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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING
February 25, 2026**

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

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Raj Chawla, Annie Costandi, Joe Duncan, Carrie Johnson, Seth Adam Manley, Reed Nye, Andy Rowe, Tim Shea, Dennis Thibeault, David F., 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

Resa asked about accessing meeting materials, citing technical difficulties. Councilor Certa provided suggestions for accessing materials in an easier way.

5. **PUBLIC HEARING**

a. First Public Hearing on Charter Change Amendments

City Council President Thibeault opened the public hearing.

City Manager Mahony began by noting that proposed charter change amendments require two public hearings, and that this is the first public hearing on this set of proposed amendments, the second of which is scheduled for March 11, 2026. She said that there are three proposed charter change questions that will appear on the ballot, and a fourth question about Councilor stipend base pay that isn't a charter change but will also appear on the ballot. She noted that all four questions arose from the Governance Committee process and recommendations. She provided a history of the Governance Committee, its actions, and the final report issued by that Committee. She reviewed the proposed charter change questions. The first asks whether the City Council President should be paid compensation that is 25% higher than other Councilors, due to the additional time commitments required of the President. The second is regarding how the Council's stipend should be adjusted over time, and whether voters will approve indexing the adjustment to the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) automatically. The third is whether the Charter should include a consistent time period for a Charter Review Committee to periodically review the City's charter every 12 years.

The following public comments were received:

- Seth Adam Manley asked what the current Council stipend is. City Manager Mahony replied that the current stipend is \$2,500 per year per Councilor.

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

6. **BUSINESS ITEMS**

57 a. Discussion and Consideration of the Resolution of Necessity for the Public Works Facility Bond Vote
58 City Manager Mahony noted that a resolution of necessity is the last step prior to placing a bond vote officially
59 on the City's ballot for its Annual Meeting. She noted that the current public works facility is on Jackson
60 Street, that current structures are beyond their serviceable life and no longer adequately support the Public
61 Works Department's daily operations, the main building is around 80 years old and uses outdated
62 construction material, and that the current facility faces deficiencies such as limited storage for equipment,
63 inadequate heated storage, low ceilings, and operational inefficiencies for staff. She noted that the salt shed,
64 while newer, requires more bays for salt storage than it currently has. She also noted that staff are
65 recommending a bond amount of \$13,960,000, to account for both hard and soft costs. She said that if the
66 bond vote passes, the City will look at a number of different financing options to ensure that they obtain the
67 most favorable loan terms.

68
69 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council approve the**
70 **resolution of necessity for the Public Works Facility in the City of Essex Junction as presented, for**
71 **an amount of \$13,960,000. The motion passed 4-1 (Councilor Shelden dissenting).**
72

73 b. Discussion and Consideration of FY27 Enterprise Fund Operating and Capital Budgets for Water,
74 Wastewater, Sanitation, Stormwater, and EJRP Program Fund
75 Finance Director Morris said that this is the second round of review for the FY27 Enterprise Fund Operating
76 and Capital budgets for these areas. She noted that they have data through January for most funds, but that
77 they were not able to prepare water bill estimates in time for this round of review but should have additional
78 figures and estimates to share in March. She said that they are currently projecting an overall increase for
79 water, wastewater, and sanitation, of about 11% or \$90 on an average resident's bill. She said that it had
80 previously been a 9.2% or \$74 increase when these estimates were first looked at in January. She
81 acknowledged that there have been several double-digit increases over the last few years, and that staff are
82 being mindful of that and trying to look for any savings or efficiencies where possible. She said that they have
83 been working to identify infiltration issues for the wastewater and sanitation systems to mitigate those where
84 possible, which entails slip-lining the pipes. She acknowledged that this is a costly procedure, and that they
85 are proposing to increase the transfer from sanitation to the capital reserve to cover those costs. She also
86 noted that there are regulatory change pressures for wastewater and stormwater.

87
88 Director Morris summarized the Water, Wastewater, and Stormwater Funds. She noted that the Water Fund's
89 revised rate change is a 6% increase with a 3.7% budget increase. She noted that CWD communicated the
90 FY27 water rate to the City between the first round of review and today, which resulted in that 6% increase.
91 She noted that the Wastewater Fund has a 3% budget increase and a 14.5% user fee increase, most of
92 which is related to payroll and benefit increases and the capital transfer increase, and upcoming changes
93 with how the City handles biosolids. She noted that the Sanitation Fund has a 9% budget increase and a
94 15% user fee increase, which is largely driven by the capital transfer increase. She noted that there may be
95 a change between now and March related to the two-party agreement revenue estimates. She noted that the
96 Stormwater Fund's operating budget has an increase of around 55%, with a 63% increase in the ERU rate.
97 She said that there was no capital transfer included in the FY26 budget and that a transfer has been added
98 to the FY27 budget of \$150,000. She said that this capital is needed for some MS4 permit requirements that
99 must be met in the near future. She summarized the capital funds, noting that they are anticipated to be
100 adequate to cover anticipated projects, with the exception of the Stormwater Fund (hence the proposed
101 \$150,000 transfer to capital for stormwater capital costs). She noted that this increase may not be adequate,
102 and that they have supplied estimates of how additional \$50,000 transfer increments will result in around a
103 \$9 increase per year per ERU.

104
105 Director Morris then summarized the Essex Junction Recreation & Parks (EJRP) operating budget. She
106 noted that it has remained largely unchanged since the first review of the budget in January. She noted the
107 administrative fees have been reviewed and recalculated, and that it is being allocated out within the program
108 fund to the various associated programs. She noted that this budget is a decrease from what was presented
109 on Budget Day, due to updated health insurance election information. She noted an updated Senior Center

110 Fund balance of \$17,317. She said that overall, they anticipate another round of updates for the March 25,
111 2026 City Council meeting, at which point it should be finalized and warned for rate-setting and
112 communicating to residents around anticipated changes.

113
114 City Council President Thibeault asked if an additional \$50,000 increase in the stormwater capital transfer
115 would have implications for the bond. Director Morris replied that it will not negate the need for the bond, but
116 could reduce it, and she can look into this for the next round of review.

117
118 Councilor Certa asked if any of the PFAS remediation work is being factored into the budget. Water Quality
119 Superintendent Mandigo replied that the two line items used in the budget to cover the biosolids program will
120 cover the cost if they need to change their method, regardless of the disposal rate, though a caveat is that if
121 New York banned biosolids applications due to PFAS, Casella could come back and increase the City's
122 rates. She said that they should be fine for FY27 but may need to address this in FY28. Councilor Certa
123 noted that some of the increases in stormwater were due to deferred costs from FY26 and asked about the
124 possibility of deferring a further portion of the costs until FY28. Director Morris replied that this budget
125 represents the lowest numbers that staff are comfortable with. She said that some of the projects in the
126 capital plans are also general fund projects, and they do not want to hold up a water line project if the
127 stormwater portion of it is delayed, for example. Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo also noted that they
128 are coming up on some deadlines articulated in their permit, and they do not want to fall too far behind in
129 meeting those deadlines.

130
131 c. Champlain Water District Annual Presentation

132 Joe Duncan, General Manager of Champlain Water District (CWD), spoke on this agenda item and provided
133 an update on CWD's budget process. He noted that they generally strive for increases in the 3-5% range,
134 but that there were some factors that resulted in increases outside of that range this year. He said that FY26's
135 rate was 3.011 per 1,000 gallons, to 3.170 per 1,000 for FY27, which is a 5.56% increase. He said that the
136 drivers of this increase include increases in salaries, additional debt service, a decrease in water use from
137 GlobalFoundries (a large industrial water user in the district), and additional electricity costs (due to
138 unanticipated rate hikes from Green Mountain Power in FY25-26). He said that this results in an
139 approximately \$300,000 increase in CWD's budget. He spoke about CWD's robust capital program and
140 proactive investment in its capital and physical plant to ensure that equipment is running and in good health.

141
142 d. Discussion and Consideration of Champlain Water District Commissioner Vacancy and Appointment

143 City Manager Mahony noted that the City's CWD Commissioner, Aaron Martin, was elected last year for a
144 three-year annual term and that he has since moved out of the City (and the Commissioner position has a
145 residency requirement). She said that the recommendation before the Council is to re-appoint the position
146 through the existing term, and they are proposing to appoint Annie Costandi for the Alternate 1 position and
147 Regina Mahony for the Alternate 2 position, and that Ms. Costandi would serve in the vacant seat until the
148 next election in 2028. Ms. Costandi said she would be happy to fill this open position and to do her part for
149 the community and her peers.

150
151 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council appoint Annie**
152 **Costandi as the Essex Junction Champlain Water District Alternate Commissioner, and to appoint**
153 **Regina Mahony, City Manager, as the Champlain Water District Second Alternate Commissioner, until**
154 **the 2028 Annual Meeting election. The motion passed 5-0.**

155
156 e. Discussion of Initial Draft of the Informational Hearing and Annual Meeting Warning and Ballot Questions
157 City Manager Mahony said that this warning will be finalized at the March 11, 2026 meeting. She said that
158 there is nothing in the budget that has changed but that part of the budget process includes approving the
159 capital plan. She said that the Capital Committee had a project that came in front of them recently for a
160 shared use path on Main Street out into the Town, and that the Town has received grant approval for phase
161 one of the project, and that phase two is located partially in the Town and partially in the City. She said this
162 was brought to the Capital Committee to determine if the City would support a grant application for the phase

two work. She noted that the project was ranked highly by the Capital Committee, which would shift a number of other projects back in FY27.

She said that other items on the ballot include the proposed charter changes, the potential bond vote for the Public Works Facility, and election of officers for two City Council seats and one Library Trustee seat.

The Council discussed whether it would be possible to reorder the ballot questions to move the bond vote up on the ballot to be the first question asked and agreed to do so if City Manager Mahony confirmed that this is acceptable and allowed.

f. Discussion and Consideration of an Extension to the Existing Sound Indemnification Agreement with Champlain Valley Expo

City Manager Mahony began by noting that a request was received by Champlain Valley Expo (CVE), to maintain the status quo of the current sound waivers for a ten-year period. She said that the purpose of the ten-year period is to allow CVE to obtain financing for their capital improvements. She said that the sound indemnification agreement that dictates the waiver process is through December of 2027 and the recommendation is that the City would modify that to be ten years from now. She said that this extension would not affect the current financial agreement that the City has with CVE, which is set for renewal in December of 2027.

Tim Shea, Executive Director of CVE, spoke to this agenda item. He said that CVE is pursuing capital improvements to the grandstand on the grounds and that a longer runway for current sound waivers puts CVE in a better position to line up financing for these capital improvements, which are currently projected to be between \$1 million and \$2 million. Councilor Certa noted that in previous discussions, CVE had said that they could secure financing without needing to negotiate an extension of the sound waivers, and asked what has changed since then. He also asked whether CVE is contemplating lining up the current financial agreement with an extended sound waiver agreement or whether the financial agreement would continue to follow a three-year term. Mr. Shea replied that they believe they can make the current sound waivers (10 for the fair and 10 for the non-fair shows) work, but that it entails added risk. He said that they do not currently anticipate a different timeline for the financial agreement, but that their focus is on the sound waiver agreement at this time. Councilor Certa noted that the request is just for an extension of the waiver agreement without other modifications to the agreement to offset that ask. Councilor Sheldon asked what CVE is considering returning to the City in exchange for an extension of this agreement. City Manager Mahony replied that CVE would conduct capital improvements to the property itself without having to add more waivers to the agreement, but only an extension of the current terms. Mr. Shea noted that more shows also contributes to local option tax revenue and helps contribute to other parts of the economy, such as hotel bookings. Councilor Certa said that the community would like to get something in exchange for this term extension, given that some residents are more impacted by the sound from CVE events than others. He said he would like to see more effort to determine how to mitigate sound impacts for adjacent residents. City Council President Thibeault said she would support this extension, and would like to see the improvements take place and then enter into negotiations on the financial agreement with CVE. She said that CVE does a number of benefits for the City that are not being charged, such as hosting the Council retreat, hosting elections, hosting training space for the Fire Department, that also need to be factored into the conversation around negotiations. Councilor Haney acknowledged that CVE has worked collaboratively in the past to try and address sound issues with residents, and asked Mr. Shea to confirm that they will be attentive to any opportunities for further sound mitigation. Mr. Shea confirmed that CVE would like to continue operating as a good neighbor, and that they work with promoters to ensure that they are being as good neighbors as possible. Councilor Miller said that a strong CVE stands to benefit the community as a whole and contributes to the local economy. He said that this current ask does not change the current financial agreement but will allow CVE to conduct capital improvements for a better facility experience.

The following public comments were received:

- Raj Chawla expressed concern about the loss of leverage for the City if the sound waiver agreement is extended, and said that this is also a good time to reimagine the financial agreement with CVE. He said that the last time negotiations were occurring, the City received a large amount of feedback from residents on what the requirements should be. He expressed deep concern that the City is missing an opportunity to work with CVE to benefit taxpayers, residents, and the fairground.
- Resa said that the Council should think about how many more taxpayers will be impacted by the sound issues from CVE in ten years, given the City's work to increase density and housing stock in the Junction. She also asked why Councilor Haney has not recused herself from the discussion. Councilor Haney replied that this particular discussion does not violate the City's conflict of interest policy or present her with a personal conflict of interest. She said that she has no financial interest in CVE, nor did she participate in any of the discussions around the negotiation of the contract.

Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council authorize the City Manager to execute the amended Sound Indemnification Agreement between Champlain Valley Exposition, Inc. and the City of Essex Junction for Champlain Valley Exposition events through December 31, 2036. The motion passed 3-2 (Councilors Certa and Shelden dissenting).

g. *Discussion and Consideration of an Executive Session to Discuss a Personnel Evaluation
See item #10a below.

7. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes – February 11, 2026
- b. Acting as the Liquor Control Commission: Approve Liquor Licenses
- c. Essex Junction Little League Street Closure Application
- d. Approve Republican Representation on City Board of Civil Authority for Elections

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

8. COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT: City Manager Mahony said that they will finalize content on the final warning and work to prepare ballots for the Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, for voting. She noted that dog licenses are due by April 15, 2026. City Council President Thibeault noted that she and Councilor Haney will be at Quality Bake Shop tomorrow morning at 9:00 to speak with interested constituents on the budget and ballot items. Councilor Certa said that the City has made good progress in being more accessible and transparent but noted that three of the last five or six events have had no public participation and urged residents and the public to engage with their Councilors. Councilor Miller said that he will be at the Tractor Supply Co on Saturday at 8:00 AM to welcome Essex Junction's newest business.

9. READING FILE

- a. Check Warrant #24105 – February 6, 2026; #24106 – February 20, 2026
- b. Background Information on the Main Street Bike Path Project
- c. Board of Civil Authority and Board of Abatement Minutes – February 2, 2026
- d. Tree Farm Management Group Minutes – February 4, 2026
- e. Planning Commission Minutes – February 5, 2026
- f. Capital Committee Minutes – February 10, 2026
- g. Bike Walk Advisory Committee Minutes – February 12, 2026

10. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- a. *An executive session may be needed to discuss a personnel evaluation

265 Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council move into
266 executive session to discuss a personnel evaluation pursuant to 1.V.S.A §313(A)(3) to include the
267 City Council and Carrie Johnson of Maple Hollow Consulting, LLC.
268

269 Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to exit executive session. The motion
270 passed 5-0 at 8:54 P.M.
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272 11. ADJOURN
273

274 Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to adjourn the meeting. The motion
275 passed 5-0 at 8:54 P.M.
276

277 Respectfully Submitted,
278 Amy Coonradt