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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES OF MEETING
June 3, 2026**

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Amber Thibeault, President; Tim Miller, Vice President; Bethany Clark, Clerk; Raj Chawla; Brian Shelden.

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Mark Brislin, EJRP Director; Colleen Dwyer, Human Resources Director; Chris Gaboriault, Fire Chief; Wendy Hysko, Library Director; Rick Jones, Public Works Superintendent; Susan McNamara-Hill, City Clerk; Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality Superintendent; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications & Strategic Initiatives Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Sue McCormack, Facilitator; Marcus Certa, Resa Mehren.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

City Council President Thibeault called the meeting to order at 8:00 A.M.

2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

None.

3. **APPROVE AGENDA**

None needed.

4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

a. Comments from Public

None.

5. **CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION:** *facilitated by Sue McCormack*

a. Council effectiveness and working agreements

City Manager Mahony began by noting that this annual retreat is a key part of the City's planning processes. Ms. McCormack then began by speaking about the goals of today's discussion, which are to continue to build shared understanding about roles, responsibilities, and norms, and focus on the Council's priorities around community engagement and economic development. Councilors began by sharing what they hope to take away from today's annual retreat. Ms. McCormack then led the Council in a facilitated discussion about establishing good shared norms and working agreements.

b. Community engagement and trust-building

Ms. McCormack then facilitated a discussion with the Council on the topic of community engagement and trust-building, with the goal of identifying a handful of priorities and action items to work on over the next year.

c. Economic development and the City's role in shaping future growth and redevelopment

Ms. McCormack then facilitated a discussion with the Council on economic development and the City's role in future growth and redevelopment, with the goal of identifying a handful of priorities and action items to work on over the next year.

6. **JOINT SESSION WITH COUNCIL AND DEPARTMENT HEADS:** *facilitated by Sue McCormack*

a. Team building and strategic reflection

Ms. McCormack facilitated icebreaker sessions with the Council and City Department Heads focusing on interactions with community businesses, engagement in community events, and the areas in Essex Junction that best represent the community's identity. She facilitated an exercise with Department Heads on their

56 hopes for the community if they were to leave the City now and return in five years. Staff brought up hopes
57 related to improved traffic, more affordable housing, and continued development of the City.

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59 b. Celebration of accomplishments and progress

60 Ms. McCormack facilitated a discussion with Department Heads and the Council on the departments'
61 accomplishments over the last year and progress on the City's goals and strategic vision.

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63 c. Discussion of strategic plan pillars and future opportunities

64 Ms. McCormack facilitated a discussion about the City's Strategic Plan pillars. City Manager Mahony
65 reviewed a brief overview of the pillars, which included housing, public services and facilities, economic and
66 business development, transportation and connectivity, environmental stewardship, and community
67 engagement and decision-making. The Council and Department Heads then engaged in personal reflection
68 and selected the action items associated with each of the six pillars that they would like to see prioritized
69 over the next one to two years.

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71 d. Small group discussions on strategic priorities

72 The Council and Department Heads then engaged in small group discussions around the strategic priorities
73 and action items they had identified.

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75 e. Priority-setting and identification of areas of alignment

76 Ms. McCormack facilitated a discussion around priority-setting and areas of alignment for the strategic
77 priorities, areas of focus, and potential action items. She reviewed the list of criteria to help prioritize items,
78 including whether the idea clearly supports the strategic pillars, is realistic for implementation in the next
79 several years with available or attainable resources, would have noticeable positive impacts on the
80 community, will reduce disparities and will promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, the City has or could build
81 the relationships or partnerships needed to make it successful, and is something that could be invested in or
82 sustained over time. They reviewed the list of items across pillars that they had developed in small group
83 discussions, including infrastructure to support housing, more services in neighborhoods, increased
84 community development, staff, staffing capacity housing needs, new impact fees, explore use of CHIP
85 financing/fee, explore Tier 1 designation, implement traffic calming improvements, housing trust fund, form-
86 based code, exploring a rental registry, holding a 5th birthday party for the City, public participation and
87 training, having a social media plan, emergency management plan updates, having a text alert system,
88 having an engagement committee, election information, investigate the use of firework drones, green energy
89 exploration, implement Comprehensive Plan climate and energy actions, stabilize and eventually expand
90 public transit services, Park Street bike lanes, implement one traffic calming improvement, hiring an
91 economic development consultant, expand downtown center designation, host business roundtables for
92 collaboration, having an economic development staff position, having more business services in
93 neighborhoods, developing a policy and staff training around AI use, Stevens Park options and alternatives,
94 recreation master plan, recreation community center, developing a homeless policy, developing an
95 enforcement policy, having an emergency shelter, Pearl Street Park parking, public parking, a 3-5 year plan
96 for parking garage, exploring alternative revenue streams, discuss having a full-time fire chief, ADA compliant
97 main entry to the library, build public works facility, social services grants, RFP for IT services, professional
98 development training for supervisors, Tree Farm capital plan, fund rolling stock, staffing for deputy manager,
99 library installation enhancement, ADA compliance for the City's website, and having a part-time assistant in
100 the clerk's office.

101
102 f. Refinement of short-and-long-term priorities

103 Ms. McCormack then facilitated a discussion of the above identified items and refining them for developing
104 short- and long-term priorities for the City, through the lens of shared purpose and momentum. The top
105 priorities that emerged were wastewater infrastructure to support housing, funding rolling stock, and exploring
106 alternative revenue streams. Other top priorities included stabilizing and expanding the City's public transit
107 network, implementing the Comprehensive Plan's climate and energy actions, the Tree Farm Capital Plan,
108 increasing community development staffing capacity, building a public works facility, developing a Recreation

109 Master Plan, hosting business roundtables for collaboration, and the City’s five-year birthday party. The
110 discussion included debate about whether some items were more public-facing versus internal infrastructure
111 work, and concerns about resource and staffing capacity constraints and how to balance maintenance of
112 existing systems with new initiatives.
113

114 g. Discussion of next steps

115 City Manager Mahony said that staff will summarize today’s discussions and present a summary of the retreat
116 at an upcoming regular City Council meeting, and staff will use these discussions to inform budget building
117 for the next fiscal year.
118

119 7. **ADJOURN**

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121 **Councilor Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Shelden, to adjourn the meeting. The**
122 **motion passed 5-0 at 2:00 P.M.**
123

124 Respectfully Submitted,
125 Amy Coonradt