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**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
CITY COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
September 25, 2024**

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

**ADMINISTRATION:** Regina Mahony, City Manager; Collen Dwyer, Director of Human Resources; Ashley Snellenberger, Director of Communications & Strategic Initiatives;

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Charlie Baker, Mark Brislin, Cristin Gildea, Deb McAdoo, Sarah Muskin, Resa,

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

City Council President Chawla 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 on items not on the agenda

None.

5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**

a. Department Head Brief to Council, Colleen Dwyer, HR Director

Director Dwyer spoke briefly about activities in the past six months for the Department. She spoke about hiring and recruitment activities in 2024. She noted that there is one open position in Public Works, that the Department has hired 11 people, and that EJRP is regularly hiring after-school positions. She spoke about Essex Junction's participation in the Welcoming & Engaging VLCT cohort. She also noted the successful execution of the union contract.

Director Dwyer then spoke about activities for the next six months of the Department. She spoke about establishing uniform evaluation guidelines and training supervisors and staff on those, which arose from the collective bargaining process. She noted that VLCT will help with this training effort. She spoke about updating the personnel regulations. She also spoke about reintroducing a former process for open enrollment for health insurance plans and providing more detailed information about that beforehand.

Councilor Haney asked what could be done by Essex Junction staff to make the City a better place to work, based on the feedback received at the VLCT Welcoming & Engaging event and survey. Director Dwyer replied that the issues are multi-faceted, but said that one tool to help recruit and retain staff is the ability to pay a competitive wage and the ability to offer competitive benefits. She also spoke about the separation from the Town of Essex and how that has been difficult for City culture, and spoke about the need for the City to listen to its staff and incorporate their feedback.

Councilor Certa asked where the challenges are coming from in terms of recruiting quality staff. Director Dwyer replied that the unemployment rate remains low in Vermont and that there are higher wages for similar jobs in the private sector. She noted that multiple companies and entities are competing to hire the same group of people, particularly for occupations with current shortages (such as those in the Public Works Department).

55 Councilor Miller asked for more information about a recent City employee event at Maple Street Park. Director  
56 Dwyer replied that the event was for City employees and was catered by local businesses, and was meant  
57 to bring employees together in a social setting. City Manager Mahony said that they will plan to have another  
58 one of these social events soon, and that it would be a good idea to have City Councilors attend it as well.  
59

60 b. Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Annual Report and Presentation  
61 Charlie Baker, Executive Director of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC),  
62 presented a summary of the FY24 Annual Report. He spoke about the specific projects the CCRPC engaged  
63 with the City on over the last fiscal year, including stormwater inspection, GIS mapping, the Transit Oriented  
64 Development Master Planning, and technical assistance in various areas.  
65

66 Councilor Haney said that the breadth of services, collaboration, and technical assistance and expertise  
67 provided by the CCRPC is so impressive and is such a value-add to the City. City Manager Mahony also  
68 noted that the \$100,000 grant being provided the City for the Transit Oriented Development Master Project  
69 does not require local match, and she expressed the City's gratitude for that.  
70

71 Councilor Thibeault asked for further information about the Older and Disabled (O&D) Transportation  
72 Program and how it has been used. Mr. Baker said that CCRPC staff provides a forum to get the providers  
73 together to provide services, and GMT/SSTA provide the transportation for the program itself.  
74

75 Mr. Baker then spoke about regional activities that have occurred in FY24. He spoke about regional efforts  
76 around equity and engagement, the ECOS plan updates, housing, regional energy planning and  
77 implementation, public transportation planning, transit-oriented development work, transportation demand  
78 management, walk/bike planning, clean water, emergency management, and a number of other areas.  
79 Councilor Certa noted the housing bills that passed in the legislature in order to increase housing, but said  
80 that he has not yet noticed an increase in housing. Mr. Baker replied that the legislature passed laws around  
81 zoning regulation and Act 250, and acknowledged that the regulatory reform is not a quick fix, given the lack  
82 of labor in Vermont to actually build housing. He noted that related to this comment, CCRPC is providing a  
83 summary of Act 181 and the implications for regional and municipal planning. He spoke about how the state  
84 will be establishing housing targets/goals for each region, and will task the RPCs with breaking that data out  
85 by municipality and tracking it. He noted that Chittenden County generally does a good job in tracking housing  
86 data. Councilor Certa asked if the data will track short-term versus long-term rentals, and Mr. Baker said he  
87 was unsure whether that breakout was specified in statute.  
88

89 Mr. Baker then spoke about requirements within Act 181 for engaging with municipalities on an overhaul of  
90 a framework for coordinating state, regional, and municipal land use. He spoke about the phases of  
91 engagement between now and summer 2025 and spoke about the activities and deliverables the  
92 engagement would inform. These include the development of a new Regional Future Land Use Map and  
93 housing targets. He noted that the City Council will need to vote on whether it wants to have Act 250  
94 exemption, and said there will be more engagement and follow-up on this specific question.  
95

96 City Council President Chawla spoke about PFAS and about the future of the brownfield site on the  
97 GlobalFoundries/IBM property if it were to be sold in the future. Mr. Baker noted that the property-owners  
98 retain the responsibility to clean it up. He noted that not much is known about it until because they haven't  
99 asked for public money.  
100

101 c. Discussion and Consideration of Green Mountain Transit Service Reduction Comments  
102 City Manager Mahony noted a draft letter that contains a compilation of the public comments received around  
103 service reductions for Green Mountain Transit. She suggested sending this letter to the legislature closer to  
104 January.  
105

106 Councilors did not have further questions or comments on the letter.  
107

108 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the Council approve the letter,**  
109 **authorize the Council President to sign the letter on the Council’s behalf, and submit it to GMT. The**  
110 **motion passed 5-0.**

111  
112 d. Discussion and Consideration of Vermont League of Cities and Towns Annual Meeting Voting Delegate  
113 City Manager Mahony noted that in preparation for the VLCT annual business meeting, a voting delegate  
114 needs to be selected for VLCT’s for their virtual meeting on October 1, 2024.

115  
116 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, to recommend that the**  
117 **City Council approve Elaine Haney as the voting delegate for VLCT, PACIF and VERB. The motion**  
118 **passed 5-0.**

119  
120 e. \*Discussion and Consideration of Executive Session to discuss a Contract

121  
122 See item #9a below.

123  
124 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

- 125 a. Approve Meeting Minutes: September 11, 2024  
126 b. Approve Application and Acceptance of the Municipal Energy Resilience Program Grant for 2 Lincoln  
127 c. Execute West, Maple, River Street Pump Station Project Clean Water State Revolving Fund Loan  
128 Application  
129 d. Approve Revised Governance Committee Purposes Statement  
130 e. Acting as the Local Cannabis Control Commission: Approval of S-000009646, Outdoor Cultivator Tier 1  
131 Small Cultivator for TrichomeVT

132  
133 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to approve the consent agenda as**  
134 **presented. The motion passed 5-0.**

135  
136 **7. COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT:**

137 City Manager Mahony said that the City is advertising vacant seats to fill on both the Recreation Advisory  
138 Committee and the Governance Committee. She also congratulated Susan McNamara-Hill who recently was  
139 awarded the 2024 Treasurer of the Year award, and noted that Ms. McNamara-Hill thanked City Councilors  
140 and staff for nominating her. She noted that Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo hosted a tour of the  
141 Water Resource Recovery Facility of 15 water quality professionals and will also host a tour of the Essex  
142 High School AP Environmental Science class. She spoke about the City’s Transit Oriented Development  
143 (TOD) project, known in the City as the Connect the Junction project, and spoke about events around public  
144 engagement for that project. She noted that there will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Crescent  
145 Connector project on Monday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, as the project moves into completion. She also noted that  
146 renovations for 2 Lincoln Street have begun and that events such as City Council meetings have moved into  
147 the Brownell Library space at 6 Lincoln Street.

148  
149 Resa asked if ballot boxes have been relocated due to construction. City Manager Mahony replied that the  
150 location has not changed and that it is just to the right of the former Senior Center entryway at 2 Lincoln  
151 Street.

152  
153 **8. READING FILE**

- 154 a. Check Warrant #24054, 09/18/24  
155 b. Planning Commission Minutes, 09/05/24  
156 c. Tree Advisory Committee Minutes, 08/20/24  
157 d. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes, 8/20/24

158  
159 **9. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 160 a. \*An Executive Session may be needed to discuss a Contract

161  
162 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, that the City Council**  
163 **make the specific finding that premature disclosure of the contractual matters would place the city**  
164 **at a substantial disadvantage. The motion passed 5-0.**

165  
166 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, that the City Council**  
167 **enter into executive session to discuss a contract, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A) to include the**  
168 **City Council, City Manager and the Assistant Recreation Director. The motion passed 5-0.**

169  
170 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to exit executive**  
171 **session. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:33 P.M.**

172  
173 **10. ADJOURN**

174  
175 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Thibeault, to adjourn the**  
176 **meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:33 P.M.**

177  
178 Respectfully Submitted,  
179 Amy Coonradt