

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
April 15, 2026
Approved April 29, 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.

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

68
69 b. Tree Advisory Committee Brief to Council

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

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

95
96 c. Discussion and Consideration of New Purchasing Policy

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

111 included in City Council materials, which shows every check that is cut. Councilor Certa said he would like
112 to think about this for higher dollar amount purchases or contracts. Councilor Sheldon agreed, asking whether
113 it would be feasible to convert checks above a certain dollar amount into some sort of dashboard for
114 increased visibility and ease of review. The Council discussed moving the threshold for minor purchases
115 from \$40,000 to \$75,000, and were amenable to that proposal from staff.
116

117 The following public comments were received:

- 118 • George Dunbar said he would be in favor of greater transparency about contracts that have been
119 executed and payments that have been approved.
- 120 • Raj Chawla asked about how the purchasing policy as revised satisfies the federal grant requirements
121 for the Amtrak grant as it relates to DEI. City Manager Mahony replied that they have revised the
122 purchasing policy as flexible and inclusive as possible as it relates to aligning with federal code.
123

124 Councilor Haney said that this concept of a dashboard could be a larger body of work that may entail further
125 software and staffing time to collect and collate and report the data in a user-friendly way. She said that she
126 agrees that the intention is good, but would not want to delay the approval of this policy while that detail is
127 being worked out.
128

129 **Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council approve the**
130 **Purchasing Policy as presented. The motion passed 5-0.**
131

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

165 and is part of a much larger plan. She said that she would be willing to make this concession in order to keep
166 this project alive.

167
168 The following public comments were received:

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

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

180
181 e. Discussion of the 2026 Council Retreat

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

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

198 EJRP Director Brislin spoke on this agenda item. He said that while the current software system works for
199 basic registration, it has not met organizational expectations, especially with financial reporting, childcare
200 payments, tracking, and modules such as facility rentals, memberships, and ticketing. He said that staff has
201 worked with the vendor to make improvements and has implemented a number of manual workarounds,
202 necessitating spending around 10 hours per week on tasks that should be automated. He said that staff are
203 maintaining accuracy through internal controls, but that this is not efficient or sustainable. He said that staff
204 have not pursued recovering costs from the vendor and that their focus has been on working collaboratively
205 with them to move forward. He noted that they have determined that the current system cannot meet the
206 City's needs or expectations. He noted that the contract was originally set to expire on May 1, but that it has
207 been extended through the end of August to allow for a smooth transition time from one vendor to another.
208 He said that the proposed system the City is considering is \$50,000 annually and the goal is to cover that
209 through a 1% user fee, with any additional costs covered by the program fund. He noted that there is an
210 additional \$15,000 startup and training fee, which will also be covered by the program fund. He noted that
211 the current system charges a 1.5% fee that is passed on to users, but had proposed to move to a straight
212 \$40,000 annual fee. He said that staff's recommendation before the Council is based on experience over the
213 past several months and the need for a system that better supports operations and better serves the
214 community moving forward. City Council Thibeault confirmed that the costs would be covered by the program
215 fund, not by the General Fund. She also asked who the current provider is, and Director Brislin replied that
216 it is Kaizen and the new provider would be Rec Technologies. He said that the current contract was around
217 \$30,000 and was covered through user fees. He said that they selected the new vendor through a sole source
218 selection process. He said that other municipalities with similar needs have used this new vendor and have
219 been satisfied with their performance. Councilor Shelden asked if the department has considered using one

220 vendor for childcare subsidies and another system for parks and recreation operations, and Director Brislin
 221 replied that they thought about this option, but decided that one system that does both made more sense for
 222 the City.
 223

224 **Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council authorize the**
 225 **City Manager to enter into an agreement with Rec Technologies for recreation management software**
 226 **services, including a one-time cost of \$15,000 and an annual fee of \$50,000, effective September 1,**
 227 **2026. The motion passed 5-0.**
 228

229 g. *Discussion and Consideration of an Executive Session to Discuss Attorney Client Communications and
 230 Litigation
 231 See item #9a below.
 232

233 6. **CONSENT ITEMS**

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

239
 240 **Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to approve the consent agenda. The**
 241 **motion passed 5-0.**
 242

243 7. **COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:** City Manager Mahony thanked volunteers
 244 who worked the polls yesterday and thanked residents and voters for participating in yesterday’s Annual
 245 Meeting Day and voting. Councilor Haney shared feedback that the wording on the postmark article on
 246 the ballot was confusing, and asked that the City work to communicate more clearly the implications of
 247 voting yes or voting no on future ballot items. Councilor Certa thanked his fellow Councilors for their work
 248 with him while serving on the Council.
 249

250 8. **READING FILE**

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

262
 263 9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

264 a. *An Executive Session May Be Needed to Discuss Attorney Client Communication and Litigation
 265 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council make the**
 266 **specific finding that premature disclosure of the confidential attorney-client communications**
 267 **regarding a probable litigation would place the city at a substantial disadvantage. The motion passed**
 268 **5-0.**
 269

270 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, that the City Council enter into**
 271 **executive session to discuss confidential attorney-client communications regarding probable**
 272 **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**
 273 **and City Manager. The motion passed 5-0.**
 274

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

277
278 10. ADJOURN

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

281
282 Respectfully Submitted,
283 Amy Coonradt