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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
April 23, 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.

OTHERS PRESENT: Katie Ballard, Andrew Brown, Bethany Clark, Linda Hansen, Ella Ruehsen, Resa.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

City Council President Chawla called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

City Manager Mahony noted the removal of the executive session (Item #7c) from the agenda.

3. **APPROVE AGENDA**

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to remove Business Item #7c from the agenda. The motion passed 5-0.

4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

a. Comments from Public

Linda Hansen spoke about traffic safety issues on Hiawatha Avenue and on Nama Avenue, particularly at arrival and dismissal times from the school. She noted that because there will be school consolidation, traffic will increase and become even worse. She noted that drivers are not obeying the speed limit or parking in designated areas. She noted that she has already voiced these concerns to the School Board, but she is now flagging this for the City Council as well. She asked whether an officer could be present at arrival and dismissal times to enforce traffic laws. City Council President Chawla noted that because these issues are on school property, the School Board has jurisdiction over it, and suggested that Ms. Hansen continue to bring these suggestions to the school. City Manager Mahony said that City staff could also observe the traffic at the school and provide traffic-study-esque suggestions to the School Board.

Katie Ballard noted that the City still does not have a functioning Housing Commission since its separation from the Town. She asked that this Commission be considered at the City Council's upcoming retreat.

Ella Ruehsen introduced herself as the new lead reporter at the Essex Reporter.

Councilor Certa noted written public comment submitted by Debbie and Roger Curtis, expressing concern for the traffic on Hiawatha Avenue and surrounding streets, especially given consolidation and additional students at the school in the upcoming year. They noted that traffic is extremely dangerous and that during drop-off and pick-up times, emergency vehicles wouldn't be able to get through traffic. They cited speed and parking concerns.

5. **PUBLIC HEARING**

a. Stormwater Utility New Ordinance 21 Public Hearing

City Council President Chawla opened the public hearing.

Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo provided an overview of the changes to the ordinance since the last public hearing on this topic. She spoke about updated estimated fees, noting that one ERU is going to be \$54.32 for a single-family residence and shared ERU estimates for commercial and tax-exempt properties.

57 She noted that the credit manual has been modified, saying that applications are available through the mail
58 or online, that single-family properties are not eligible, and that up to 50% of the stormwater fee can be
59 credited. She noted additional categories within the credit manual, including stormwater treatment practice
60 parcels that already have stormwater practices in place, MS4/TS4 permit holds, an education credit for
61 schools that demonstrate teaching a stormwater or water quality curriculum, NPDES or state stormwater
62 permit holds, and combined sewer system parcels. She noted that there will be periodic inspections to ensure
63 compliance for credits. She noted that the ordinance has been updated to incorporate the credit categories
64 by reference to the credit manual. She spoke about next steps, which include a deadline of May 16 for credit
65 applications for the first year of bills, setting the ERU rate for FY26 by June 11, and mailing the first round of
66 stormwater utility bills in October.

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68 City Council President Chawla closed the public hearing.

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70 **6. RECOGNITION**

71 a. Consider Resolution of Appreciation: Raj Chawla

72 Councilor Certa read a resolution of appreciation regarding Raj Chawla into the record, as follows:

73
74 **WHEREAS Raj Chawla was elected to the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees in April 2019;**
75 **and**

76 **WHEREAS Raj will his term as a City Councilor on April 30 2025, concluding 11 years of dedicated**
77 **service and leadership to the Village and City of Essex Junction; and**

78 **WHEREAS during that time Raj held the role of Vice President of the Essex Junction Board of**
79 **Trustees from May 2021 to April 2023; and**

80 **WHEREAS during that time Raj held the role of President of the Essex Junction City Council from**
81 **May 2023 to April 2025; and**

82 **WHEREAS Raj was instrumental in both the merger and separation initiatives between the Town and**
83 **Village; and**

84 **WHEREAS Raj was a key contributor to the establishment of the new City, including budget**
85 **development and support of the 2 Lincoln renovation; and**

86 **WHEREAS Raj led the Council during the long-awaited Crescent Connector Road project; and**

87 **WHEREAS Raj contributed to drafting cannabis regulations for the City to permit dispensary**
88 **businesses while ensuring they were located at a sufficient distance from school zones to protect**
89 **children; and**

90 **WHEREAS Raj was a member of the Bike Walk Advisory Committee from October 2014 to June 2019;**
91 **and**

92 **WHEREAS during that time Raj held the role of Chair of the Bike Walk Advisory Committee from July**
93 **2017 to June 2019; and**

94 **WHEREAS during that time Raj was instrumental in the working of signal trigger locations and**
95 **successful application of our bike-friendly community ranking, the encouragement of bike-friendly**
96 **businesses, and the slow ride events; and**

97 **WHEREAS Raj consistently demonstrated a calm and rational leadership style and his inclusive**
98 **nature was clearly reflected in the way City Council meetings were run;**

99 **NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**

100 **That the City Council on behalf of the staff and the citizens of the City of Essex Junction hereby**
101 **extend our most sincere appreciation to Raj for his commitment and dedicated years of service to**
102 **the residents of Essex Junction, adopted this day, Wednesday, April 23, 2025 by the Essex Junction**
103 **City Council.**

104
105 City Council President Chawla thanked Councilors, staff, and the community for their support, advice,
106 patience, and camaraderie during his time serving the City.

107
108 Councilors expressed their gratitude for City Council President Chawla's dedication and service on Essex
109 Junction's governing body.

The following public comments were received:

- Andrew Brown shared his experience serving on City Council with City Council President Chawla. He said that City Council President Chawla’s legacy will be around how he dispersed leadership on the Council and involved the Vice President in leadership decision-making with the City Manager.

7. **BUSINESS ITEMS**

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

Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo noted that she and Finance Director Morris reviewed each parcel and applied what they think the parcel might apply for, as one of the assumptions in the ERU calculation. She also noted that no capital transfer was assumed in the budget or rate. She noted that approval of the ordinance would officially establish the utility. She also noted that while not required, approval of the credit manual would also be recommended.

Councilor Certa noted that the removal of the credit manual categories from the ordinance also removes the requirement to hold a public hearing if those categories are being modified. City Manager Mahony noted that they removed the list of permit types to allow for flexibility, particularly as the State is actively working on modifying stormwater legislation. She noted that it is highly unlikely that other substantive components of the credit manual would change anytime soon. She said that nothing prevents the City from having a more involved engagement process if specific changes are contemplated in the future. Councilor Thibeault noted that policies and procedures generally come to the City Council prior to being changed, at which time they can deliberate on them.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, that the City Council adopt the Essex Junction Municipal Ordinance Chapter 21: Regulation of Stormwater Utility, and that the City Council approve the establishment of the Stormwater User Fee Credit Manual. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Discussion of the Plan for the City Council Retreat

City Manager Mahony said this relates to having a more robust process for the Council to think through budget priorities in the springtime, which would allow staff to provide updates on current status, as well as an opportunity to talk through priority-setting for the next fiscal year’s budget. She noted that the Retreat is set for June 4, 2025, and she noted that staff recommend having this be a facilitated retreat with the Council and City department heads. She said that after the retreat, staff will think through the feasibility of specific goals related to the Council’s overall direction and vision to incorporate into a final preliminary budget for the next fiscal year.

City Council President Chawla invited incoming Councilor Brian Shelden to participate in this discussion.

Councilor Thibeault expressed support for the proposed retreat plan, additionally suggesting that a breakout session of just the City Council be included for them to talk about the core ideas related to City Council roles and responsibilities, as well as public engagement. Councilor Miller agreed with Councilor Thibeault’s suggestion. Councilor Certa said the agenda seems meaty enough to have a full-day retreat, but not necessarily include the department heads in the full day (to be respectful of their time). He said that he would like the Councilors to talk about strategic direction. City Council President Chawla said it is important that the Council have the opportunity to conduct its visioning discussion as part of the retreat.

c. *Discussion and Consideration of an Executive Session to discuss a Contract **ITEM REMOVED FROM AGENDA**

8. **CONSENT ITEMS**

- 163 a. Approve Meeting Minutes: April 9, 2025, and April 13, 2025
164 b. Acting as the Liquor Control Commission – Approve Liquor/Tobacco Licenses
165 c. Approve Memorial Day Banner Application
166 d. Approve Memorial Day Street Closure
167 e. Approve Tentative Redetermination of Equalized Education Property Value and Coefficient of Dispersion
168

169 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Thibeault, to approve the**
170 **consent agenda, pending approval of the Hornet’s Nest liquor license by the Essex Police**
171 **Department. The motion passed 5-0.**
172

- 173 9. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**: City Manager Mahony noted that staff have
174 conducted data analysis on the traffic lights at Five Corners, and they are in the process of determining
175 changes for the lights based on their findings.
176

177 10. **READING FILE**

- 178 a. Election Results
179 b. Governance Committee Minutes – March 27, 2025 and April 10, 2025
180 c. Capital Review Committee Minutes – April 1, 2025
181 d. Recreation Advisory Committee Minutes – April 2, 2025
182 e. Planning Commission Minutes – April 3, 2025
183 f. Bike Walk Advisory Committee Minutes – April 10, 2025
184 g. Warrant #24073 – April 18. 2025
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186 11. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 187 a. *An Executive Session may be needed to discuss a Contract
188 Executive session item removed from the agenda. No executive session held.
189

190 12. **ADJOURN**

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192 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Thibeault, to adjourn the**
193 **meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 7:30 P.M.**
194

195 Respectfully Submitted,
196 Amy Coonradt