

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
June 25, 2025**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Brad Luck, EJRP Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Rich Boyers, Elijah Massey, Dennis Thibeault, Resa

1. CALL TO ORDER

City Council President Thibeault 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 spoke about traffic improvements due to improved signal work at the Five Corners intersection. She also asked about how the site coordinator position for the Fleming School is funded, and City Manager Mahony clarified that the Essex Westford School District funds that position by paying the City for it.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Interviews and Consider Appointments to Bike Walk Advisory Committee, Capital Program Review Committee, Development Review Board, Moderator, Planning Commission, and Tree Advisory Committee

The City Council interviewed Elijah Massey for a position on the Planning Commission. He spoke briefly about his background and interest in continuing to serve on the Commission. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and he was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

The City Council interviewed Rich Boyers for a position on the Tree Advisory Committee. He spoke briefly about his background and interest in continuing to serve on the Committee. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and he was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

b. Department Head Brief with Recreation Director Brad Luck

Essex Junction Recreation & Parks Director Luck spoke about activities and accomplishments over the last six months. He noted the efforts of staff to secure a number of grants for the department, noted that the Recreation Advisory Committee launched in April, that staff trainings have been conducted for summer staff, and spoke about some staff hires and reorganizations. He then noted a number of events and programs, spoke about statistics related to the number of visitors at Maple Street Park this year to date, and spoke about the exploration work being conducted for a future gymnasium facility. Director Luck then spoke about the anticipated activities and work over the next six months in the department. These include anticipated changes to licensed childcare, hiring for a number of vacancies, implementing new software, projects related to the resurfacing of the Maple Street Park skate park and basketball court, a number of programs and events over the summer and into the fall, and the continued exploration work for a future gymnasium facility. Councilor Certa spoke about comments from residents of Whitcomb Woods about not feeling connected to

the City, and asked about the relationship between EJRP and Whitcomb Woods programming. Director Luck spoke about outreach and connections between EJRP programming staff and the Whitcomb Woods residents and program coordinator, and said they will work to reiterate and strengthen that connection. He also noted that once construction is completed at 2 Lincoln Street, having the Senior Center move back into that space will help with that connection as well. Councilor Certa asked about the future planning for the gymnasium and how it should also include a broader recreation facility for the community. Director Luck replied that having a community center is the goal, but that he is mindful of the cost of construction and wants to be realistic in terms of a tolerable bond amount for the City. Councilor Certa said he would like the City to conduct a study of current facility conditions and needs and factoring in growth to determine what the needs will look like in the next 5-10 years. City Manager Mahony noted that other public facilities that are needed include a public works facility and a wastewater facility. Councilors agreed that this is a large topic that warrants more in-depth conversation. Councilor Miller asked about the maintenance of Veterans Memorial Park, and Director Luck clarified that it is currently managed jointly between Public Works and EJRP.

c. Discussion and Consideration of Amendments to Municipal Code Chapter 9: Enforcement and Chapter 18: Ordinance regulating control of litter, refuse, garbage, junk, junk motor vehicles, trash, and solid waste; and Setting a Public Hearing

Community Development Director Yuen said that the Community Development Department has been tracking code enforcement and non-compliance more closely over the last several years and have been following up more rigorously with cases of non-compliance. He said that there have been cases of chronic non-compliance that require escalation, and that these amendments to the municipal code make that easier. He noted that these amendments have been put together in consultation with the City Attorney. City Council President Thibeault noted that one question for the Council is whether the City should establish an Ordinance Appeals Board, but said her preference for now would be to keep this function with the Council for now and reassess whether this Board is needed in the future. Other Councilors agreed with this. City Council President Thibeault offered a friendly amendment to section 905 to add the words “and cost”, and asked whether in section 1801, the exclusion of farm vehicles and equipment are excluded only in the Planned Agricultural District or in all districts. Director Yuen replied that these exclusions used to apply to all districts but in this context would only apply to the Planned Agricultural District. City Council President Thibeault asked about the reference to criminal penalties in section 1802, and Director Yuen said that because the ordinance is civil, the criminal penalties reference should be removed. City Council President Thibeault asked that the reference in section 1805 be modified to reflect the City and not the Town.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council warn a public hearing on July 23, 2025 at 6:30 P.M. to receive comments on changes to the Essex Junction Municipal Ordinance Chapter 9 and Chapter 18, as presented with any edits discussed. The motion passed 5-0.

d. Discussion of Retreat Summary and Council Engagement Plan Framework

City Manager Mahony said this is an opportunity to share the details of the Council Retreat with the public as well as reflect on and discuss the priorities from the Retreat and discuss the Council Engagement Plan. Communications & Strategic Initiatives Snellenberger provided a summary of the topics discussed at the Council Retreat, and asked if the Council has thoughts they'd like to share about the priority items in order to give staff a better understanding of direction for departmental work plans for FY27. Councilor Certa said he is looking forward to further discussion about committees, as this will help move some of the larger topics forward. Councilor Sheldon said that the Retreat did not focus on housing as much as he would have liked, even though the list of priorities includes a number of initiatives related to housing. He agreed that focusing on and standing up new committees may be what helps move these important initiatives and topics forward. Councilor Miller said the entire retreat was very well-run and productive. Councilor Haney agreed that emphasizing communication and community engagement is important and must become part of the budget conversation.

Director Snellenberger then spoke about the Council Engagement Plan, noting that staff developed three goals based on the discussion during the Council Retreat on this topic. The goals are that residents are aware of who the City Council members are and feel that the Council is approachable, that residents have multiple ways to interact with the Council, and to improve the structure of the City Council meetings. She said that staff are working on developing ideas and strategies to help achieve these goals. She noted that she is beginning to populate an events calendar of upcoming events and will send Councilors emails reminding them of the events and whether they'd like to participate in them. City Council President Thibeault suggested holding a 1-hour public forum on July 9th (in lieu of a regular City Council meeting) to solicit input from the public on any topic they wish to discuss. Other Councilors agreed. City Council President Thibeault also noted that the Essex Reporter launched its "Get To Know Your Council" section, which will cover every Councilor and help get the public more familiar with the Council.

e. Discussion of FY27 Budget Direction

City Manager Mahony said the main ask of the Council for this item is a target for a budget range for the FY27 budget, as one of the key initial steps in budget development. She noted that staff will provide budget and work plan instructions to department heads in July and that having a budget target is helpful. City Council President Thibeault noted that last year's target was 3%. Councilor Haney said that 3% has served as a *de facto* target for the last number of years, and that she would not recommend level funding (as in this inflationary environment, level funding represents a cut). She said that 3% could continue to serve as a safe target. Councilor Miller noted that different departments have different needs (e.g., wastewater has had substantial needs over the last several years), and bringing forward a budget that addresses needs (as opposed to wants) is crucial in this environment of unaffordability. He said that understanding if 3% is a reasonable target is a crucial first step, and City Council President Thibeault agreed, asking if there are important implications for targeting a 3% budgetary increase. Councilor Haney noted that in the past, staff have presented draft budget scenarios that represent a 3% or a 5% increase, for review and comparison. She also noted that even if the City targets a 3% increase, they have little control or understanding of what final utility rates are until late in the budget discussion and timeline. Other Councilors agreed that they would like to see a 3% and 5% scenario for the draft FY27 budget. Councilor Certa said he agrees that a 3% target is good, but said he struggles to see how this can be achieved without cutting services. He said that there needs to be a discussion with the community about this, to make sure they are comfortable of letting go of certain services or are comfortable with what will be asked of them in order to achieve the City and community's strategic goals.

f. **Executive Session to discuss Negotiating Lease Options for the Tree Farm Recreational Facility

See item #9b below.

g. ***Executive Session to Discuss the Allocation of Costs in Police Services Agreement with the Town of Essex

See item #9c below.

6. **CONSENT ITEMS**

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes: June 4, 2025; June 11, 2025
- b. Approve Rebranding Consultant Selection
- c. Approve Varec Biogas Purchase Order for Digester Flare
- d. Acting as the Liquor Control Commission – Approve Liquor/Tobacco Licenses

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

7. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony noted that traffic signal work at the Five Corners intersection are still ongoing.

8. **READING FILE**

- a. Check Warrant #24077 – 6/13/2025
- b. Champlain Water District Water Quality Report
- c. Decrease in the Grand List from Utility Valuations at the State level
- d. Opioid Community Forum Memo
- e. EJRP Programs Team Info
- f. Invitation to Lafayette 200 event in Essex Junction Village Cemetery: June 29, 2025
- g. Recreation Advisory Committee Minutes: June 4, 2025
- h. Planning Commission Minutes: June 5, 2025
- i. Development Review Board Minutes: June 9, 2025
- j. Bike Walk Advisory Committee Minutes: June 12, 2025

9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. *An Executive Session may be needed to discuss the appointment of public officials

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss appointment of public officials, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to include the City Manager. The motion passed 5-0.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:42 P.M.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, that the City Council appoint Nathan Doudera to the Capital Programs Review Committee, Daniel Liguori to the Bike Walk Advisory Committee, Maggie Massey and Dylan Zwicky to the Development Review Board, Steve Eustis as Moderator, Elijah Massey and Diane Clemens to the Planning Commission, Finn Hamilton to the Planning Commission as a non-voting member, and Rich Boyers and Leslie Goldring to the Tree Advisory Committee. The motion passed 5-0.

- b. **An Executive Session may be needed to discuss the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss contracts, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(2) to include the City Council, City Manager, and Mark Brislin. The motion passed 5-0.

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

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the Council make the specific finding that general public knowledge of contracts would place the City at a substantial disadvantage. The motion passed 5-0.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss appointment of public officials, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A) to include the City Manager. The motion passed 5-0.

10. **ADJOURN**

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:45 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt