

City of Essex Junction Governance Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 11, 2025 @ 6:30 PM

Members present: Bethany Clark, Thomas Coen, Elaine Haney, Deb McAdoo, Gabrielle Smith, Marlon Verasamy

Absent: Steve Eustis, Candace Morgan, Brian Shelden

Staff present: Brad Luck

Members of the public present: None

Chair Steve Eustis was absent and Vice Chair Marlon Verasamy was on the road, so Clerk Elaine Haney called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

There were no additions or changes to the agenda. There was no public to be heard.

Deb motioned and Marlon seconded approval of the August 28 meeting minutes. They passed unanimously.

With all the municipal interviews completed the next step is to set up how the committee will obtain public feedback from Essex Junction residents.

There was consensus that the committee will share some recommendations based on our research while also providing several opportunities for residents to make choices about various options, which will be presented along with pros and cons. The committee will also provide explanations for why some options were ruled out.

The committee discussed multiple methods of public engagement. It will be necessary to provide education to explain concepts and context before asking for feedback. There was debate about whether to develop a survey to collect public feedback but it was decided that the topics are too complex for a survey and more robust engagement is needed.

The committee agreed that a public forum that includes real time polling and feedback collection would be preferable. Such a forum could also be recorded and people who can't attend could watch it and provide feedback afterwards. The city manager's public access show would also be a good place to provide the education needed, as well as the upcoming Meet Me on Main events, where committee members could solicit feedback in person. A question arose about whether there were funds to help in this process and to possibly develop a print piece.

The committee reviewed the timeline, ending with Town Meeting Day on April 7, 2026. Some of the topics being discussed may require charter changes, and they could be ready for voters by that time. But others may require more substantial public engagement and might not be able to be decided on Town Meeting Day 2026.

The committee also worked to prioritize the topics that would benefit from public feedback, which could be grouped together, and which could be recommended by the committee based on the research. The committee will continue this conversation when more members are able to be present. Some preliminary considerations and decisions include:

- There is consensus about removing the strong mayor form of government from the discussion as well as removing the option for having only 3 city councilors.
- Discussion about term limits and term length revealed some nuance that may require consultation with certain committees like the Planning Commission and Design Review Board.
- There was conversation about councilor compensation and the need for better communication about the requirements of the job.
- The topics of elections and neighborhood assemblies are intertwined and require a more robust conversation.
- The committee will recommend that a charter review committee be established with a regular timeline.
- The committee will recommend that the election of the leader of the elected body continue to be the responsibility of the City Council.

Considering the tight timeline, the committee decided to establish an ad hoc subcommittee tasked with developing the public engagement process. This subcommittee will meet before the next full committee meeting. Bethany, Deb, and Gabrielle volunteered to do this work and Brad will also participate. The group is looking for 1 more volunteer.

The next meeting is Thursday, September 25, 2025 at 6:30 PM.

Deb moved and Gabrielle seconded to adjourn, which passed unanimously. Elaine adjourned the meeting at 7:59 PM.