

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING
December 17, 2025**

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

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

OTHERS PRESENT: David Achee, Rev Baker, Clayton Clark (GMT), Finn Hamilton, Jeffrey Kershner, Deb McAdoo, Elijah Massey, Bridget Meyer, John O'Brien, Kirstie Paschall, Lauren Philbrook, 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

City Manager Mahony noted that amendments to the minutes are required.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to make the minutes of the December 5, 2025 meeting Business Item #5f. The motion passed 5-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public

Bridget Meyer said she is working to put together a community dinner for Essex Junction residents on January 31, 2026, and is here before the Council seeking funding for that dinner. She said that the cafeteria at the Essex Westford High School is available and that EJRP will set up games for the children in the gym, and they are thinking about having board games in the lobby or other fun offerings for adults and children. She said that the event would begin at 4:00 P.M., with dinner served at 5:30 or 6:00, and that they are hoping to have around 300 attendees. She said that the cost would be \$3,000 for the dinner itself. City Council President Thibeault said that this is a discussion topic that the Council would like to have at one of their meetings in January, so they would like to discuss it then.

John O'Brien spoke in favor of the City's Traffic Calming Policy, saying that the proposed changes would benefit the public walking and bicycling infrastructure of the City, and would bring the City in line with other bike- and- pedestrian-friendly municipalities in the area.

Rev Baker noted that he has seen several Patriot Front stickers in the City, noting that this is a white supremacist organization, and said he wanted to bring this to the City Council's attention.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Annual Green Mountain Transit Presentation and Discussion and Consideration of Green Mountain Transit's Request to Approve Amendment to Formula for Apportionment for ADA Paratransit Service
Clayton Clark, General Manager of Green Mountain Transit (GMT), spoke on this agenda item. He said that this annual presentation also includes an amendment to GMT's paratransit assessment methodology, which needs to be retroactively approved by 75% of the 8 municipalities served by GMT. He noted that the Fiscal Year 2027 assessment for Essex Junction is \$315,000, which is a \$30,000 increase from the previous year. He acknowledged that a 10% increase over one year is substantial and acknowledged that GMT's funding pressures is adding to the funding pressures of its municipal membership. He said the biggest component of that increase is an increase in the fixed route assessment. He said that the entirety of GMT's FY27 budget is showing a deficit of \$840,000 but noted that GMT has some plans of action to lower that deficit to under \$400,000 but that those plans are still in development. He noted that they are anticipating a future funding

gap for FY28 of around \$2 million, which could unfortunately mean another round of service reductions. He noted that though this is generally negative news, the Number 2 bus service (which is one of the Junction's primary bus routes) is the most protected route in the GMT system. He then noted, however, that the Number 4 route (the Essex Circulated route) is one of the most vulnerable routes in the system, which could end unless GMT identifies an additional revenue source in FY27. Mr. Clark then spoke about GMT's general reorganization efforts, noting that they are working with VTrans, the legislature, and other rural transit providers in the state to concentrate GMT's activities more heavily in the state's urban areas and transfer rural services back to rural transportation providers. He said that GMT's service in Franklin and Grand Isle County will transfer to rural community transportation beginning in 2026, and service in Washington County will transfer on July 1, 2026, and the seasonal ski mountain services at Sugarbush and Stowe will transfer in 2027. He said that GMT is also in the midst of reviewing its assessment methodology in tandem with identifying additional revenue sources, noting that the methodology has not been revised in 20 years. He said the goal of revising it to give municipalities a greater understanding of how their money is being used and making it easier for municipalities to tailor services to their individual needs. He noted that GMT has worked to change its tax status in order to be eligible for more nonprofit-related grant funding from the federal government, which could help provide longer-term relief. Mr. Clark then spoke about the ADA assessment methodology amendments, which have been proposed in order to decrease the volatility in ADA assessments seen by municipalities. He noted that the new methodology includes an access fee component that is tied to a municipality's fixed route service and a trip fee component that is based on the number of ADA trip origins and destinations in that municipality during the most recently completed fiscal year. He noted that as implemented, these amendments reduce Essex Junction's ADA assessment costs by around 9% compared to the prior methodology. He said that this change has been implemented and apologized for seeking retroactive approval back to July 1, 2024, rather than seeking approval prior to implementing the change. Councilor Sheldon noted that the new methodology is based on a study conducted in 2023 (pre-separation of the Town and City), and asked if GMT has a good methodology for separating the Town and City for these assessment purposes. Mr. Clark said he could provide further detail on how the Town versus City data is broken out, but that he is confident that the methodology is sound. Councilor Sheldon also asked if this retroactive approval is legally sound, and City Manager Mahony said she would follow up with the City Attorney to confirm. Councilor Certa thanked Mr. Clark for his work on advocating for individuals who need public transportation.

Councilor Sheldon made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to table the decision on the GMT funding and ADA assessment methodology amendments, until the Council receives requested data and advice from the City Attorney. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Discussion and Consideration of the Connect the Junction Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan
Community Development Director Yuen said that this item relates to updating the City Council on progress since the last time this was discussed at City Council, as well as outlining the Planning Commission's recommendations on this topic. He noted that the City Council and Planning Commission held a joint meeting on this topic in November and that no action was taken at this time. He said that since then, the Planning Commission had an in-depth discussion related to the regulation of height limits along the Pearl Street corridor and future configuration of the Five Corners intersection. He said that if this plan is adopted, the next step will be to work with consultants on a set of form-based code recommendations and implementing an d enforcing those through zoning. He reviewed and summarized topics and recommendations from the Planning Commission, including around the relationship between building height limits and municipal housing targets, affordable housing bonus, inclusionary zoning, and unit type incentives, height limits in specific areas, form-based code considerations, changes to traffic operations at the Five Corners intersection, and any known errors that need to be corrected. He noted that for the relationship between building height limits and municipal housing targets, the Planning Commission believes that the updated analysis supports allowing heights above 8 stories. He said that related to affordable housing bonus, inclusionary zoning, and unit type incentives, the Planning Commission did not recommend pursuing mandatory inclusionary zoning requirements, but recommended aligning with the State's existing affordability bonuses, but also suggested a supplemental bonus for projects that include 2-bedroom or larger units, in order to support larger

households. He said that for height limits in specific areas, the Planning Commission recommended a height limit for the Pearl Street Corridor of 9+1 (9 stories plus the 1-story bonus), a height limit of 4+1 in the historic portion of the Village Center District, a height limit of 9+1 in the Village Center District in the area between Park Street and Maple Street, and allow a 7+1 height limit in the remainder of the Village Center District. He said that for form-based code considerations, the Planning Commission recommended that the code consider transitions to lower-scale residential areas, design standards to temper the visual impact of height, and multimodal transportation improvements. He said that related to changes in traffic operations at the Five Corners intersection, the Planning Commission recommended removing proposed permanent closure of Memorial Way from further consideration, but allow for temporary closures for special events. He also spoke about technical corrections to documentation related to the draft plan.

Councilor Haney asked why the Planning Commission felt that the plus-one bonus floor would be preferable to pursuing inclusionary zoning. Director Yuen noted that inclusionary zoning requires a portion of new housing developments to be permanently or long-term affordable. He said that the Planning Commission felt that there are some risks to that all-or-nothing approach, given the current market conditions for construction, which could lead to fewer homes constructed overall. He said that they felt that a height bonus was less risky in that if developers couldn't afford the extra story, they wouldn't be compelled to construct it. Elijah Massey, Chair of the Planning Commission, agreed with this summary, and said that part of the Planning Commission's discussion was informed by its past rental registry work. He also noted other work the City is doing outside of the Transit-Oriented Development plan discussion to address missing middle housing and other housing needs in the City. Councilor Haney expressed support for the bonus for larger units. Councilor Certa expressed concern about the lack of inclusionary zoning in the plan, given that the Council has said one of its priorities is having more opportunities for low-income individuals to find housing in Essex Junction. He said he is generally supportive of increasing the height limits, recognizing that the only direction that Essex Junction can be developed is up. He said he looks forward to seeing more 3-dimensional renderings of how these increased heights could be visualized down Pearl Street and into the Village Center. Director Yuen said that it is difficult to develop a public framework for some of these issues without public funding, as it puts the onus and risk on developers to subsidize the affordable units with the market rate units. Councilor Certa said he would rather partner with developers than force policies on them. He asked if Burlington's inclusionary zoning has been successful in adding low-income housing into developments. Director Yuen replied that he does not believe Burlington's policies have been a failure. Mr. Massey also noted that having clear communication around this master plan and its contents will be key in engaging the public. Councilor Shelden expressed support for increasing height limits, saying that the best way to solve the housing crisis is to increase supply. Councilor Haney noted that the Junction's village designation allows developers some flexibilities in terms of Act 250 permitting and first priority for available state loans. Councilor Haney asked about plans for more in-depth communication with the community about the particulars of this plan, such as the height requirement changes. City Manager Mahony replied that once the City receives approval for the Connect the Junction plan, it will need to be implemented, in part, through amending the City's Land Development Code. She said that this amendment process would have the standard public engagement and public hearing steps, which is one mechanism for public engagement. Councilor Haney said she would like a summarized narrative of this specific topic to post in public forums in order to raise public awareness of these changes as much as possible. City Council President Thibeault asked how the unit type bonus would work, given that developers have stated that they are building what is demanded (which are typically smaller units). Director Yuen said that this incentive attempts to incentivize building more than just studio apartments and one-bedroom units. City Council President Thibeault agreed that having more explicit and detailed agendas for meetings could help raise awareness of particular sub-topics within agenda items (such as noting the building height proposals as part of the Transit Oriented Development discussion, for example).

The following public comments were received:

- Resa said that the more the Council can involve people early and often, the better, especially on complex topics such as development and urban planning. She expressed concern about expanding the limit on building height to 9 stories. She also emphasized the importance of ensuring that developers follow the LDC and that code is enforced.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council adopt the Connect the Junction Transit-Oriented Development Master Plan, as discussed. The motion passed 5-0.

c. Discussion and Consideration of the Proposed Traffic Calming Manual

Director Yuen said that this item was previously introduced and discussed by the City Council at its August 13, 2025 meeting, noting that City staff have worked to refine the proposed Traffic Calming Policy in response to that feedback, and that the amended policy is generally supported by the Essex Police Department, Public Works Department, and City Engineer. He said that the new policy generally allows for more types of traffic calming than the City currently has. He said that the existing policy currently poses challenges for residents to petition and have a traffic study conducted, and the new policy would remove that barrier and instead rely on a set of criteria and scoring rubric to determine whether traffic calming interventions are needed in a certain area. He said that based on feedback from the City Council's August 13 meeting, the scoring rubric includes a local support factor that elevates the priority of locations with strong resident backing. He noted that this could still lead to a single complainant in a high-scoring location to lead to implementation, and he proposed adopting an approach similar to South Burlington's, where applicants must provide five or more signatures from proximate households or businesses to support the request. He said the current policy also only allows residents of Essex Junction to request a speed study, but that the amended policy expands participation to allow any interested party to submit a complaint and initiate the process. He noted that this approach could result in residents feeling that decisions about their streets are being influenced by non-residents, but said that the majority of speeding-related complaints in the City come from local residents and the risk of this changing is low. Councilor Sheldon asked about the City's capacity to implement traffic calming measures, if it has limited funding in its budget to do so and enforcement still remains a problem. City Council President Thibeault noted that the Police Department is aware of the importance of enforcement (in addition to traffic calming) and is working to curb infractions through enforcement mechanisms. Councilors agreed to maintain the current proposed draft language around local support in the rubric, to align with current Capital Committee processes. Councilors agreed with the proposal to expand participation to allow any interested party to submit an initial complaint.

The following public comments were received:

- David Achee expressed support for the traffic calming policy revisions.

Councilor Haney asked about instances where speed studies are not feasible due to camera angles or street curves. Director Yuen replied that this process should include improved coordination between departments in order to ensure that data is collected accurately. He noted that the Community Development Department would conduct the initial desktop analysis and help plan for the physical collection of data. Jeffrey Kershner of Hamlin Engineering, spoke about how the City can move through addressing data limitations in this revised traffic calming policy and process.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Sheldon, that the City Council adopt the revised Traffic Calming Policy as discussed. The motion passed 5-0.

d. Discussion and Consideration of the Rebranding Identity Feedback

Communications and Strategic Initiatives Director Snellenberger said that this is a continuation of the rebranding discussion initially begun at the City Council's November 12, 2025 meeting. She said that at that meeting, the Council had selected Option A and listed a number of revisions to pursue. She said that the consultant made proposed changes and presented revisions to the Rebranding Committee, which reviewed them and would like the Council to consider Concepts A, B, and C. Councilors expressed support for Concept A. Councilors also agreed that the word "Junction" should be more prominent than the word "Essex." The Council also discussed tagline options, and coalesced around tagline A (Where It All Comes Together), but asked that the consultant make sure that the proposed taglines are not being used by other municipalities.

The following public comments were received:

- Rev Baker expressed support for Concept A, and provided additional feedback on layout and text justification. He also expressed support for Taglines A and G.
- Resa expressed support for Concept A.

e. Discussion and Consideration of Updated Annual Meeting Schedule

City Manager Mahony said that the Annual Meeting Schedule has been adjusted to accommodate all deadlines, and to include the informational hearing dates as decided by the Council at its December 10, 2025 meeting. She noted that the warning must be approved at the March 11, 2026 meeting. She said that they are still contemplating holding the January 14th meeting on the budget, but would also be holding a January 21 meeting. Councilors expressed support for the additional meeting on January 14.

f. Approve Meeting Minutes – December 5, 2025

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to amend the minutes to remove George Tyler from the meeting attendee list and add George Dunbar to the meeting attendee list and accept the minutes as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

6. **CONSENT ITEMS**

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes – December 5, 2025 **now Business Item #5f**
No discussion or approval needed, as there are now no consent items.

7. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony noted that tree removal will occur in the median on Pearl Street tomorrow morning, necessitating a closure in one of the westbound lanes. She noted that City offices will be closed for the holidays on December 25 and 26, and January 1. Councilor Haney recommended that Councilors and staff discuss the January 31 community meal events via email, noting that this discussion would not violate Open Meeting Law. Councilor Certa asked that any resident with budget questions reach out to the City Council or staff, so that they can work to have those questions addressed. City Council President Thibeault thanked EJRP for the successful and fun Train Hop event.

8. **READING FILE**

- a. Check Warrant #24101 – December 12, 2025
b. November Financial Reports
c. Recreation Advisory Committee Minutes – December 3, 2025
d. Planning Commission Minutes – December 4, 2025
e. Governance Committee Minutes – December 4, 2025
f. Tree Farm Management Group Minutes – December 8, 2025

9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. No Executive Session is Anticipated

10. **ADJOURN**

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 9:10 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt