

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
CITY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING  
April 15, 2026**

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

**ADMINISTRATION:** Regina Mahony, City Manager; Mark Brislin, EJRP Director; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director;

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Raj Chawla, Bethany Clark, Clayton Clark, George Dunbar, Jack Hanchett, Warren Spinner, Resa.

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

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

**2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

City Council President Thibeault asked to move Consent Item #6c to be Business Item #5f, and modify the Executive Session to be Business Item #5g.

**3. APPROVE AGENDA**

**Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 5-0.**

**4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

**a. Comments from Public**

George Dunbar asked a number of questions about the Recreation Software Contract item, including who the current recreation management software vendor is, how much the contract cost in FY26, whether the City's procurement process was followed for the current vendor, whether the competitive bidding process was followed for the contract up for consideration tonight, and whether there are costs associated with this contract included in the FY27 budget.

**5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Discussion of Green Mountain Transit – Potential Elimination of the #4 Service**

Clayton Clark, the General Manager of Green Mountain Transit, spoke on this agenda item. He said that the #4 Service, the Essex Circulator, has been determined by the Agency of Transportation to be economically inefficient for the last ten years based on AOT's scoring of the route, and it has been recommended that the route be eliminated or modified. He said that the most recent report shows that the average cost per ride for GMT is about \$7, and the average cost per ride for the #4 service is around \$28 (with the next highest cost being around \$14 per ride). He noted that GMT is facing a very significant financial deficit of \$2.5 million for FY28 and \$500,000 for FY27. He said that reducing the #4 service would provide a net savings of \$112,000. He said that GMT's board will be considering this action at its meeting next week, noting that if this elimination is approved, GMT will need to work with the City of Essex Junction and the Town of Essex on how to handle ADA service. He said that riders with disabilities can access paratransit service through GMT's contract with SSTA, and they could explore providing this service for a period of time if the route is eliminated. He expressed optimism about the #4 service, given that current State legislative changes through the Transportation Bill ("T Bill") could allow GMT to collect money outside of its standard formula for assessment. He said that this could allow GMT to enter into an agreement with the City, Town, and Essex Westford School District, to raise local funds to cover the cost of the route. He noted that the school district is interested to keep some level of the #4 service.

Councilor Haney asked about the decline in volume of ridership and what the average number of riders for that route currently is. Mr. Clark replied that average ridership for the #4 is lower than for other routes, and

57 said he will send those utilization metrics to the City, including where the boardings are along the route. He  
58 said that the #2 bus service goes to the Amtrak station, and that one area of exploration is extending the #2  
59 service to the Essex Experience, in the event that the #4 service is eliminated. Councilor Certa noted that  
60 bus service in the City has been an issue for years, and said that there will be a number of people impacted  
61 who rely on this bus service. He said a key piece of the discussion will center on understanding the  
62 demographics of the ridership at the #4 stops to try and understand and mitigate impact. Mr. Clark noted that  
63 GMT is fielding a ridership demographic survey next month, so they should have fresh data to look at to  
64 inform potential discussions. Councilor Miller asked about the implications of a reduced route as it would  
65 relate to the availability of SSTA rides. Mr. Clark replied that SSTA service is available at the same time that  
66 the routes are available, which would need to be considered if the #4 service is reduced.

67  
68 b. Tree Advisory Committee Brief to Council

69 Nick Meyer, Chair of the Tree Advisory Committee, and Warren Spinner, a member of the Tree Advisory  
70 Committee and Tree Warden, spoke on this agenda item. Mr. Meyer spoke about the TAC's activities over  
71 the last year. He noted that the TAC planted 40 trees last year and received a grant for ash remediation. He  
72 noted that last year's drought made planting difficult and is hoping that the majority of the trees planted,  
73 especially in the Route 15 corridor, will survive. He said that they are growing the vast majority of their trees  
74 at the Burlington Branch Out Nursery, which is a great opportunity for volunteers to get involved and help  
75 grow trees that are much less costly than trees purchased through wholesalers. He said that work on ash  
76 tree remediation continues, that the TAC has removed and interplanted where possible. He noted that  
77 residents have been taking action to remove sickened ash trees on their private properties, and he said he  
78 hopes that the TAC can offer trees to those residents ongoing. He spoke about TAC's participation in Arbor  
79 Day events at schools. He noted that the City was awarded its 11<sup>th</sup> year as a Tree City USA City. He spoke  
80 about more work with the Planning Commission and Development Review Board to provide technical  
81 assistance and expertise where needed, especially with amendments to the land development code to  
82 improve the green infrastructure in the City. He spoke about upcoming activities over the next year, including  
83 planting 25 trees along the Village right-of-way, holding an Arbor Day event on May 13<sup>th</sup> and planting trees  
84 at the schools and at Maple Street Park, conducting a large planting at the Branch Out Burlington Nursery,  
85 holding a Tree Walk at St. Michael's College with its ecologist, holding a Great Tree contest in the fall, and  
86 working more with the Planning Commission and the Development Review Board.

87  
88 Councilor Certa noted Mr. Meyer's point about the current regulations requiring that 3% of the budget for  
89 large development projects be set aside for landscaping, and asked what he thinks that percentage should  
90 be if it were modified. Mr. Meyer replied that he doesn't believe it should be a percentage, but a set of  
91 comprehensive requirements and standards for landscaping. Councilor Certa said that the City should  
92 ensure that both current and future landscaping requirements are enforced. Councilors thanked the TAC for  
93 its work in the City.

94  
95 c. Discussion and Consideration of New Purchasing Policy

96 Finance Director Morris spoke on this agenda item, noting that a revision of the City's Purchasing Policy has  
97 been in progress for some time, given the City's separation from the Town and the implementation of new  
98 federal and state regulations in this area. She said that staff looked at current statute, VLCT's model policy,  
99 and the purchasing policies of six or seven neighboring municipalities, in order to inform revisions to the  
100 City's Purchasing Policy. She said that staff worked to move procedural instructions from the policy to an  
101 internal procedure document, updated purchasing thresholds and dollar amounts to align with federal  
102 requirements, align municipal thresholds with federal requirements, update the municipal Code of Conduct  
103 section to align with state statute, and update language related to the bidding process. She provided more  
104 detail about purchasing thresholds, noting that staff are proposing to move the minor purchasing threshold  
105 from \$40,000 to \$75,000 (and that the federal threshold is \$150,000), but that they would welcome Councilor  
106 input on this. City Manager Mahony noted that regardless of thresholds, the City cannot authorize purchases  
107 that don't fit in the City's budget. Councilor Certa asked about ways to increase transparency around  
108 executing purchases so that the public has more visibility into what has been authorized. Director Morris  
109 noted that one mechanism to track purchases is through the Check Warrants that are issued and that are

110 included in City Council materials, which shows every check that is cut. Councilor Certa said he would like  
111 to think about this for higher dollar amount purchases or contracts. Councilor Sheldon agreed, asking whether  
112 it would be feasible to convert checks above a certain dollar amount into some sort of dashboard for  
113 increased visibility and ease of review. The Council discussed moving the threshold for minor purchases  
114 from \$40,000 to \$75,000, and were amenable to that proposal from staff.  
115

116 The following public comments were received:

- 117 • George Dunbar said he would be in favor of greater transparency about contracts that have been  
118 executed and payments that have been approved.
- 119 • Raj Chawla asked about how the purchasing policy as revised satisfies the federal grant requirements  
120 for the Amtrak grant as it relates to DEI. City Manager Mahony replied that they have revised the  
121 purchasing policy as flexible and inclusive as possible as it relates to aligning with federal code.  
122

123 Councilor Haney said that this concept of a dashboard could be a larger body of work that may entail further  
124 software and staffing time to collect and collate and report the data in a user-friendly way. She said that she  
125 agrees that the intention is good, but would not want to delay the approval of this policy while that detail is  
126 being worked out.  
127

128 **Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council approve the**  
129 **Purchasing Policy as presented. The motion passed 5-0.**  
130

131 d. Discussion and Consideration of the Multimodal Train and Bus Station Improvements – Grant Agreement  
132 Conditions, Associated Amendment to the Personnel Regulations and Grant Approval Authorization  
133 City Manager Mahony began by noting that the City is now at the stage of obligating funds for this grant and  
134 project, after having gone through pre-authorization and project design to achieve the current level of  
135 obligation from the federal government. She said that federal grant conditions include provisions relating the  
136 diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that reflect recent changes in federal policy implemented through  
137 executive orders from the Trump Administration. She said that grant condition requires the City to provide  
138 equal opportunity as federal law allows, and that the City has worked with VLCT and the City attorney and  
139 determined that there could be certain statements in existing City policies that may raise a flag of concern  
140 under this grant condition. She noted the Federal Railroad Administration has noted that certain of these  
141 issues are under litigation and they are unable to provide clear guidance on how the City should approach  
142 this grant condition, and have also said that there is no aggressive enforcement of this grant condition at this  
143 juncture. She said that in order to have a clear picture of potential compliance issues, staff have put together  
144 an inventory of the sections of City policies and procedure documents that could be at issue. She said that  
145 her recommendation is to make a minor adjustment to personnel regulations in the mission, value, and goal  
146 statement section that highlights DEI. She said that in practice, the City will not change how it approaches  
147 advertising for and filling jobs. She also noted that the City is working to revise its overall mission, value, and  
148 goals statements, given that they are older and haven't been updated in some time, and anticipates having  
149 a lengthier discussion on this topic as the City proposes updates. She said that she would also recommend  
150 modifying job advertisements and postings to align with the City's full equal opportunity statement in the  
151 personnel policy (which does not need to be modified). She reiterated that the City still values diversity,  
152 equity, and inclusionary efforts and that the City is here to serve every member of the community in practice.  
153 She said that the risk of not making these changes could potentially be putting federal funding at risk for the  
154 next three years, which is not a tenable position for the City to be in. Councilor Sheldon noted that there is  
155 ongoing litigation about the legality of this executive order, and said he would be reluctant to make a change  
156 like this if the executive order is overturned. Councilor Certa asked what the impact to the community would  
157 be if this project does not move forward. City Manager Mahony said that this project will not move forward  
158 without the \$3 million federal grant, and that the benefit of this project is that it will elevate the look and feel  
159 of a critical section of the downtown area, which will benefit the entire community. Councilor Miller said that  
160 making these proposed changes will not change any of the City's practices, or the City's values. Councilor  
161 Haney said that though the edits proposed would remove mention of equity, inclusion, and diversity, it doesn't

162 mean the City won't practice diversity, equity, and inclusion. She said that the potential for revising the  
163 language again in the future also exists. She also recalled that this project has been in the works for years,  
164 and is part of a much larger plan. She said that she would be willing to make this concession in order to keep  
165 this project alive.

166  
167 The following public comments were received:

- 168 • George Dunbar expressed concern that the City would make these changes, accept the funding, and  
169 then be challenged in court and at risk of having the funding clawed back by the federal government.
- 170 • Mark Brislin asked whether this would apply to all federal programs. City Manager Mahony replied  
171 that this particular federal grant has this particular contract clause in it. She said that the approach  
172 being proposed now should work for other federal grants.

173  
174 **Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council approve the**  
175 **amendments to the Personnel Regulations identified herein and authorize the City Manager to**  
176 **execute the Federal Railroad Administration grant agreement for the Essex Junction Multimodal**  
177 **Train and Bus Station Improvements Project. The motion passed 3-2 (Councilors Certa and Shelden**  
178 **dissenting).**

179  
180 e. Discussion of the 2026 Council Retreat

181 City Manager Mahony said that staff are beginning to plan the Council's second annual retreat and would  
182 like to discuss what items would be of interest for inclusion in that retreat. Communications and Strategic  
183 Initiatives Director Snellenberger noted that last year's retreat had a City Council-specific discussion about  
184 the Council's priority areas and then a discussion with department heads on priorities for FY27, both of which  
185 were facilitated. She said that staff would like initial feedback from the Council on specific topics for inclusion  
186 and any suggestions for improvement. City Manager Mahony noted that they are hoping to hold the retreat  
187 on Wednesday, June 3, and that there will be discussions about firming up the agenda at the Council's two  
188 meetings in May. City Council President Thibeault said she would like to see a topic related to discussing  
189 revenue as a Council priority, as well as a topic related to continued improvement of public engagement.  
190 Councilor Certa said he would like to see a discussion about the amenities that are provided to the City and  
191 its constituents, and how to balance that with affordability concerns. Councilor Haney said that part of the  
192 engagement topic could be around how to harness citizen energy, such as when a group of residents  
193 expresses a desire to form a committee to work on a pressing topic (such as economic and business  
194 development).

195  
196 f. Approve Recreation Software Contract \*\*was Consent Item #6c\*\*

197 EJRP Director Brislin spoke on this agenda item. He said that while the current software system works for  
198 basic registration, it has not met organizational expectations, especially with financial reporting, childcare  
199 payments, tracking, and modules such as facility rentals, memberships, and ticketing. He said that staff has  
200 worked with the vendor to make improvements and has implemented a number of manual workarounds,  
201 necessitating spending around 10 hours per week on tasks that should be automated. He said that staff are  
202 maintaining accuracy through internal controls, but that this is not efficient or sustainable. He said that staff  
203 have not pursued recovering costs from the vendor and that their focus has been on working collaboratively  
204 with them to move forward. He noted that they have determined that the current system cannot meet the  
205 City's needs or expectations. He noted that the contract was originally set to expire on May 1, but that it has  
206 been extended through the end of August to allow for a smooth transition time from one vendor to another.  
207 He said that the proposed system the City is considering is \$50,000 annually and the goal is to cover that  
208 through a 1% user fee, with any additional costs covered by the program fund. He noted that there is an  
209 additional \$15,000 startup and training fee, which will also be covered by the program fund. He noted that  
210 the current system charges a 1.5% fee that is passed on to users, but had proposed to move to a straight  
211 \$40,000 annual fee. He said that staff's recommendation before the Council is based on experience over the  
212 past several months and the need for a system that better supports operations and better serves the  
213 community moving forward. City Council Thibeault confirmed that the costs would be covered by the program

214 fund, not by the General Fund. She also asked who the current provider is, and Director Brislin replied that  
215 it is Kaizen and the new provider would be Rec Technologies. He said that the current contract was around  
216 \$30,000 and was covered through user fees. He said that they selected the new vendor through a sole source  
217 selection process. He said that other municipalities with similar needs have used this new vendor and have  
218 been satisfied with their performance. Councilor Sheldon asked if the department has considered using one  
219 vendor for childcare subsidies and another system for parks and recreation operations, and Director Brislin  
220 replied that they thought about this option, but decided that one system that does both made more sense for  
221 the City.

222  
223 **Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council authorize the**  
224 **City Manager to enter into an agreement with Rec Technologies for recreation management software**  
225 **services, including a one-time cost of \$15,000 and an annual fee of \$50,000, effective September 1,**  
226 **2026. The motion passed 5-0.**

227  
228 g. \*Discussion and Consideration of an Executive Session to Discuss Attorney Client Communications and  
229 Litigation  
230 See item #9a below.

231  
232 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

- 233 a. Approve Meeting Minutes – March 23, 2206; March 25, 2026  
234 b. Approve Arbor Day Proclamation  
235 c. Approve Recreation Software Contract \*\*now Business Item #5f\*\*  
236 d. Approve Grants in Aid Participation to Help Mitigate Phosphorus in Stormwater Runoff  
237 e. Acting as the Liquor Control Commission: Approve Liquor Licenses

238  
239 **Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to approve the consent agenda. The**  
240 **motion passed 5-0.**

241  
242 **7. COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony thanked volunteers  
243 who worked the polls yesterday and thanked residents and voters for participating in yesterday's Annual  
244 Meeting Day and voting. Councilor Haney shared feedback that the wording on the postmark article on  
245 the ballot was confusing, and asked that the City work to communicate more clearly the implications of  
246 voting yes or voting no on future ballot items. Councilor Certa thanked his fellow Councilors for their work  
247 with him while serving on the Council.

248  
249 **8. READING FILE**

- 250 a. Check Warrant #241154 – April 3, 2026  
251 b. Regional Boards and Committees Memo  
252 c. March Financial Reports  
253 d. Reappraisal Public Meetings  
254 e. Chittenden County Communications Union District 2025 Annual Report  
255 f. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes – March 17, 2026  
256 g. Brownell Library Trustees Minutes – March 17, 2026  
257 h. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes – March 24, 2026  
258 i. Development Review Board Minutes – March 26, 2026  
259 j. Planning Commission Minutes – March 31, 2026  
260 k. Capital Program Review Committee Minutes – April 7, 2026

261  
262 **9. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

263 a. \*An Executive Session May Be Needed to Discuss Attorney Client Communication and Litigation  
264 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council make the**  
265 **specific finding that premature disclosure of the confidential attorney-client communications**

266 regarding a probable litigation would place the city at a substantial disadvantage. The motion passed  
267 5-0.

268  
269 Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council enter into  
270 executive session to discuss confidential attorney-client communications regarding probable  
271 litigation, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(E) and 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(F) to include the City Council  
272 and City Manager. The motion passed 5-0.

273  
274 Councilor Shelden made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to exit executive session. The  
275 motion passed 5-0 at 8:58 P.M.

276  
277 10. **ADJOURN**

278 Councilor Shelden made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to adjourn the meeting. The motion  
279 passed 5-0 at 8:58 P.M.

280  
281 Respectfully Submitted,  
282 Amy Coonradt