

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING
February 11, 2026**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Mark Brislin, Assistant Recreation Director, EJRP; Brad Luck, EJRP Director; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Julie Shorter, Older Adults Program Director, EJRP; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Eliana Fox, Pat Lynch, Bridget Meyer, Reed Nye, Dennis Thibeault, Katie, 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

None.

5. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2027 Proposed General Fund Operating and Capital Budgets

City Council President Thibeault opened the public hearing.

City Manager Mahony provided an overview of the Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) proposed General Fund (GF) Operating and Capital Budgets. She began by noting that the proposed FY27 City Budget is \$12,921,469, a \$502,228 or 4.0% increase over the FY26 GF budget. She said that this translates to an average annual tax increase on a \$280,000 property of \$118 over the FY26 tax rate. She also provided a summary of the preliminary estimated increases on utility rates for FY27. These include an estimated preliminary annual increase on all utilities of \$75 or 9.1% and an increase in the stormwater utility of \$24 or 44.4% for a total increase across property tax and utility increases of \$217 on a \$280,000 property. She noted that utility rates will be finalized over the next several months, and that the City Council (not the voters) approve the utility rates. She noted that the GF budget was built with an eye to affordability, and with a goal of an increase between 3-5%. She said that a level-funded budget with contracted increases in salaries and health insurance would be around a 3.5% increase, so a 3% increase without cutting services would not have been feasible. She noted the drivers of the budget increases between FY26 and FY27, which included salary increase, technology service and license cost increases, increases for vehicle, equipment, and buildings maintenance and repair costs, health insurance premium increases, increases in cleaning costs for 2 Lincoln (because the occupied space is now bigger), an expanded Assessor's budget for 2 FTEs instead of 1.7 FTEs, and an increase in the police budget for shared services with the Town. She spoke further about the salary, wage, and benefit increases, noting that there was an overall 4.25% increase in salary and merit increases, that there are no new positions in the FY27 proposed GF budget other than the expanded Assessor's office FTEs, that health insurance costs increased markedly less than in previous years (2.05% for CY2026), and that personnel costs account for 34.1% of the GF budget overall. She spoke about cost containment efforts for the General Fund, including aligning services contracts to achieve cost-effectiveness, and moving

expenses out of the GF to EJRP Program Funds where possible. She also spoke about examining transfers out of the GF to capital reserve funds, to set funding aside to pay for large and costly infrastructure projects in future years. She said that this budget level funds the GF capital transfer and relies on the Local Option Tax (LOT) funds to help cover increases, assumes a 7% rolling stock transfer, increases the retirement fund transfer by \$25,000 in anticipation of future retirements, and removes the transfer to the unassigned fund balance, which is at 12% as of the end of FY25. She provided a visual summary of the proposed FY27 GF expenses, additionally noting that it includes an additional \$30,000 for economic development strategic planning. She provided a visual summary of the proposed FY27 GF revenues, noting that 76% of the revenues are from resident property taxes, 10% are from business property taxes, 8% are miscellaneous revenues, and 6% are for Global Foundries' property taxes. She noted that this may all shift as the result of the property reappraisal activities that are currently occurring but noted that the reappraisal in general is budget neutral (the overall revenues will not grow). She provided an overview of the proposed FY27 GF capital projects, noting some road and sidewalk repair, purchasing of traffic cameras, traffic calming measures, restoration of Veterans Memorial Park, installation of a bike lane on Park St, implementation of an asset management program, and replacement of equipment (lawn mower, dump truck, pickup truck, and sidewalk plow). She spoke about how the strategic plan and annual workplan process and how these feed into budget building. She then spoke about next steps, including a Council budget working session and presentation of the draft warning of the annual meeting ballot and public hearing on charter amendments on February 25, finalizing the budget for voter consideration and a second public hearing on charter amendments on March 11, an informational hearing on ballot items on March 23, and the City's annual meeting day and voting on the budget on April 14 at the Champlain Valley Expo.

There were no public comments.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to close the public hearing. The motion passed 5-0.

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion and Consideration of the Fiscal Year 2027 General Fund Budget and Capital Program Budgets

City Manager Mahony spoke about what has changed since the last time the Council discussed the budget on January 28, which includes the additional \$30,000 for economic development, another slight decrease in the county tax in the City's favor, for an overall net increase since the January 28 presentation of \$26,211. She also noted other minor changes that did not result in material changes.

There was no further Council discussion or public comments or questions.

b. Rebranding Final Design Approval

Communications and Strategic Initiatives Director Snellenberger said that this relates to the Rebranding Committee's presentation of rebranding for final design approval. She said that there have been some minor changes related to color, but that it is very similar to the third round of design proposals presented to the City Council in December. She provided a brief history of the rebranding process, which began with the formation of the Rebranding Committee in April 2025, which procured and met with a design and marketing consultant, and developed proposals for logos and other branding and identity materials for the City. She said that the finalized proposal reflects the feedback received from the community while also being a good reflection of the community and representation of the City. She presented the finalized version of the City logo and text and presented sub-branding logo designs for individual City departments and programs. She noted that the Committee is still working on designing the horizontal logos, which will be presented in a style guide that will outline the signage and templates of the logo for City use.

Councilor Certa asked when the public can anticipate seeing the new logos and branding around the City, and Director Snellenberger replied that there will be one or two rounds of revisions for the style guide and

templates, but she anticipates that the City will begin to debut the new logo and signage in April. Councilors commended the staff and Rebranding Committee for their work on this rebranding effort.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council approve the final brand identity as presented. The motion passed 5-0.

c. Recreation Advisory Committee Brief to Council

Bridget Meyer, the Chair of the Recreation Advisory Committee, provided an update to the Council on the Committee's activities. She began by noting that the Committee was charged with representing the City and its residents' interests in serving in an advisory capacity and liaison to EJRP in the development, maintenance, and stewardship of a comprehensive system of parks and recreation services. She spoke about the Committee itself, with individuals ranging in age from 15 to 80, which fosters great discussion for affordable programs and services for the community. She said that they have spent the last year becoming acquainted with EJRP staff, programs, and history. She spoke about the usage of programs through EJRP and challenges related to space, capacity, and staff retention.

Councilor Certa asked how the Committee plans to begin advising EJRP in the next year. Ms. Meyer spoke about how the last year was spent familiarizing the Committee with EJRP's activities and programs, and that she anticipates the next year being spent determining how the Committee can best help EJRP and serve in that advisory and liaison capacity. Councilor Certa asked which programs are being most detrimentally impacted by EJRP programming's space constraints, and Ms. Meyer replied that summer camps seem to be the most constrained and have the most waiting lists.

d. Recreation and Parks Director Department Head Brief to Council with Program Director – Older Adults
EJRP Director Luck and Older Adults Program Director Julie Shorter spoke on this agenda item. Director Luck spoke about activities in EJRP overall in the past 6 months, noting staffing changes, events that have been put on (Meet Me On Main, Pumpkin Palooza, the Train Hop, Letters to the North Pole, the Giving Tree, Winter Lights in the Park), and upcoming activities in the next 6 months, maintenance and repair work on the Maple Street Park building and the Senior Center, Cascade Park renovations, the opening of the Main Street pocket park, and summer events such as the Memorial Day and Independent Day parades. He spoke about the importance of Vermont's schools as their recreation hubs and that additional burdens have been placed on schools since Covid, which highlights the need for EJRP to have more of its own space to address recreation needs. City Council President Thibeault asked about EJRP's plans for a Meet Me On Main series of events next year, and Director Luck replied that they are currently reviewing feedback and think that a fall timeline for next year's series of events would be appropriate. He noted that they are also thinking about having one-off events on some Saturdays throughout the year. Councilor Certa agreed that space constraints are real but would like the City to work on trying to address those over the next several years.

Program Director Shorter spoke about activities in the Older Adult Program through EJRP. She noted that the program hosted three large luncheons (the Senior Picnic in September, a Thanksgiving meal, and a Christmas meal) at Maple Street Park, and that around 100 seniors were served at each event. She noted that the program also hosts community meals twice a month at Holy Family, and they serve between 25-45 people at each of those. She spoke about building strong partnerships with program coordinators at Cathedral Square Senior Housing Facility and putting on community events in their space, as well as partnering on activities such as indoor walking at the fairground facilities. She spoke about building a senior hiking club, which has been well-attended. She said that they are looking ahead to the reopening of the Senior Center, which will come with a grand reopening event and opportunities for new programming and volunteering. She said that anticipated summer events include a senior swim night at the Maple Street Pool, as well as equine programming for seniors with a local horse farm. She concluded by saying that attendance continues to grow, which will only continue once the Senior Center reopens. Councilor Miller commended Program Director Shorter for her efforts to grow the Older Adult Program with the current lack of dedicated space. Councilor Certa echoed those sentiments and remarked on the relationships that have been built through this programming.

e. Discussion and Consideration of Pearl Street Additional Pedestrian Crossing

Community Development Director Yuen and Eliana Fox, the Transportation Director at the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) spoke on this item, which is a scoping study for a Pearl Street pedestrian crossing and is a project within the CCRPC's Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), a federally mandated and funded work plan. Director Yuen began by saying that there is no official pedestrian crossing between the West Street Extension and Champlain Valley Expo (CVE), which represents a half-mile gap (or ten-minute walk). He noted a prior study conducted in 2012, which recommended not installing a crosswalk at the time because criteria for a crosswalk had not been met. He said that the land use and context have changed over time, resulting in revisiting the need for a crosswalk. He noted that there are now bus stops on both sides of the streets in that area, and that there should be infrastructure in place to ensure that people can access these municipal services. He noted that this corridor is part of the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) plan, and that there have been repeated requests for safer crossings. Ms. Fox presented a summary of the scope of work and timeline for this scoping study. She noted that the study includes a review of traffic, pedestrian and crash data, site visits and field measurements, and online surveys to understand community needs, as well as evaluating potential crossing locations, conceptual plans and cost estimates, and that the project began in August of 2025. She provided an overview of preliminary findings on pedestrian counts, and Director Yuen reviewed video of several street crossings. Ms. Fox spoke about the survey that was fielded and provided a summary of the 42 responses received, including where people are crossing that section of street and why. Director Yuen spoke about next steps, which include reviewing consultant data and developing conceptual alternatives, and presenting those alternatives at the Bike Walk Advisory Committee's March 12, 2026 meeting.

Councilor Haney noted that a crossing in this area has been one of the most frequent requests she has received from constituents. Councilor Certa expressed support for a pedestrian crossing on this stretch of road. Councilor Sheldon asked if the scoping study is considering one crosswalk or multiple crosswalks. Ms. Fox replied that the consultants are looking at up to two locations and will present two different designs per location, but that it will be at the City's discretion whether both location crossings are implemented.

f. Discussion and Consideration of Park Street Bike Lane

Director Yuen spoke on this agenda item, noting that the Community Development Department has been working on a proposal for changes to Park Street between Railroad Street and River Street. He said that this arose due to a noted gap in the bicycle lane network in this area of the City. He said that this section of road has seen some traffic fatalities involving pedestrians. He noted that this gap has been suggested by several plans, including the Connect the Junction TOD Master Plan of 2025 and the Essex Town and Village Bike and Pedestrian Plan of 2016, as well as included in the Community Vision and Strategic Action Plan of 2024. He said that in the proposal for a bike lane, they have divided the street into four zones (A, B, C, and D), and that they are not proposing changes to Zone A, and that the focus of the proposals is for Zones B-D. He summarized the alternatives, which include Alternative 0 (do nothing), Alternative 1 (remove all on-street parking to create the space for bike lanes), and Alternative 2 (remove some on-street parking on one side of the street). He noted that the biggest impact of Alternatives 1 and 2 will be to parking. He noted that Zone B currently has a total of 7 parking spaces, Zone C has a total of 14 spaces, and Zone D has a total of 2 spaces. He spoke about average utilization of these spaces over time from 2008-2025, noting that between 0 and 1 spaces are used in Zone B at any given time, with a maximum occupancy of 2 spaces at peak times. He noted that certain spaces have a one-hour limit and that they are subject to an overnight parking ban in the winter months. Councilor Certa said that these utilization numbers seem low, particularly in Zone B. Director Yuen spoke about a 2019 parking study conducted by Stantec, which coincided with peak demand. He said that if the Council is interested in proceeding with this proposal, next steps would include public engagement (direct outreach to businesses and property owners and a public meeting at the Bike Walk Advisory Committee) in the spring, the selection of a preferred alternative by the Council and final design and technical specification drafting in May, and implementation in the summer of 2026, subject to available capital or operating budget funding. He said that this could be implemented relatively quickly and at low cost, and could be timed with annual restriping of the streets in question. Councilor Miller asked if there are any plans for

lighting or signage improvement in this area, in order to further improve the pedestrian experience. He also expressed concern about removing parking spaces when the City is potentially increasing housing density in this area. Councilor Certa agreed with this but said that additional residents will also mean additional demand and desire for connections to multi-modal paths within the City and to other municipalities. Director Yuen said that lighting is not part of the scope for this proposal but acknowledged that there could be improvements to this aspect of the streetscape. He noted that this stretch of road is an area of safety concern for traffic calming measures, and that one of those measures could be narrowing lanes and adding features such as bike lanes. Councilor Sheldon expressed support for the proposal, as it increases cyclist safety and is a traffic calming measure. He asked whether parking could be removed from the opposite side of the street in Alternative 2 to allow for businesses to maintain on-street parking, and Director Yuen replied that that would be possible. Councilor Haney asked if Alternative 1 could be pursued for one zone and Alternative 2 could be selected for other zones. Director Yuen said that they could pick and choose between alternatives for each zone.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council support proceeding with the Park Street Complete Street Improvements Project and direct staff to advance public engagement and further design development as proposed. The motion passed 4-1 (Councilor Certa dissenting).

g. Discussion and Consideration of Land Development Code Fee Schedule Adjustments

Director Yuen spoke on this agenda item, noting that the Community Development Department has been reviewing the development fee schedule and ensuring that it is aligned with the cost of administering services and aligned with what other municipalities are charging for similar services. He said that they have drafted proposed changes in consultation with the Public Works Department and City Engineer, the most significant of which is for the excavation permit fees. He said that the fee structure was \$30 for minor excavation and \$100 for a major excavation, and that they are now proposing an \$85 base permit fee and \$10 per square foot for excavations into the roadway pavements and into the sidewalk or shared use paths. He said that the per square foot fee would not apply to excavations related to work that is already going through the development approval process. He said they are also proposing a \$100 fee for work that has been found to be conducted without a permit. He noted that these proposals are closer to but still remain below the regional median, to avoid sticker shock for existing contractors. He noted a second proposed change related to no longer charging pavement repair fees for cuts under 100 square feet in size. Councilor Haney asked what the anticipated additional revenue would be if these fee schedule changes are made. Director Yuen replied that the City issues around 30-50 excavation permits per year, and that this would raise some revenue but not a significant amount. City Manager Mahony added that fee schedule increases are intended less to be a revenue source and more to ensure that costs match the level of effort needed to conduct these activities, as well as align with surrounding municipalities. Councilor Sheldon asked about whether adjustments for inflation could be added to these fees, and Director Yuen replied that it would be a good practice for the City to review its fee schedule every several years to ensure that it is keeping pace with inflation and other factors.

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council adopt the amendments to the development fee schedule as presented, effective February 12, 2026. The motion passed 5-0.

7. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes – January 21, 2026; January 28, 2026; January 31, 2026
- b. Approve Green Mountain Transit's Request to Approve Amendment to Formula for Apportionment for ADA Paratransit Service
- c. Approve PVR-4155 Certificate No Appeal or Suit Pending
- d. Approve Banner Application for Burlington Gem and Mineral Club

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

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269 8. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony spoke about working
270 to set up public tours of the public works facility. Councilor Haney suggested that CCVT be invited to one
271 of the tours to take footage. City Council President Thibeault spoke about upcoming public engagement
272 events on the FY27 budget. Councilor Certa noted that the entire budget engagement schedule is
273 available online on the City's website.
274

275 9. **READING FILE**

- 276 a. Check Warrant #24104 – January 23, 2026
277 b. January Financial Reports
278 c. Regional Boards and Committees Minutes Memo
279 d. Chittenden Solid Waste District Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report
280 e. 2025 CATMA Annual Report
281 f. Tree Farm Management Group Minutes – January 12, 2026
282 g. Brownell Library Trustee Minutes – January 20, 2026
283 h. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes – January 20, 2026
284 i. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes – January 27, 2026
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286 10. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 287 a. Not Anticipated
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289 11. **ADJOURN**

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291 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to adjourn the meeting. The motion**
292 **passed 5-0 at 8:31 P.M.**
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294 Respectfully Submitted,
295 Amy Coonradt