

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA
MINUTES OF MEETING
November 12, 2025**

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Amber Thibeault, President; Tim Miller, Clerk; Elaine Haney.
ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Colleen Dwyer, Director of Human Resources; Ricky Jones, Public Works Superintendent; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Marcus Certa, Lauren Chicote, Bethany Clark, Jeffrey Ferland, Christine Forde, Toni Morgan, Katie Murad, Sean Neely, Meghan O'Rourke, Dennis Thibeault, George Tyler, Nick Warner, Sharon Wille Padnos, Stephen Wille Padnos, 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

Stephen Wille Padnos noted that he is opposed to renewing the cannabis cultivation license for 8 Taft Street. He also noted that municipal water rate payers are seeing increases in their water bills and expressed concern that this is a hidden cost that is making it more difficult to afford to live in the City. City Council President Thibeault noted that there was a communication sent out by the City to explain the price increase and the rationale behind it. City Manager Mahony provided a brief explanation and offered to respond to any follow up questions that Mr. Wille Padnos may have after reviewing the communication.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Acting as the Cannabis Control Commission: Consideration of S-000009646, Outdoor Cultivator Tier 1 Small Cultivator for TrichomeVT

City Manager Mahony began by noting that this particular property has undergone litigation in the past related to cannabis licensing and that a resulting Vermont Supreme Court decision has resulted in more authority to municipalities to regulate cannabis. She noted that a notice of violation was issued for this property and was reviewed by the Development Review Board, which agreed with the violation, and that the issue is now in front of the City Council for its consideration. She said that the sole authority of the Council in this case is acting as the local Cannabis Control Commission and deciding whether this does or does not meet zoning requirements. She noted that the DRB's recommendation is to deny the license renewal and revoke the local cannabis license for Trichome. She said that if the City Council agrees with the DRB's recommendation, that is then sent on to the State, which is the issuer of the cannabis license.

Councilor Haney asked whether the State has already approved the cannabis license for this property and how that would be impacted by the Council's decision. City Manager Mahony replied that a municipality has the right to weigh in on whether a cannabis license is out of compliance with zoning or local law, and that the State still has the right to override a municipal decision. Councilor Haney noted that despite the litigation surrounding this particular case and the Supreme Court ruling that changed precedent about what municipalities can do, municipalities continue to be at a disadvantage in this process, in terms of authority and control.

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the Essex Junction Local Cannabis Control Commission deny the license renewal and revoke the local cannabis control license for TrichomeVT's Tier 1 outdoor cultivation. The motion passed 3-0.

b. Annual Winooski Valley Parks District Presentation and Discussion

Nick Warner and Lauren Chicote presented on this agenda item, providing a Fiscal Year 2025 report and a Fiscal Year 2027 request to the City of Essex Junction in the amount of \$36,911. Mr. Warner spoke about the history of the Winooski Valley Park District and its dual mission of ecological protection and public recreation. He noted that it is funded by eight municipalities, of which the City of Essex Junction is one.

City Council President Thibeault asked about the variance between several operating revenue budget lines (general income and other operational support) between FY2025, FY2026, and FY2027, and Mr. Warner and Ms. Chicote provided an explanation. Councilor Haney asked about how WVPD is working with the City on Stevens Park, and Mr. Warner replied that they are assessing how they can be most useful and help with maintenance in the park. Councilor Haney also asked about the potential canoe launch near Global Foundries, and Mr. Warner replied that they are working with the Town of Essex as well as private property owners, to create that launch.

c. Annual Town Meeting TV Presentation and Discussion

Megan O'Rourke, Executive Director of Town Meeting TV, presented on this agenda item. She noted that though most of the revenue for Town Meeting TV comes from cable subscribers, they are working to diversify revenue to support their work, including municipal contributions. She noted that this year's request for municipal contributions for Essex Junction is \$15,315, a 5% increase over last year's contribution. She further noted that this increase is part of offsetting the decline in cable revenue that supports the majority of Town Meeting TV's work.

Councilor Haney noted that the legislature increased the base funding from the Secretary of State's office and asked whether that is offsetting the decline in revenue from Burlington Telecom and Comcast. Ms. O'Rourke replied that yes, this increase is helping to offset that revenue decline.

d. Human Resources Department Head Brief to Council

Human Resources Director Dwyer spoke regarding this agenda item. She spoke about activities over the last six months, noting that the administrative hiring procedure was updated for the first time since 2014, that managers received training on standardized employee evaluations from VLCT, and that they are looking forward and preparing for union contract negotiations as well as updating the mission, vision, and values of the department. She also noted that a Hiring and Wage Compression Committee is in the process of issuing recommendations to the City Manager about hiring and wage compression and that the department is working on launching an employee engagement and survey to track longitudinal data on employee satisfaction.

Councilor Haney asked about the Hiring and Wage Compression Committee, which positions were on the committee, and whether there was consultant support for the committee. Director Dwyer replied that the committee was born out of the negotiation process, was comprised of six individuals both in and out of the union, and did not include consultant support. Councilor Miller asked how the department is settling into being back at 2 Lincoln Street, and Director Dwyer replied that it has been a positive experience and has been great to see staff connect in different ways.

e. Discussion and Consideration of Pearl Street Multimodal Project Alternative Including Delay Analysis Presentation

Community Development Director Yuen introduced this topic by noting that it is related to consideration of a design alternative that can be funded with the City's available capital budget of \$1.23 million. He noted that there have been several public meetings on this topic over the last few months, saying that there was a

Planning Commission meeting dedicated to this topic as well as a public engagement summary and Q&A documents.

Sean Neely, a consultant with Stantec, provided an overview of the scoping study, noting that the area in question is Pearl Street between Susie Wilson Road and the West Street Extension. He spoke about the purpose of the current study, which is to provide safe, visible, comfortable and convenient multimodal transportation that connect this section of Pearl Street and do so in such a way as to fit within the available budget for this body of work. He spoke about the needs for the current study, which are to provide an inviting travel corridor, complete a missing bicycle facility link in the regional bicycle network, and to identify short- and medium-term improvements that can be accomplished using existing resources from the City. He reviewed three alternatives from the 2018 scoping study, noting that the preferred alternative at the time would cost \$2.6 million (\$4 million in 2025 dollars). He then reviewed the alternative #2 from the 2025 study, one of which retains most of the existing median and curbs, reduces the existing two-lane westbound roadway to one lane, and includes a buffered bike lane and shared-use path, while decreasing the eastbound lanes to one lane to allow for a public transit stop and pedestrian crossing. He noted that this proposal would reduce the speed limit to 30 MPH. He then compared project costs for the 2018 alternatives and the 2025 alternative. He noted that median removal was the primary driver of project costs for all alternatives, saying that the 2025 alternative minimizes the number of curbs that are removed in order to contain costs.

Councilor Haney expressed appreciation for the work to include a crosswalk in the project, as one has been needed for years on that section of Route 15. Councilor Miller expressed strong concern about any project that includes a reduction in westbound traffic, given that on-road bicycle lanes become snowbanks in winter, rendering them essentially unusable. He said he is supportive of a sidewalk-height shared use path and that he is supportive of an eastbound transit stop. He said he would also support the use of a pedestrian HAWK (high-intensity activated crosswalk) signal. He expressed concern about emergency vehicle access. City Manager Mahony said that having two bike lanes is an attempt to make the mid-block pedestrian crossing safer by having the pedestrian only cross one lane of traffic on the westbound side, rather than two lanes of traffic, and that it is also intended to be a form of traffic calming. Mr. Neely added that the alternative assumes the City would take on snow removal in this area as part of its winter operations and that five feet of grass buffer is generally considered reasonable snow storage space. He said he would not advocate for a HAWK in this area, as they can sometimes contribute to confusion among the driving public. He spoke about emergency access, noting that the grass buffer and curb can be used by emergency vehicles. He said that in terms of the volume of westbound traffic, Stantec conferred with VTrans and evaluated the capacity of the roadway, and purposefully ensured that the travel lanes on the westbound approach are long enough to sufficiently store the queues and not negatively impact traffic operations along the road. City Manager Mahony asked about accommodating traffic related to fairground events. Mr. Neely replied that westbound travel could be temporarily modified by cones and signage to allow for two lanes exiting the fairgrounds. He also noted that best practice in roadway design accommodates not for the worst traffic, but for the 30th busiest hour of the year. Councilor Miller noted that as the number of housing units coming online in Essex Junction increases, so will the number of cars that will be added to the roadways. Councilor Haney also noted that in addition to that, the number of pedestrians will also increase. She said that she thinks this preferred alternative provides a good compromise to balance traffic volume and increased pedestrian safety. Director Yuen asked if the existing second westbound lane actually provides additional capacity to the road, and Mr. Neely replied that having two westbound lanes is not required for the volume that they are seeing in the traffic. He also noted that because the changes contemplated for the westbound side of Pearl Street are just painting, the changes could easily be reversed if the results are unsatisfactory.

The following public comments were received:

- Resa said that the better biking and pedestrian infrastructure are great, but that they are not practical in this area, especially if the cost of them means detrimental impacts to car traffic.
- Stephen Wille Padnos said that paint markings are difficult to see in the winter if there is snow cover, and a painted bicycle lane may be difficult to see and abide by. Mr. Neely said that though the current

design of the bicycle lane is to demarcate it with paint, there is the option to install raised bollards to provide vertical buffering.

City Council President Thibeault made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council approve the 2025 Alternative 2 as the preferred alternative for the near term for the Pearl Street Multimodal Improvements Scoping Study, on the condition that staff return to the Council prior to final design regarding the alternative for westbound traffic configuration. The motion passed 3-0.

f. Discussion and Consideration of Public Works Facility Next Steps

City Manager Mahony began by noting that the purpose of this discussion is to provide an update and information to the City Council about the need for a new public works facility. She said that the key takeaway is that the better the City can properly maintain its fleet of vehicles (by storing them in such a covered facility), the longer they can extend the life of those vehicles. She noted that the Public Works leadership have also conducted site visits at other public works facilities, such as that of Milton. She said that the cost estimate is still projected to be between \$8 million and \$9 million, and that Councilors should consider this for both the Budget Day discussion on December 5 as well as further budget discussions in mid-February. She said that if the Council ultimately decides to move forward with this, a bond vote would be put in front of voters on April 7th.

Councilor Haney asked whether all enterprise fund estimated needs will be available for the Budget Day discussion in early December, in order to have an estimate of the total tax burden for the upcoming fiscal year. City Manager Mahony replied in the affirmative, caveating that some enterprise budgets are determined based on the amount of flow or usage, which is difficult to project six months ahead of time. She said that there are no additional new bond items up for consideration. Councilor Miller asked about intermediary steps between now and a bond vote, and City Manager Mahony replied that the City would have an architect look at the design and provide more refined cost estimates for inclusion in a construction RFP. Councilor Miller advocated for taking a design-build approach with the RFP, to streamline the design and construction process. Public Works Superintendent Jones spoke briefly about the site visit to the new Milton public works facility.

g. Discussion and Consideration of Rebranding Identity Options

Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director Snellenberger began by noting that this item is to consider brand identity options that were developed by the branding consultant, Place Creative Company. She noted that these seven options were presented to the Rebranding Committee several weeks ago, and that the options included a logo, tagline, color palette, and examples of how the logo would appear on products. She noted that the City and Committee have five rounds of revisions they can make to one of these options, and that the taglines are interchangeable and can be with any of the logo options. She presented and described each of the options (A-G) with the Council. She noted that each of these options was presented to the Rebranding Committee, which felt that Concept A was the logo that best represented the City, saying that it is distinctive to the City in that it represents the Five Corners in an abstract way, while also being an aesthetically pleasing image that strikes a good balance between contemporary and traditional design. She said that the Committee also felt that "Vermont's Neighborhood City" was a good tagline fit for this logo as well. Jeffrey Ferland and Katie Murad, both members of the Committee, also spoke briefly and noted their support of Concept A. Councilor Miller also spoke as a member of the Committee, saying that he was generally underwhelmed by the options but agreed that Concept A is the best of the options. Councilor Haney said she is supportive of Concept A, but said she would like to see either the word "Essex" capitalized, or capital letters used for the entire word. She said that she would also like to see the font size for "Junction" be equal to or larger than that of "Essex" in the logo, given that the City is often referred to as "the Junction." She said that she likes the taglines "Where it all comes together" and "small City, big heart." City Council President Thibeault agreed with Councilor Haney about emphasizing the Junction portion of the City's identity. She said she likes the "Small City, big heart" tagline. She said she would like to have further discussions around which tagline to use, but would like to see further refinement for the Concept A logo as the preferred choice.

The following public comments were received:

- Resa expressed appreciation for the work done by the Rebranding Committee, saying that she likes Concept A, but would like to see the font in grey.
- Stephen Wille Padnos added that he likes Concept A, but suggested that dash lines could be added to indicate that the image is of the Five Corners intersection. He said the image could also be zoomed out slightly to show that it is the intersection. He further suggested moving the image to the same line as the word “Essex.”

Director Snellenberger said she would take this feedback and have the consultants work on a round of edits and revisions to the logo and taglines.

6. **CONSENT ITEMS**

- Approve Meeting Minutes: October 22, 2025
- Approve Lincoln Hall Conference Room Policy Update
- Acting as the Liquor Control Commission – Approve Liquor/Tobacco Licenses

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 3-0.

7. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony noted that there will be some work conducted on the outside of the 2 Lincoln Street building to address a chimney leak (which is not related to the recently concluded renovations). City Council President Thibeault noted that the Council and City staff are conducting a food drive on December 1, 2025 from 8:30 to 3:00 P.M. at the City offices, and will be accepting non-perishable food items.

8. **READING FILE**

- Check Warrant #24098 – October 31, 2025
- October Financial Reports
- Resolutions of Appreciation for Troy Wilber and John Rowell
- Reappraisal Update
- Lead Service Line Inventory Annual Letters Update
- Regional Boards and Committees Memo
- Recreation Advisory Committee Minutes – October 15, 2025
- Brownell Trustee Meeting Minutes – October 21, 2025
- Police Community Advisory Board Meeting Minutes – October 21, 2025
- Governance Committee Meeting Minutes – October 23, 2025
- Capital Review Committee Meeting Minutes – October 28, 2025

9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- No Executive Session is anticipated

10. **ADJOURN**

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 3-0 at 9:08 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt