

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
June 4, 2025**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Colleen Dwyer, Human Resources Director; Wendy Hysko, Library Director; Rick Jones, Public Works Superintendent; Brad Luck, EJRP Director; Sue McCormack, facilitator; Susan McNamara-Hill, City Clerk; Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality Superintendent; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Annie Cooper, Tim Shea.

1. CALL TO ORDER

City Council President Thibeault called the meeting to order at 8:12 A.M.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

None needed.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public

Annie Cooper spoke as a member of the Vermont Water Safety Action Committee about water safety. She spoke about a proposal that each municipality in Chittenden County organize its own Water Safety Committee whose focus is to inventory their bodies of water, provide water safety education through distributing brochures to the public, and share resources between municipalities.

5. CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION: *facilitated by Sue McCormack*

a. Set Context

Ms. McCormack began by speaking about the goals of today's discussion, which is to build a shared understanding about the City Council's roles, responsibilities, and priorities within the context of Essex Junction and local governance. She said that the areas of focus for today will be the Council's role in setting the City's strategic vision, and the Council's role in community building.

b. Strategic Vision Reflection

Ms. McCormack then facilitated an icebreaker conversation with the Council members to understand and uncover what the Council's strategic priorities are. Councilors shared their thoughts on what aspects of the City they hope remain the same and what changes they would like to see over the next five years. They spoke about maintaining quaint, safe, walkable neighborhoods in the Village area, continued smart growth across the City (with a particular focus on the Pearl Street corridor and increasing amenities where possible), focusing on economic and community development, maintaining bus services where possible, and increasing accessibility and mobility. They also discussed increased traffic enforcement and code enforcement in general, more parking along Park Street, and strengthening the relationship between the City and Champlain Valley Expo (CVE). The Council discussed their strategic priorities for the City, which include strengthening community engagement through creating spaces that foster community, economic and community development, increased collaboration with CVE, optimizing traffic and smart growth along Pearl Street, increased code enforcement, and continuing to focus on the City's parks as some of its key assets. The Council reviewed the City's vision statement, determining that their identified priorities are well-aligned with the statement.

c. Effective Community Engagement

Ms. McCormack then led the Council through a discussion on effective community engagement. Each Councilor shared how they would define effective community engagement. The Council discussed their role as community-builders within the City and that because the City is still relatively new, the Council has an important role to play as helping to shape the future of the community. They spoke broadly about engagement best practices, including being present and listening to individuals and community groups, convening important community conversations, celebrating accomplishments, and participating in community events. They spoke about the importance of different types of engagement (thick engagement and thin engagement), and how both are essential in robust community engagement.

d. Mapping the Why & How of Engagement

Ms. McCormack then led the Council through a discussion related to strategies for improving community engagement and ensuring that Councilors are accessible and available to the community. She spoke about a number of community engagement projects over the years in the Essex community and said that having ongoing civic infrastructure is essential to creating and supporting sustainable engagement within the community. The Council discussed and developed a set of engagement goals. These include ensuring that the community knows who the Council members are, that the community feels that the Council is approachable, that they outreach and engage with people and groups in the community who have not historically been engaged in the past, both on social media and in person, and that they try and transition social media interactions into in-person interactions where possible.

6. **JOINT SESSION WITH COUNCIL AND DEPARTMENT HEADS:** *facilitated by Sue McCormack*

a. Strategic Reflection

Ms. McCormack facilitated a strategic reflection discussion with the City Council and the City's department heads. She began by asking department heads to share their thoughts on what they would like to stay the same and what they would like to see change for the City in five years, and asking the Council to weigh in on how these do or don't align with the elements identified in a similar exercise from the retreat's morning session.

b. Celebration of Accomplishment in FY25

Department heads each shared the top 1-2 achievements for their department in FY25. Notable achievements discussed included a fully staffed finance department, the establishment of a stormwater utility, staff turnover or more staffing in some departments, first steps in an inquiry about a City gym facility, the recently adopted zoning amendments that the Planning Commission and staff drafted, progress on the City's strategic planning process, and progress on the 2 Lincoln Street building renovation project.

c. Review Pillars of Strategic Plan

City Manager Mahony reviewed the six pillars of the City's strategic plan, which include housing, economic and business development, public services and facilities, transportation and connectivity, environmental stewardship, and community engagement and decision-making. Department heads and Councilors then engaged in an exercise to connect each of the priorities and action items they'd identified during their strategic reflection with one (or more) of the strategic plan pillars, in order to inform both the FY26 work plan and FY27 budget planning discussions.

d. Group Work with the Pillars

Department heads and Councilors then engaged in an exercise to connect each of the future action items they'd identified during their strategic reflection with one (or more) of the strategic plan pillars, in order to inform both the FY26 work plan and FY27 budget planning discussions. This exercise enabled the group to begin to develop the City's priorities for the next several years.

e. Priority Setting

Ms. McCormack then led department heads and Councilors in a priority-setting exercise, based on the future action items identified for each of the six strategic plan pillars. The top priorities identified were for a new public works building, identifying opportunities for the City and CVE to further strengthen their relationship, working on a Council engagement plan, exploring the feasibility of having a City farmer's market or food truck opportunity, exploring the need for new committees, having a municipal gym, improving the experience as one travels through the Five Corners area of the City, and preserving green space with future development.

f. **Share Results and Refine Priorities**

Ms. McCormack then asked the group to refine the identified priorities into their top 3-5 priorities. Across the group, the top priority identified was the need for a public works building, followed by collaboration between the City and CVE, a Council engagement plan, and exploring the need for new committees. City Manager Mahony then discussed next steps from this retreat. She said that she and staff will work together to digest the results of the priority list. She noted that Ms. Snellenberger and the Council will work directly to frame the Council Engagement Plan priority to begin the planning process around it. She said that other items on the list may take more time to determine staff capacity.

7. **ADJOURN**

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 2:00 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt