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8       **CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION**  
9        **CITY COUNCIL**  
10      **REGULAR MEETING**  
11      **DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING**  
12      **January 28, 2026**

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

15      **ADMINISTRATION:** Regina Mahony, City Manager; Ricky Jones, Public Works Superintendent;  
16      Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality Superintendent, Jess Morris, Finance  
17      Director.

18      **OTHERS PRESENT:** John Alden, Richard Hamlin, Reed Nye, Dennis Thibeault, Resa.

19      **1. CALL TO ORDER**

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

21      **2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

22      None.

23      **3. APPROVE AGENDA**

24      None needed.

25      **4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

26      a. Comments from Public

27      None.

28      **5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

29      a. Water Quality Superintendent Department Head Brief to Council

30      Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo spoke on this agenda item. She provided an update on progress  
31      made over the last year for the department. She spoke about two major capital projects that were completed  
32      this summer and expressed gratitude for the staff who handled those projects. She spoke about the launching  
33      of the stormwater utility over the past year and noted that the City hired a stormwater coordinator in August  
34      of 2025. She spoke about the purchasing of a camera for the vacuum truck and how it will be helpful for the  
35      wastewater plant going forward, in terms of discovering where groundwater is infiltrating the collection  
36      system. She said that looking forward, the biggest challenges for the wastewater departments will be to  
37      address issues with aging equipment and infrastructure. She noted that the City applied to renew its  
38      wastewater permit with the State and that they have requested an additional 100,000 gallons to the overall  
39      capacity amount. She said another challenge will be related to biosolids management, given that the  
40      beneficial reuse of biosolids at Whitcomb Farm will be sunsetting due to stricter PFAS regulations. She said  
41      that for stormwater, the City needs to create a capital fund to address some of the City's aging infrastructure.  
42      She spoke about working with the Town of Essex to revise a shared agreement on shared collection lines.

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44      Councilor Certa asked about the experimental project that the City was involved in that explored ways of  
45      removing phosphorus and whether that could also help remove PFAS. He also asked if the City could begin  
46      sending biosolids to Whitcomb Farms again if the PFAS are removed. Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo  
47      replied that the pilot program is a grant-funded project from the State that involved loading phosphorus  
48      removal technology into a mobile trailer, and that the trailer will now go to a facility in South Burlington to test  
49      whether the technology works. She noted that some of the research conducted in this project also indicated  
50      that it could remove PFAS, and that if it is successful and the biosolids meet regulations, they could begin  
51      land application again. She said that she will follow up with the University of Vermont professor who had  
52      been working on this research. Councilor Haney asked for more information on growth pressures related to  
53      housing needs and the limitations of the pump stations. Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo replied that  
54      half of the City's pump stations are between 30 and 40 years old and weren't initially designed to pump for  
55      higher density areas and that they cannot retrofit them but are now limited by the force main, which would  
56

57 need to be replaced in order to increase capacity. She said that though the City wants development, it must  
58 be sure that it has adequate capacity in its water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure to support  
59 increased density.

60 b. Discussion and Consideration of Annual City Meeting Ballots

61 City Manager Mahony said that staff are recommending mailing postcards to residents so that they can  
62 request ballots in the mail, as opposed to universally mailing ballots to all residents. She noted that the school  
63 district is also intending to use this approach. Councilors agreed with this approach for the City's ballots.

64 c. Discussion and Consideration of the FY27 General Fund Budget and Warn Budget Public Hearing

65 City Manager Mahony began by noting that the Council last discussed the FY27 budget on January 14 and  
66 that there have been some minor changes between the budget at that time and the budget being brought to  
67 the City Council at tonight's meeting. She noted a slight adjustment of \$1,500 as a result of an increase in  
68 insurance rates from VLCT and a decrease in the county tax, which have offset each other. She also noted  
69 the enterprise funds with preliminary estimates of year-over-year changes. She noted a response to a  
70 question about stormwater, noting that a \$50,000 increase in the capital transfer for stormwater results in a  
71 roughly \$8 increase on the equivalent residential unit (stormwater rate). She also noted the inclusion of  
72 \$30,000 for consultant services for economic development and that that is in addition to the already-existing  
73 \$10,000 in the legislative budget (which could be used for engagement activities such as the one that Bridget  
74 Myers brought to the Council for its consideration). She noted that the Council must warn the public hearing  
75 for the budget tonight.

76 The Council discussed whether to include an additional \$30,000 in the budget for economic development  
77 consultant services. Councilor Miller expressed concerns about affordability, especially taken in tandem with  
78 a potential bond vote for a new public works facility. Councilor Certa said he is in favor of adding this \$30,000  
79 to the budget, saying that the City needs to be proactive about increasing revenue and growing the grand  
80 list in order to take the burden off of residents in the upcoming years. Councilors Haney and Shelden  
81 expressed support for adding the funding in.

82 **Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council warn the public  
83 hearing for the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 General Fund and Capital Budget on February 11, 2026 at  
84 6:30 P.M. The motion passed 5-0.**

85 d. Discussion and Consideration of the Public Works Facility Bond Vote

86 City Manager Mahony began by noting that the City Council last discussed this item at its November 12,  
87 2025 meeting. She noted that since that time, a third concept plan and cost estimate for a new public works  
88 facility have been developed, for a total cost of \$13.5 million. She noted that the impact on an average home  
89 in the City for a 20-year bond term is approximately \$299 and for a 30-year bond term is approximately \$259.  
90 She noted that after discussions, next steps to move forward would be for the Council to adopt a resolution  
91 of necessity on February 25, 2026. She noted that the Council should think about allowing itself enough time  
92 to communicate this with the community, if it chooses to move forward with a resolution of necessity and  
93 ultimately placing the question on the ballot.

94 Rick Hamlin of Hamlin Engineering (and the City Engineer) noted that there were two previous versions of  
95 the design concept for a new public works facility. He noted that Version 1 retained some of the buildings  
96 and provided some infill, while Version 2 was a teardown of most of the buildings. He said that feedback from  
97 the Council during its last discussion of this item was a request to remove all existing buildings except for the  
98 salt shed and build all new buildings for the facility. He provided an orientation to the proposed design for  
99 Version 3 of the pre-conceptual plan, including office space for public works personnel, the main barn, vehicle  
100 storage, and a new building that would contain a wash bay, pipe-fitting, water equipment and meter testing  
101 equipment. He said that because the existing buildings would be leveled, the construction crew would need  
102 somewhere to work out of during the 18-24 months of construction, and they are proposing the new wash  
103 bay building in the corner to do that. He also noted that the vacuum sucker would need to be stored in a  
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110 heated environment, which would also be stored in that new wash bay building. He said that Public Works  
111 has also requested two more bays be added to the salt shed to increase storage and stockpiling abilities  
112 during salt shortages. He also noted that bins that store other materials would also now be covered, rather  
113 than exposed to the elements, in this new plan. He noted that the roofs of some of the buildings could have  
114 solar panels added to them, if the City wanted to pursue that (though this has not been reflected in current  
115 cost estimates).

116  
117 Councilor Haney asked about the permitting needing for this construction. City Engineer Hamlin replied that  
118 they will need permitting from the City but also a wastewater permit, a construction general permit, and an  
119 operational stormwater permit. Councilor Certa asked about what is driving a higher pricetag on this version  
120 than for the cost of similarly-designed facilities for other municipalities. John Alden of Scott & Partners replied  
121 that he canvassed online for building material cost estimates and spoke with contractors who constructed  
122 similar facilities in Milton and St. Albans, and noted that the estimate for St. Albans began at \$216 per square  
123 foot and ended up around \$300 per square foot in their reporting once construction concluded. He noted that  
124 there are a number of factors that go into costs, including not just the building but the site work, infrastructure,  
125 and utilities. He said that currently, this proposal has a square footage pricetag of \$275 per square foot.  
126 Councilor Miller noted that recently constructed public works facilities for other municipalities include St.  
127 Albans, Georgia, Milton, East Montpelier, Berlin, and Swanton, and they have all been built out under  
128 construction management contracts. He noted that they have generally costed between \$250-\$300 per  
129 square foot, and that the contracts seem to run for around a year. Councilor Certa said that this seems in  
130 line with what is being presented and he is in support of it. Mr. Alden noted that the range of dollar costs is  
131 wide and that keeping costs contained throughout the project will be a challenge, so the City should make  
132 sure it picks the right process and that the construction management firm would be key in ensuring that costs  
133 are kept contained.

134  
135 The following public comments were received:

136 • Resa asked about alternative solutions, if a bond vote fails. Councilor Miller said that it is the Council's  
137 job to advocate for a bond vote, and he sees the need for this new public works facility.

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139 Councilor Shelden thanked Public Works for the work that they do. He said that it seems like the current  
140 Public Works facility needs another salt bay, and a smaller investment for quality of life improvements, but  
141 he said he does not see the need for a brand new facility. Other Councilors expressed support for putting  
142 this on the ballot for a bond vote.

143  
144 e. Discussion and Consideration of Water Service Line Further Investigation and Loan Ballot Question  
145 City Manager Mahony noted that there was a bond question similar to this one in 2023, in order to comply  
146 with federal drinking water rules around identification of lead in service lines for drinking water. She noted  
147 that this original request entailed inventorying the service lines, which resulted in determining that the majority  
148 of the service lines are lead-free. She said that this next step requires validating a 15% sample size of the  
149 non-lead lines, which would require the City to dig and analyze the physical pipes themselves. She said that  
150 additionally, they are required to conduct further investigation into the remaining service lines that they were  
151 unable to determine as lead or non-lead during the initial phase. She noted that the City has until 2037 to  
152 complete this set of requirements. She said that Essex Junction is currently eligible for loan forgiveness  
153 under its Intended Use Plan, meaning that the first \$100,000 is forgiven and 50% of the remainder is forgiven.  
154 She said that given this eligibility, staff think it makes sense to continue to pursue this work, but that it would  
155 require taking on more debt and thus, the approval from residents through a ballot vote. City Council  
156 President Thibeault asked about the likelihood of regulations at the federal level changing and no longer  
157 requiring this work. City Manager Mahony replied that in her mind, the loan forgiveness (a known) outweighs  
158 the potential that requirements could change in the future (an unknown).

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160 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, that the City Council ask the voters**  
161 **to authorize a planning loan through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund for a project in the**  
162 **Water Enterprise to be used for service line material identification and non-lead service line validation**

163 as required by the federal drinking water regulations, in an amount not to exceed \$892,771 to be  
164 financed over a period not to exceed 10 years. The motion passed 5-0.  
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166 f. Discussion and Consideration of a Social Service Grant Program Ballot Question

167 City Manager Mahony began by noting that this was a program that the Village participated in while it was  
168 part of the Town but that since separation the City has not has this type of program. She said that she has  
169 been thinking about adding an activity around this discussion once reappraisal is completed, as they will  
170 have a better sense of how the City's finances stand and how much the Economic Development Fund is  
171 receiving. She noted that VLCT has put out guidance on Social Service Appropriations and said that the  
172 model policy recommends that each appropriation be a separate line item on the ballot that voters can weigh  
173 in on. She also added that if the City postpones their decision on this for a year, they could have a more  
174 thoughtful approach for the program and consider whether the program could be for one-time funding or  
175 annual operating funding for organizations, and whether they could incorporate participatory budgeting  
176 practices to put decision-making in the hands of residents.  
177

178 Councilor Haney said she supports participatory budgeting but isn't sure what types of participatory budgeting  
179 the residents of Essex Junction are interested in (having a voice in grantmaking to nonprofits that help the  
180 community versus having a voice in the City's spending decisions on infrastructure and operations). She also  
181 expressed concern about the capacity to establish a participatory budgeting program versus the capacity  
182 needed to start a human services grant program. She said that the Town's model is very easy to replicate  
183 for the City, whereas starting a participatory budgeting program for granting would be a large undertaking.  
184 She also emphasized that the local nonprofits who would be eligible for this funding need it urgently. She  
185 said that this would also help contribute to the human services needs being felt across Chittenden County.  
186 Councilor Certa said he is struggling with how to help these nonprofits but not contribute to the tax burden  
187 on the residents of the City. He said he very much supports putting this on the ballot for the voters to decide.  
188 He said that if the voters are in favor of this program, they could set it up like the Town's program now and  
189 transition it into a participatory budgeting process in the future. Councilor Miller said he is supportive of these  
190 nonprofits and the work they do, but expressed grave concerns about affordability, given the other items that  
191 were included in the budget (such as potential bond votes) and trying to keep tax increases to residents to a  
192 minimum. Councilor Shelden expressed support for putting this on the ballot and leveraging the Town's  
193 program structure and transitioning into participatory budgeting processes in the future. City Council  
194 President Thibeault agreed with Councilor Miller and said that this may not be the right year to come to the  
195 voters with this advisory ballot question ask, though she expressed support for the concept, the Town's  
196 program, and VLCT's model policy. She expressed concern that having both this and the bond vote for the  
197 public works facility on the ballot together may risk the failure of the bond vote, which is her priority of the  
198 two. Councilors discussed whether the social services grant program should be funded at 1% of the General  
199 Fund budget or through a 1-cent tax. Councilor Haney said a one-cent tax makes sense, and other Councilors  
200 concurred. Councilors also agreed to replicate the Town's program, policy, and process for now, if voters  
201 approve the program. Councilor Haney suggested producing an explanatory document on the proposed  
202 program.  
203

204 Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, that the City Council ask the voters  
205 to authorize the development of a Social Services Funding Program and approve a one-cent tax to  
206 fund this program, to be considered at the annual meeting in 2027. The motion passed 5-0.  
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208 6. **CONSENT ITEMS**

209 a. Approve Meeting Minutes – January 14, 2026  
210 b. Approve Annual Highway Mileage Certificate  
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212 Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa to approve the consent agenda. The  
213 motion passed 5-0.  
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215 7. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony encouraged residents  
216 to attend the City's open house on January 31. She said it is open between 11:30 and 2:00 P.M at Maple  
217 Street Park, and the City will have information on the ballot and ballot items, as well as a community  
218 lunch. Councilor Certa thanked Public Works for its work during the latest snowstorms to clear the roads  
219 and sidewalks to help keep the City running. Councilor Miller echoed these sentiments.  
220

221 8. **READING FILE**  
222 a. Planning Commission Minutes – January 15, 2026  
223

224 9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**  
225 a. An Executive Session is not anticipated  
226

227 10. **ADJOURN**  
228

229 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller to adjourn the meeting. The motion**  
230 **passed 5-0 at 8:03 P.M.**  
231

232 Respectfully Submitted,  
233 Amy Coonradt