

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING
December 10, 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; Susan McNamara-Hill, Clerk/Treasurer; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Ella Ruehsen, Bethany Clark, Thomas Coen, Steve Eustis, Deb McAdoo, Candace Morgan, Dennis Thibeault, Marlon Verasamy, Judy, Resa.

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

City Manager Mahony noted that Business Item #5a will be postponed until the City Council's January 21, 2026 meeting.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to amend the agenda to remove Business Item #5a. The motion passed 5-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public

None.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Annual Tree Farm Management Group Presentation **AGENDA ITEM REMOVED**

No discussion.

b. City Clerk Department Head Brief to Council

Clerk/Treasurer McNamara-Hill provided a summary of activity over the last six months and a summary of anticipated activity over the next six months. She noted that the City is still awaiting confirmation from the State Department about becoming a passport agency. Councilor Certa asked if the budget assumes potential revenue from that in the next fiscal year, and Clerk/Treasurer McNamara-Hill replied that she doesn't think so but can double-check. Councilors thanked the Clerk/Treasurer and her office for their exemplary work.

c. Discussion and Consideration of the Governance Committee's Charter Change Final Report and Recommendations, and Dissolution of the Governance Committee

Steve Eustis and Marlon Verasamy presented on this agenda item. Mr. Eustis noted that the Governance Committee focused on structural reforms (form of government, election methods, Council size and term lengths, compensation, and Charter review), solicited feedback from Councilors and Trustees from 2020 forward, solicited information from nine similar municipalities in the state, and conducted numerous community engagement activities to solicit information and feedback from the Essex Junction community. He said that as a result of that research, the Governance Committee has a number of recommendations to propose. He said they recommend retaining the Council-Manager form of government, retaining at-large elections, continuing with a Council President elected by Councilors, maintaining five Councilors, maintaining three-year staggered terms, and maintaining no term limits. He said they recommend, in terms of modifications, increasing Councilor stipends from \$2,500 to \$3,600, providing the Council President with 25% higher compensation, indexing annual stipend adjustments to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), and requiring a comprehensive Charter Review every 12 years. He said that they recommend future exploration of a set

of broader soft reforms to strengthen engagement and participation with the community, and examining a recall provision for elected officials.

Councilor Certa thanked the Governance Committee for their tremendous amount of work over the last seven months on this set of recommendations. He expressed significant concern about the lack of public participation in the engagement process, noting that while numerous opportunities for input were solicited, not many community members participated. He said that he is reluctant to bring changes forward without more public input. He said he is supportive of the regular charter review recommendation, but cannot speak to the compensation recommendations, given that they pertain to Councilor compensation. He said he would like to see the committee either draft questions to put on the ballot for Town Meeting Day to solicit the input needed from the community to implement the recommended changes, or try and solicit additional community feedback. Mr. Eustis noted that the Governance Committee does not have further meetings scheduled and had anticipated dissolving after tonight. He said the Committee made a very strong effort to engage as many members of the community and hold as many forums as possible. He said that the lack of engagement could be interpreted as members of the community not being concerned with these recommendations. Mr. Verasamy said they would defer to the Council on whether the Committee should draft questions to be placed on the ballot, but that would require a charge from the Council. He also stressed the difficulty of public engagement. Mr. Eustis said that the Committee can pull information from the report for context for drafting questions, but said that the City Attorney would ultimately be charged with drafting the language to appear on the ballot. Mr. Verasamy suggested that the Council or staff can pull information from the report to create a one-pager to show why the Committee made the recommendations it did. City Manager Mahony said that staff can work with the City Attorney to draft the recommendations as proposed charter changes, to be considered and warned at the City Council's January 21, 2026 meeting. Councilors agreed that putting the questions to the voters makes the most sense, given that they deal with Councilor compensation, and they do not feel comfortable making decisions related to Councilor compensation without voter approval. Mr. Eustis and Mr. Verasamy spoke about how the Committee debated and made its recommendations from the lens of how to increase community engagement, and said the report contains a number of future soft reform recommendations geared toward increasing public engagement. Councilor Haney thanked the Committee for their work. Deb McAdoo, a member of the Committee, thanked Brad Luck for his hard work and support.

The following public comments were received:

- Resa noted that because the City will be voting on these changes in April, they likely won't be approved by the State legislature until 2027. She said that putting it on the ballot this year for a charter change is the best course of action if the City wants to move forward with it.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council accept the final report from the Governance Committee and dissolve the Governance Committee effective December 10, 2025. The motion passed 5-0.

d. Discussion and Consideration of Annual Meeting Engagement Plan

Director Snellenberger led the discussion of this item. She noted that the Council discussed the engagement schedule during its Budget Day session. She spoke about potential timing for the informational meeting, noting that it could be held on March 16 or March 23, given that other potential nights already have scheduled meetings or are holidays. She noted that ballots will go out on March 25 this year. She said that the Council could hold an informational meeting after ballots go out as well. The Council agreed to hold the informational meeting on March 16, 2026. Director Snellenberger then spoke about the community meal. She noted that members of the community have expressed a desire to have a community meal that is just a meal (no discussion of the budget) on the same day as the Council's proposed community meal (January 31). She asked the Council whether they would be interested in that idea, or whether they would like to pursue a community meal that also includes informal City discussions. Councilor Certa said that the proposed community meal (just a meal) sounds like it would be a multi-municipality event, so his preference would be to hold a separate community meal. Director Snellenberger clarified that the community meal (just a meal) is

strictly City-only. Councilors discussed this, and all felt that it would be good to keep the two events separate and stick with the Council's original plan for their community meal.

The following public comments were received:

- Steve Eustis asked why the City is taking a different approach than the last two years. City Council President Thibeault replied that they are trying to make the event more of an inviting environment and less formal than in the past. City Manager Mahony also noted that CVE is not available for this event, so they have also had to think about pivoting to a different space.
- Resa said it could be difficult to combine the two community meals.

e. Discussion and Consideration of Budget Day Feedback

City Council President Thibeault began by noting that this is an opportunity for Councilors to further discuss items brought up during Budget Day or budget-related items that may not have been discussed at Budget Day. Councilor Haney spoke about human services grants and how the Town sets aside 1% of its annual General Fund budget to give to organizations that provide services to the community. She spoke about the Town's grant application and approval process. She said she would like to discuss the possibility of putting a question on the ballot around setting aside 1% of the Essex Junction General Fund budget to use as human services grants. She noted that the City has addressed ad hoc requests for grants from organizations but has not had a formal process for reviewing and approving such requests. Councilor Certa asked whether it would be possible to review the unassigned fund balance on a yearly basis and decide whether to fund something like this, rather than asking residents for another increase to the tax rate to fund it. Councilor Haney said that one concern with that approach could be that the unassigned fund balance could fluctuate and may be needed for something else, which makes it difficult to use it as a dedicated human services grant fund. Councilor Miller spoke about the current difficulties many are facing, including high increases in property taxes, utility bills, and the City's proposed increase transfers to its capital reserves. He said he is supportive of the concept, but is gravely concerned with affordability. Councilor Sheldon said he is supportive of putting an item on the ballot to solicit voter feedback on funding such a grant pool. City Council President Thibeault noted that if the Council wants to pursue this and voters approve it, City staff will need to develop policies, procedures, and processes in order to implement a grant program, which could impact whether, when, and how other City priorities are pursued. Councilor Certa noted that putting it on the ballot would necessitate some pre-work and pre-development of processes and asked if staff have the bandwidth for that. He also asked if staff have the bandwidth to staff a human services grant review committee, given that committee staffing is at capacity. Councilor Haney spoke about the Town's process, noting that it has an ad hoc (not standing) committee and that their process works well and smoothly. City Manager Mahony said that if the Council wishes to pursue this as a priority, she would assess which staff have the bandwidth to take this on. Councilor Certa and Councilor Miller expressed reluctance to put this item on the ballot. Councilor Sheldon and Councilor Haney expressed support for putting this item on the ballot. City Council President Thibeault said she believes this is important but also wants to spend the time to weigh the impacts of funding this item versus some of the other initiatives or policies, such as a housing trust fund. She suggested having a more substantive discussion about this particular item at one of the City Council's meetings in January. Other Councilors agreed.

f. Discussion and Consideration of Postmarked Payments for Tax Bills

City Manager Mahony noted that in July of 2024, the City Council approved updated tax policies that included a change to no longer accept postmarks as indications of on-time tax payments, given that it was administratively burdensome and that there have been significant challenges with timely mail delivery. She said that it has come to the City's attention that because the City Charter doesn't specify a method and time of payment for taxes, the requirement reverts back to the more specific State statute language allowing postmarks as proof of on time delivery. She said that if the Council is interested in no longer accepting postmarks as proof of on time delivery, the question will need to be brought to the voters. She noted that the City does not accept postmarks on utility payments. Councilor Miller said that he would like to see the rules be applied uniformly (to taxes and to utility payments). Councilor Sheldon asked how many tax payments

arrive more than three days late. City Manager Mahony replied that the City waived or reversed eight tax penalties this past cycle. Councilors Shelden and Haney said that postmarks should be honored as proof of timely payment.

The following public comments were received:

- Resa said that the post office isn't being thorough about postmarking mail anymore, which should be kept in mind when considering this issue.

City Council President Thibeault said that residents have other alternative methods to deliver tax and utility bills to the City, including the drop box at City Hall. Director Morris agreed with Resa's comment, noting that a significant amount of correspondence comes to the City without postmarks. She also spoke about the administrative burden of honoring postmarks, especially given that the two departments that handle the workload do not have the bandwidth for additional manual processes. Councilor Certa asked if the City could expand its hours the week prior to the tax deadline, to make residents feel more comfortable with dropping off their bills in person. City Manager Mahony said they could look into this suggestion. Director Morris also noted that residents can request a receipt to confirm payments were received when they pay their tax bills (if they are uncomfortable dropping their payments off in a drop box).

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to authorize the City Manager to continue to research this topic and work with the City Attorney on a ballot question that would ask the voters to specify method and time of delivery for tax payments. The motion passed 5-0.

g. Discussion and Consideration of April Meeting Date Adjustments

City Manager Mahony said that because of how Passover falls in April, staff are recommending rescheduling the City Council meetings in April to be on April 15 and April 29.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, that the City Council reschedule its April 8 and April 22, 2026 meetings to April 15 and April 29, 2026. The motion passed 5-0.

6. CONSENT ITEMS

- Approve Meeting Minutes: Joint City Council/Planning Commission – November 6, 2025; City Council – November 11, 2025
- Approve Fiscal Year 2026 Wastewater Capital Plan Amendment for Doors
- Approve Comprehensive Plan Consultant Selection
- Approve CVE 2026 Banner Applications

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 there is a Train Hop event occurring this Friday evening. She also noted that the Public Works Department is doing a fantastic job with snow removal so far. Councilor Shelden also commended a public works employee who worked diligently to repair a broken plow truck. Councilor Miller noted that there is a Fire Department Open House on Saturday, December 13, at 10:00 A.M. and that Santa will be there. He also noted that there will be a holiday Fire Department parade on December 17 in the evening around the City. City Council President Thibeault thanked Councilors, staff, and residents who participated in the food drive, saying that they delivered 224 lbs of food and \$550 in cash to Aunt Dots. She noted that the next food drive event will occur in March.

8. READING FILE

- Check Warrant #24099 – November 14, 2025; #24100 – November 25, 2025
- Regional Boards and Committees Memo
- Railroad and Main Streets Kiosk Update

- d. Vermont Department of Health Annual Report
- e. Reappraisal Update
- f. Board of Civil Authority/Board of Abatement Minutes – November 3, 2025
- g. Governance Committee Minutes – November 5, 2025; November 20, 2025
- h. Bike Walk Advisory Committee Minutes – November 18, 2025
- i. Police Community Advisory Committee Minutes – November 18, 2025
- j. Brownell Library Trustee Minutes – November 18, 2025
- k. Planning Commission Minutes – November 18, 2025
- l. Development Review Board Minutes – November 20, 2025
- m. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes – November 25, 2025

9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. No Executive Session is anticipated

10. **ADJOURN**

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:30 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt