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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
April 9, 2025**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality
Superintendent; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Ashley Snellenberger,
Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: John Alden, Bethany Clark, Resa Mehren, Tim Shea, Brian Shelden.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

City Council President Chawla 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

Resa Mehren asked if any of the City's federal grant funding is earmarked for cancellation. She also noted that she had difficulty accessing the recording for the last Governance Subcommittee meeting and asked whether that meeting is open to the public. City Manager Mahony replied that there are two federal grants the City is tracking and that it has been confirmed that the federal funding for the Connect the Junction project is secure. She noted that there is more concern about the grant related to the Amtrak project, given that the grant has not yet been obligated at the federal level. She added that City staff will look into the issue about accessing that Subcommittee's meetings, as that meeting is intended to be open to the public.

5. **PUBLIC HEARING**

a. Stormwater Utility New Ordinance 21 Public Hearing

City Council President Chawla opened the public hearing.

Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo's presentation covered the definitions of stormwater management and stormwater utilities, how user fees are calculated, the City's proposed credit manual for its stormwater utility, and the proposed or amended stormwater chapters for the City's Municipal Code. She outlined the history of stormwater management and the problems it is intended to address (stormwater runoff leading to degraded water quality in Lake Champlain), and how stormwater utilities can aid a municipality in spreading the financial burden of managing stormwater equitably. She outlined how impervious area is calculated to determine the standard unit of charge for the stormwater utility and then how the stormwater utility fee is calculated for each residential unit. She spoke about the credit manual, saying that non-single-family properties can apply to receive credit toward their stormwater fee by demonstrating stormwater treatment practices, by holding an MS4 or TS4 permit, or by demonstrating teaching stormwater or water quality curriculums, and noting that properties would need to recertify for credits every two years.

Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo then spoke in more detail about the newly-proposed chapter in the City's Municipal Code that establishes the City's stormwater utility (Chapter 21). She said that it outlines the administration, development, and procedures of the utility, the assignment of billing units, credits, billing and collection procedures, and the formation of an enterprise fund for stormwater. She spoke about changes

55 since the 2024 public hearings on this subject, including modifications to the exemption list and to State
56 statute that references the establishment of utilities.

57
58 She spoke briefly about next steps, which include the establishment of the rates for Fiscal Year 2026 and
59 mailing out the first round of stormwater utility bills in October 2025.

60
61 City Manager Mahony noted that the City is also recommending an additional 10% credit option to
62 acknowledge the variety of stormwater permits that exist and the work that larger properties have to do to
63 maintain them. She also noted a recommendation pertaining to removing specificity around the types of
64 credits in the ordinance and maintain that specificity in the credit manual instead.

65
66 The following public comments were received:

- 67 • Tim Shea, Executive Director of the Champlain Valley Exposition, noted that of CVE’s 33 acres of
68 impervious surface, all but five of them are being treated for stormwater and that they are working to
69 bring themselves up to current state standards. He said that with the calculations as they stand, they
70 have calculated that CVE would pay an annual City stormwater fee of \$35,000, which is exorbitant
71 for a nonprofit organization. He urged the Council to continue exploring the credit manual and credit
72 options, which could help reduce that cost for CVE.

73
74 City Council President Chawla closed the public hearing.

75
76 **6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

77 a. **Discussion and Consideration of the Stormwater Utility (New Ordinance 21) and the Stormwater Utility**
78 **Credit Manual**

79 Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo said that City staff would like City Council input on several items
80 related to the credit manual (including the 10% credit for properties that hold current state and federal permits,
81 and a credit to recognize the unique situation of Global Foundries, which already treats a portion of its
82 stormwater through a combined sewer/stormwater system). She said they would also like City Council input
83 on staff recommendations related to phasing the utility’s budget in over two years (including the capital funds
84 in year two rather than in its first year). She added that the Council will also need to decide whether to hold
85 another public hearing to make the change to remove the specificity within the ordinance related to the types
86 of credits in the credit manual.

87
88 Councilor Certa said that the 10% credit could be used as an incentive for potential future development if it
89 weren’t an overlapping credit with the 50% credit cap. City Manager Mahony said that the system is so
90 regulated as it is at the state and federal level that the 10% credit is acknowledging that from the City side.
91 Councilor Haney asked about the likelihood of larger parcels achieving a 50% credit, and City Manager
92 Mahony replied that not many users are taking advantage of credits in other utilities, and that the City is in a
93 unique position in that it is developing its utility in tandem with many property owners needing to grapple with
94 3-acre permitting requirements from the state.

95
96 Councilors agreed to the phasing approach laid out by staff, which would leave the capital funds out of the
97 budget for the first year of implementation. They agreed to make available the 10% credit for properties with
98 an existing permit. They agreed to amend the ordinance to remove the specificity around the types of credits.
99 They agreed to add a credit manual option for combined sewer treatment.

100
101 Councilor Certa asked if utility bills will show the number of ERUs for a property when calculating the amount
102 for the stormwater utility. Finance Director Morris replied that the City is working with its billing administrators
103 to determine what level of specificity will be on stormwater utility bills, but bills will at least show whether the
104 property is a single-family user or non-single-family user.

105
106 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council**
107 **warn a public hearing on April 23, 2025 at 6:30 P.M. to receive comment on changes to the Essex**

108 **Junction municipal ordinance Chapter 21 and ordinance relating to stormwater utility regulation and**
109 **the stormwater user fee credit manual as amended, and with any edits as discussed tonight. The**
110 **motion passed 5-0.**

111
112 b. Discussion and Consideration of 2 Lincoln Renovation Update and Re-Assign Funds

113 John Alden, architect at Scott & Partners, spoke on this item as the architect team leader for the renovations
114 of 2 Lincoln Street. City Manager Mahony also spoke, noting additional detail on cost updates to the project
115 and a request to allocate an additional \$500,000 to the project. Mr. Alden spoke about how the initial cost of
116 the project had been subject to what was discovered once renovation work began, noting that they have
117 found that the building was originally four separate structures that were joined together in a manner that was
118 altogether not of the highest quality. He said they have had to conduct structural reinforcement of the outside
119 walls and stabilize the roof. He noted that due to this, they have been able to better insulate the walls. He
120 also noted that some of the costs quoted by the contractor have increased due to difficulty in sourcing
121 subcontractors for some portions of it. He said that they anticipate any future cost surprises from the project
122 to be cosmetic and smaller in nature than this. He emphasized that in the long run, these surprises they have
123 addressed will result in a more durable, longer-lasting, comfortable, and more energy-efficient building.
124 Councilor Certa asked if the City could have done anything to get a tighter cost estimate at the outset of the
125 project. Mr. Alden noted that there were headwinds for the City, which included a tough bidding climate and
126 coverage issues with subcontracting for the project. He added that predicting what is behind walls is difficult
127 without removing portions of the wall, so that elements was difficult to anticipate. He noted that as part of this
128 project, the team is documenting what was discovered in the walls and what was improved, so the City has
129 a record of what will be in the walls and where, for future reference.

130
131 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council**
132 **assign \$400,000 in LOT funds for this project, reassign an additional \$100,000 from the Building**
133 **Maintenance Fund for this project, and authorize the City Manager to complete the renovation of 2**
134 **Lincoln Street with the Not To Exceed amounts as identified by staff herein, and approve change**
135 **orders and contract amendments as needed. The motion passed 5-0.**

136
137 c. Discussion and Consideration of the City's Rebranding Request for Proposals

138 Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director Snellenberger spoke about this item, which pertains to an
139 RFP for a rebranding project for the City, the ultimate goal of which is to create a longstanding recognizable
140 brand identity for the City. She said that it will include a new City logo, letterhead, report cover memos,
141 signage, and banners for the City's flagpoles, as well as new sub-logos for departments. She spoke about
142 the three phases of the project, which include the RFP process and a temporary committee to help with this
143 (including representation from the City Council), a design phase, which will entail soliciting Councilor and
144 community feedback on proposed options, and a phase related to the changeover of the logo itself. She said
145 they anticipate having a logo by July and having all logos changed over within a three-year period. Councilor
146 Certa asked about the historical context around sub-branding for the Fire, Police, and Library departments.
147 City Manager Mahony noted that there is logic to keeping some of the departments' logos untouched, but
148 that it would be interesting to solicit feedback from bidders on their suggestions to honor past logos while
149 making the connection between them and any new logo. Councilor Certa spoke about the importance of
150 assembling the right committee composition for this work. Councilor Haney spoke about the importance of
151 any design being attentive to and honoring the mission statements and slogans of the various departments,
152 and asked that this be included in the RFP. Councilor Miller volunteered to be on the RFP committee.

153
154 d. *Discussion and Consideration of an Executive Session to Discuss a Contract
155 See item #10a below.

156
157 7. **CONSENT ITEMS**

158 a. Approve Meeting Minutes: March 25, 2025 and March 26, 2025

159 b. Acting as the Liquor Control Commission – Approve Liquor/Tobacco Licenses

160 c. Acting as the Cannabis Control Commission – Approve Tier 1 Manufacturer Application at 8 Taft St

d. Approve Amendments to Tree Planting Outside of Public Right-of-Way Policy

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

8. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**: City Manager Mahony noted that Champlain Water District has asked residents to conserve water on April 16 from 8:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M so that they can conduct a water treatment plant shutdown. She thanked the community for its support of the City budget for FY26 and for the affirmative pump station bond vote. City Council President Chawla thanked Bethany Clark and Brian Shelden for putting their names forward to fill the vacant City Council seat, and congratulated Mr. Shelden for his win.

9. **READING FILE**

- a. Check Warrant #240702 – April 4, 2025
- b. March Financial Reports
- c. LOT Fund Sidewalk Projects for FY25 and FY26
- d. Regional Boards and Commissions Minutes Memo
- e. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes – March 18, 2025
- f. Development Review Board Minutes – March 20, 2025
- g. Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Draft Housing Targets
- h. Chittenden County Communications Union District 2024 Annual Report
- i. VELCO Notification Letter – Using Drones for Inspections

10. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. *An Executive Session may be needed to discuss a Contract

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, that the City Council make the specific finding that premature disclosure of the contractual matters would place the city at a substantial disadvantage, and that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss a contract, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A) to include the City Council and City Manager. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:07 P.M.

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:32 P.M.

11. **ADJOURN**

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:32 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt