

City of Essex Junction Governance Committee

Potential Governance Related Action Items



Governance Topic	Status Quo and No Proposed Change		Ruled Out
City Manager	*Elected City Council hires manager who runs government *Apolitical, professional administrator *Manager selected for expertise and experience *Elected officials have less control over municipal operations *Opportunity for consistent/stable management; not having to change with election cycles NO CHANGE		*Mayor elected by residents serves as manager who runs government *Political administrator *Manager (Mayor) may not be qualified or lack expertise; holds position due to popularity *Power concentrated in one elected position *Manager (Mayor) may change frequently with elections RULED OUT
Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option	
Leader of City Council	President Elected by Councilors *City Councilors elect leader of Council (titled "President"); no direct public input *Greater flexibility to change leadership with annual election of President by Council; possible more frequent leadership turnover vs. just on election cycles *President has support from majority of Council; internal accountability *Needs to be responsive to Council dynamics in order to retain leadership role CURRENTLY	Mayor Elected by Residents *Residents elect leader of Council (titled "Mayor"); direct public input *Potential for leadership change only on election cycles; less flexibility, possibly greater leadership stability *Councilors do not select leader of Council *Mayor is visible/known representative of City for local, regional, and state affairs *Typically a Mayor is a more political leader of the Council; running on agendas; seeking votes from entire community to embrace as leader; serves as a symbolic leader of the City POSSIBILITY	
Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option	Ruled Out
Number of City Councilors	5 Members *Fewer people needed to run/elect *Fewer voices around table *Fewer people to spread work of Council *Lower number needed for consensus and votes to take action; more efficient *Fewer stipends and less admin resources to support Council CURRENTLY	7 Members *More people needed to run/elect *More voices around table *More people to spread work of Council *Higher number needed for consensus and votes to take action; less efficient *More stipends and more admin resources to support Council *Opportunity to form sub-committees of 3 Councilors to get work done; potential for less transparency POSSIBILITY	3 or 9 Members 3 - Too few to represent a community of 11,000 9 - Nearly doubles current Council size; much larger group to run effectively/efficiently RULED OUT

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Term Length for City Councilors	3-Years for All *More time to adjust to learning curve of Councilor role *More opportunities/experiences to hone decision-making skills *Greater Council consistency with terms longer and staggered *Focus on longer term gains with more time between elections *Less frequent accountability and slower to respond to shifts in public opinion *Simple with all same term length CURRENTLY	Some 3-Years, Some 2-Years *Keep advantages of 3-year terms while offering a shorter commitment option; which may appeal to more people *Less consistency with some shorter terms *Greater voter accountability and faster to respond to shifts in public opinion with 2-year terms *More complex with differing term lengths POSSIBILITY	1-Year, 2-Years, More than 3-Years *1- too short to grasp role before next election *2- could be more appealing for broader set of people willing to run with less commitment; all 2-years results in potential for more than half of Council to turnover at one time; less institutional knowledge; focus may be on short term gains before next election *3+ - a major commitment; smaller pool of people willing to run RULED OUT
Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option	
Term Limits for City Councilors (and appointed committee members)	No Term Limits *Elections serve as accountability; voters' choice *Incumbency advantage CURRENTLY	Yes Term Limits *Inability to run beyond limit not based on performance or voter accountability *Forces turnover and new Councilors *Reduces incumbent advantage *Can force loss of institutional knowledge and experience *Can have "lame duck" terms for people in final term POSSIBILITY	
Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option	Ruled Out
Stipend for City Councilors	\$2,500 Per Year *Councilors receive \$2,500 stipend per year for their service *Stipends recognize many hours of work required to be a Councilor *Stipends can provide money for food, babysitters, lost wages, and other essentials; may open doors for some to feel they have ability to serve if elected CURRENTLY	Higher Stipend *Higher stipend may attract a broader pool of candidates; reducing or eliminating financial barrier; may not improve economic diversity of Councilors *Increased costs *Financial gain could be motivation for someone to run *Compensation reflects time and effort required to serve POSSIBILITY	Lower/No Stipend *Being a City Councilor is a time-consuming role and people deserve to be compensated for their time RULED OUT

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Governance Topic	Status Quo	Option
Stipend for Leader of City Council	Leader Receives Same Stipend as Rest *All Councilors treated equal *No financial incentive to serve as leader *No compensation for leader additional time and duties CURRENTLY	Leader Receives More *Leader compensated for additional time and duties *Councilors may seek role for compensation POSSIBILITY
Stipend Increases for City Councilors	Can Increase with Budget Each Year *During budget process, stipends can increase and be part of overall budget vote *Potential conflict of interest as Councilors initiate stipend increases for selves *Ability to change annually but historically not increased frequently CURRENTLY	Charter Defines Council Stipend Increases *Removes decision and conflict from Council *Could define frequency and/or rate *Once defined, difficult to change as requires community vote POSSIBILITY
Charter Review	No Built-In Charter Review *Charter can be reviewed at any point but no requirement that it be reviewed at any point; typically driven by a current issue CURRENTLY	Built-In Charter Review *Charter review frequency and process defined in Charter to require regular comprehensive review *Once defined, difficult to change as requires community vote POSSIBILITY
Election of City Councilors	At-Large *Live in 4.6 sq. mile community; small enough to not need to break down further *No recent history of all Councilors coming from one part of City *Neighborhoods/areas are diverse *Councilors represent all, not just their area; more constituents *Interested candidates can run whenever an election, don't have to wait until their ward is on ballot NO CHANGE	Wards *Councilors represent smaller area, fewer constituents *Councilors guaranteed to be from different parts of City *Outcomes may focus on best for ward vs. best for City *No existing equitable formula for dividing community *Need to update wards each census, potentially changing representation and eligibility *Option to do some wards & some at-large RULED OUT