with children in them and asked whether the City also needs to purchase these for its constituents to access them. She asked City Manager Mahony to also inquire about these.

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57 Councilor Haney left the meeting.
58

59 **6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

60 a. Grabowski Parking Request **was consent item #7c**

61 City Manager Mahony said that this is a request to temporarily remove the overnight parking ban signs from
62 12 spaces in front of Park Street School for the duration of the new development project occurring there. City
63 Council President Chawla asked about the timeframe for the project and its construction. Mr. Grabowski
64 replied that they anticipate beginning construction between July 1 and August 1 and that it would last
65 approximately 15 months. City Council President Chawla asked if this is for the entire lot or just a portion of
66 it. Community Development Director Yuen replied that there are more than 12 spaces in the lot, and it is just
67 a portion of them that they are seeking a waiver for. Mr. Grabowski said that in the longer term, he would like
68 to explore with the City whether its parking policy can be modified. City Council President Chawla said that
69 he would like the Council to have an intentional and thoughtful conversation about parking with the developer
70 community and public in the coming months.

71
72 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, to authorize the**
73 **temporary removal of the overnight parking ban for 12 parking spaces at the Park Street School**
74 **property, for the duration of demolition and construction activities at 17 Park Street as discussed.**
75 **The motion passed 4-0.**
76

77 b. Council Orientation Presentation

78 City Manager Mahony said that this presentation provides a basic overview of many aspects of the City and
79 City Council. She said that the presentation will cover the City's demographics, its Comprehensive Plan, the
80 City's form of government, the Council's authority, the Council's Conflict of Interest Policy and Ethical Code,
81 the Manager's authority, the City's organization and staffing, budget and fiduciary responsibility, priority
82 projects, hiring, and events, and information about resources available to the Council.

83
84 She began by speaking about the Comprehensive Plan, noting that it was last completed in 2019 (prior to
85 separation), that it needs to be revised every 8 years, and that its current content is largely still relevant. She
86 noted that the plan is important because the City's zoning bylaws must reflect the priorities articulated within
87 the plan. She said that key areas within the plan include focus on the local economy, health and recreation,
88 education, and community connections.

89
90 She then spoke about the Council-Manager form of government that the City has. She noted that Councilors
91 make up the legislative body of the City and set its policies, and that the City Manager is the Chief
92 Administrative Officer of the City and runs its day-to-day operations and implements and administers the
93 policies and priorities as set forth by the Council. She outlined the Council's authority and activities. She also
94 outlined the Manager's authority and activities.

95
96 City Manager Mahony then spoke about the Council Rules of Procedure and how the City Council runs its
97 meetings. She noted the basic outline of the Council's agendas and that meetings are held on the second
98 and fourth Wednesdays at 6:30. She noted that she and the City Council President set the agenda and that
99 Councilors can request items by the Wednesday prior to the meeting.

100
101 She then walked through the City's various Boards and Committees, noting which are specified in charter,
102 which are regional organizations with City representation, which are policy committees of the Council, and
103 which are possible future policy committees of the Council (which are pending further discussion in the
104 Strategic Planning process). She noted that over the next several meetings, they will be bringing both annual
105 appointments to all boards and commissions and representation of the Council and community members on
106 regional boards. Councilor Certa asked about timing for restarting the Housing Commission (which is
107 currently inactive). City Manager Mahony replied that she would recommend that interested participants sit

108 on the steering committee for the Transit-Oriented Development project or that they participate in Planning
109 Commission meetings, as that is where much of the policy work around housing is occurring.

110
111 City Manager Mahony then spoke about transparency, ethics, and conflict of interest. She noted that all
112 communication (except for executive session) is considered public, that meetings must be warned, and
113 minutes produced, that inadvertent quorum should be avoided, that debate must take place in public settings,
114 and that executive session material is considered confidential. She also provided an overview of the City's
115 Conflict of Interest and Ethics Policy and what Councilors should do if they believe they have a conflict of
116 interest for a specific topic.

117
118 She spoke briefly about City staff and organization. She noted that there are staff that have specific authority
119 as directed by State statute. She noted that the Zoning Administrator, Police Chief, Fire Department, and
120 City Clerk all have requirements and authority enshrined in statute. She also provided an overview of the
121 City's organizational chart and its department heads.

122
123 She then provided an overview of the City's budget for Fiscal Year, including its major sources of revenue
124 and expenditures, an overview of the City's purchasing policy, and a list of the City's priority projects. Some
125 of the projects include the 2 Lincoln Street building renovation, the City's strategic planning initiative,
126 construction projects including the Crescent Connector and Main Street waterline, better ordinance
127 enforcement, work on the Amtrak Station, setting up a stormwater utility, and a number of other projects. She
128 also provided an overview of vacant positions and hiring updates. She then provided a summary of upcoming
129 events.

130
131 c. Discussion and Consideration of City Council Meeting Schedule

132 City Manager Mahony said that meetings are generally the second and fourth Wednesday of each month,
133 but that various cultural and religious holidays occur that may warrant rescheduling or shifting meetings
134 around and flagged several notable meeting dates in 2024 that would need to change (July 10, July 24,
135 October 23, November 27, December 25). She recommended canceling the July meetings and holding one
136 meeting on July 17th, rescheduling the October 23 meeting to October 30, and canceling the November 27
137 and December 25 meetings.

138
139 She also noted that the City will not have its regular meeting space once the 2 Lincoln Street renovations
140 begin, and asked whether the Council would be interested in having one business meeting a month rather
141 than two and freeing up Councilors to participate in community events. Councilor Certa expressed concern
142 about consolidating the Council's business into one monthly meeting. Councilor Miller expressed the same
143 concern. Both Councilors were supportive of community engagement and getting out into the community.
144 Councilor Thibeault echoed these concerns, saying that two meetings a month are already quite lengthy.
145 City Council President Chawla agreed, also suggesting that Councilors commit to public events ahead of
146 time (in pairs, to avoid inadvertent quorum), so that there is awareness about engagement at community
147 events. He said that remaining flexible is going to be key as the Council loses its current meeting space for
148 a span of time. The Council will discuss this topic at its following meeting.

149
150 d. Discussion and Consideration of Main Street Park Next Steps

151 City Manager Mahony noted that the City received a Downtown Transportation Fund grant from the State for
152 its 1 Main Street Park project, and the City must decide whether to continue to work on the park or to return
153 the grant. She said that the City has inquired about transferring the grant from the Main Street Park project
154 to the Amtrak project but learned that the grant cannot be transferred from one project to another. She noted
155 that it is a reimbursement grant, so the City would not have to return any funds (as it has not yet incurred
156 funds for this project). She said that one option is to return the current grant and reapply for the same grant
157 for the Amtrak project. City Council President Chawla asked if the City could modify the design to cost less
158 than what was originally submitted for the Main Street Park project, and City Manager Mahony replied that
159 they can ask whether that modification is acceptable. Director Yuen noted that the project is already
160 significantly scaled back from its original plan. Councilor Miller said that the Amtrak project is much higher

161 on the priority list than the park, given that the park is in an area that will be under redevelopment for a
162 number of years. Councilor Thibeault asked about the corrective action plan and soil remediation for the Main
163 Street park space. City Manager Mahony replied that soil remediation would be conducted by the State only
164 for the areas where there would be trees and posts. She also noted that a portion of the corrective action
165 work was also covered by brownfield planning funds. She said that they do not know whether there is funding
166 to help finalize the corrective action plan. Councilor Thibeault said that she would support pursuing a grant
167 for the Amtrak project, and table the Main Street Park project for now. Councilor Certa said that he would
168 like to look at potential parks in the Main Street area once the Crescent Connector project and other
169 development projects are completed. City Council President Chawla agreed, saying that future priorities
170 should include creating and protecting public green space. Director Yuen said that it may be in the City's
171 interest to explore doing something small now at 1 Main Street that doesn't tap into much of the City's funding
172 but uses the grant, while not disturbing the soil. Councilors said they would be supportive of exploring this
173 with the State.

174
175 The following public comments were received:

- 176 • Bridget and Nick Meyer said that they have been involved in volunteering at 1 Main Street Park since
177 the City began working on the project. Ms. Meyer noted that she investigated the cost of shade sails
178 several years ago, which were significantly less than the \$600,000 cost of the proposed project. She
179 said that if the City pursues renovation of this park in future, it would be good to set parameters when
180 developing landscape architecture plans. Mr. Meyer said that they could pursue shade sails and
181 better planters, which would greatly help improve the space.

182
183 e. Meeting minutes: April 18, 2024 **was consent item #7a**

184 Councilor Thibeault asked that the April 18th minutes note that it was a Special Meeting (rather than a Regular
185 Meeting).

186
187 **Councilor Thibeault made a motion, seconded by Marcus Certa, to approve the minutes of April 18,**
188 **2024 as amended to reflect that it was a Special Meeting. The motion passed 4-0.**

189
190 f. *Discussion and Consideration or an Executive Session to discuss a contract

191 See item #10a below.

192
193 g. **Discussion and Consideration of an Executive Session to discuss pending or probable civil litigation

194 No longer needed.

195
196 **7. CONSENT ITEMS**

197 a. Approve Meeting Minutes: April 24, 2024

198 b. Acting as the Liquor Control Commission: Liquor License Approvals

199 c. Grabowski Parking Request **moved to business item #6a**

200 d. Approve Change Orders from Main St. Waterline Project and Wrap Up

201 e. Award Contract for Consultant for Stormwater Utility Formation

202
203 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, to approve the consent**
204 **agenda as presented. The motion passed 4-0.**

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206 **8. COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**

207 City Manager Mahony noted that two wastewater staff passed their wastewater exams, allowing them to
208 become licensed wastewater operators. She also noted that May 13 the City will start its biosolids application
209 at Whitcomb Farms. She noted that this week is Professional Municipal Clerks week and thanked the City's
210 clerk department for their work. She noted that there are 15 open committee positions, which the City is
211 currently advertising for volunteer applicants. She noted that there is a Reappraisal Coffee Chat occurring
212 on Wednesday May 15 at the Town Offices at 81 Main Street. Councilor Thibeault asked whether a synopsis
213 of City Council meetings posted on Front Porch Forum would be helpful to engage with the community, and

214 other Councilors agreed. Councilor Miller said he would begin drafting summaries of meetings and send to
215 Director Snellenberger, City Manager Mahony, and City Council President Chawla for their review prior to
216 posting on FPF.

217
218 9. **READING FILE**

- 219 a. Check Warrant #24044 5/2/2024
220 b. April Financial Report
221 c. Essex Community Justice Center Newsletter
222 d. DRB Minutes 4/18/2024
223 e. PCAB Minutes 4/16/2024
224 f. BWAC Minutes 4/25/2024
225 g. TAC Minutes 4/16/2024
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227 10. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 228 a. *An Executive Session may be needed to discuss a contract
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230 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, that the City Council**
231 **make the specific finding that premature disclosure of the contractual matters would place the city**
232 **at a substantial disadvantage and that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss a**
233 **contract, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A) to include the City Council and City Manager. The motion**
234 **passed 4-0 at 8:33 PM.**
235

236 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, to exit executive**
237 **session. The motion passed 4-0 at 9:32 PM.**
238

- 239 b. **An Executive Session may be needed to discuss pending or probable civil litigation
240 None needed. Item removed from agenda.
241

242 11. **ADJOURN**

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244 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, to adjourn the meeting.**
245 **The motion passed 5-0 at 9:32 P.M.**
246

247 Respectfully Submitted,
248 Amy Coonradt