

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
May 22, 2024**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Brad Luck, EJRP Director; Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality Superintendent; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Harlan Smith, Interim Buildings Coordinator, Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Alexis Brown, Shawn Handy, Mike Sullivan, Resa.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

City Manager Mahony called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

City Manager Mahony suggested moving agenda item #6e and #6f to follow the public hearing (to be #6a and #6b). She noted that #6g must be tabled until June 12, 2024. She said that #6h is not needed.

3. **APPROVE AGENDA**

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

a. Comments from public on items not on the agenda

Mike Sullivan asked about the materials that are being stored behind Big Lots. City Council President Chawla replied that these materials are related to work conducted by Burlington Telecom, but that this is an assumption and hasn't been confirmed.

5. **PUBLIC HEARING**

a. Public Hearing on the Large Water User Rate

Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to open the public hearing. The motion passed 5-0.

Finance Director Morris began by noting that this is the public hearing for the Fiscal Year 2025 Water, Wastewater, and Sanitation rates. She said that the proposed FY25 combined rates for all enterprise funds (water, sanitation, and sewer) is an increase over the current year of 3.31%, and the cost to an average user would be just over \$678 per year, or \$56 per month. She spoke briefly about the history of rates over the last five years by enterprise fund.

Director Morris summarized the City water user rates, noting that the proposed increase over FY24 is 0.04% or \$0.12 annually for the average user, with the cost to the average user being approximately \$303. She noted that the reasons for the increase are a 5.1% increase in the Champlain Water District (CWD) wholesale rate, and a \$50,000 planned increase to the City's capital fund. She then summarized the City wastewater treatment user rates, noting that the proposed increase over FY24 is 5.75% or \$11.24 for the average user, with the cost to the average user being approximately \$207. She said that the reasons for the increase are an increase in the cost of biosolids management, and a \$30,000 planned increase to the City's capital fund. She further summarized the City sanitation user rates, noting that the proposed increase over FY24 is 6.53% or \$10.36 per year, with the cost to the average user being approximately \$169 per year. She noted that the increases are driven by an increase of \$77,000 to the City's capital fund, and a \$5,800 increase to TV sewer

56 lines. Director Morris then summarized the large water user rate, which applies to GlobalFoundries. She said
57 that the proposed increase for FY25 is 15.33%. She also summarized the wastewater treatment wholesale
58 rate. She noted that this is the rate that is paid by the Towns of Essex and Williston for the treatment of
59 wastewater from those communities. She noted an increase over FY24 of 0.59%, which was driven by a
60 2.2% increase in the WWT budget, an increase in the cost of biosolids management, and a planned \$20,000
61 increase to the capital transfer.

62
63 The following public comments were received:

- 64 • Harlan Smith noted that increases to capital in all three funds, and asked how those numbers were
65 developed. Director Morris said that the increases in all three funds were all planned increases, and
66 were based on the capital plans for each of these funds. She said that the increase in the sanitation
67 fund is so much greater this year because it was underfunded in past years, and that there is pump
68 station upgrade work that will require additional funding.

69
70 **Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to close the public hearing. The**
71 **motion passed 5-0.**

72
73 **6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

74 a. Discussion and Consideration of Setting All Utility Rates

75
76 **Councilor Miller made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council adopt the FY25**
77 **utility rates as presented. The motion passed 5-0.**

78
79 b. Discussion and Consideration of West St. Pump Station Replacement

80 Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo said that this item relates to amending the Fiscal Year 2025
81 Sanitation Capital Plan for an emergency repair to the West Street Pump Station. She noted that this station
82 has been at the top of the list for retrofits and upgrades, given that it is the station with the greatest amount
83 of flow City-wide and that it hasn't been retrofitted since 1983. She noted that one of the pumps at this station
84 is close to catastrophic failure, and must be replaced as soon as possible. She said that the Town of Essex
85 shoulders about half the cost of this pump station, and that though they had offered the use of a replacement
86 pump, it was determined that this pump would not work at this station. She noted that the maximum cost to
87 replace the pump is \$40,000 (which would be split with the Town of Essex), that it would come out of the
88 FY25 Sanitation Capital Fund, and that there would be a lead time of 12 to 14 weeks for ordering parts. She
89 noted that the Town of Essex is on board with this approach, and their Selectboard is in the process of
90 approving this spending. She noted that within the Sanitation Capital Fund, they accommodated this funding
91 by postponing a capacity collection system evaluation to afford this emergency repair.

92
93 City Council President Chawla asked whether there are redundant pumps in this station, and Water Quality
94 Superintendent Mandigo replied that there are only two pumps in this station and that they alternate, and
95 that if one pump fails then there is only one pump left (which is not permitted by State law).

96
97 Councilor Certa asked about the anticipated project for the West Street Pump Station, which included both
98 replacement of the pump and some storage and retrofitting. Water Quality Superintendent Mandigo replied
99 that the project would still include retrofitting to provide additional capacity and emergency storage.

100
101 **Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the City Council approve the**
102 **amended Fiscal Year 2025 Station Capital Plan to include the West Street pump station emergency**
103 **pump replacement. The motion passed 5-0.**

104
105 c. Department Head Brief to Council – Brad Luck, EJRP

106 Director Luck began by providing a six-month department look back of activities conducted through the EJRP
107 department, which included various events, programs, sports, an 8th grade trip to Washington, spring running
108 series, the Senior Center, an after-school program for kids, EJRP preschool, Park Street School renovations,

an update on Maple Street Park, and facilities work at Park Street, the pool house, Library, and 2 Lincoln Street. He then also spoke about a six-month departmental look-ahead of anticipated activities. These include summer programming, City events, community gardens, the Senior program, a Master Plan and facility feasibility study, conversations around a Recreation Advisory Council, getting new playground equipment at Maple Street, new equipment for the Maple Street Pool, having people counters at the Maple Street Park to determine usage, replacing benches outside of Maple Street Park, updating signage related to dogs in the park and dog-free areas, the EJRP preschool expansion (adding a 2/3 classroom), looking forward to at least 435 registered kids for fall Rec Center programming, and the 2 Lincoln Street renovation. He flagged for the Council that the Maple Street courts for tennis, basketball, and the skatepark are all in need of replacement, as are the tennis/pickleball courts at Cascade Park. He spoke about how a Master Plan and assessment could help inform how many tennis courts are truly needed for a community of this size. Councilor Haney noted that the demand for pickleball in the community is high. Councilor Certa said that he hopes that a feasibility study could also help show indicators of economic impact of enhancing or increasing certain services to be a bigger draw for the community. He said he would also like to explore whether the Maple Street Pool could be made a year-round pool. Director Luck also flagged that the department is at its limits in terms of physical space and needs more in order to continue to provide services and programming.

Councilor Miller asked about tree trimming and chipping activities at Stevens and asked if there are other maintenance activities planned for that park or others. Director Luck replied that they have been expanding the pathways at Maple Street Park and that they are much more connected now. He also said that a feasibility study can also help inform activities and priorities for Stevens Park. Interim Buildings Coordinator Smith said that the maintenance has been on hold at Stevens Park somewhat, and that the work that Councilor Miller witnessed was work to clean up trees that had blown over during a storm. He said that they will continue to engage with the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program and students, who help with forestry and roadwork as part of their education and training, to do tree work and path work.

The following public comments were received:

- Mike Sullivan commented on the large workload of EJRP.

d. Update from the Bike Walk Advisory Committee

Micah Hagan, Chair of the Bike Walk Advisory Committee, provided an update on the Committee's activities. He said that they completed the list of blinking lights at crosswalks throughout the City. He spoke about public engagement at the Pride Event last year. He spoke about working with Director Yuen to fix inaccuracies in Google maps data on paths in the City. He spoke about engaging with the Library on installing a bicycle repair stand and pump in front of the Library. He said that they are picking up a stock of bicycle racks to install on public property, as well as developing a bicycle rack inventory to ensure that they are maintained. He spoke about working with UVM students on a capstone project examining a specific intersection downtown and increasing safety around it. He said that they are also due for renewal of the City's Bicycle Friendly certification in 2025.

City Council President Chawla asked if there is an update on the grand opening for the bicycle store that will be opening in the Village Center. Mr. Hagan replied that he doesn't have information on this. City Council President Chawla noted the change in designation around Pearl Street and development along those arteries, saying that transportation patterns may change and more crosswalks may be needed. Director Yuen agreed, saying that it would be great to get feedback from the Bike Walk Advisory Committee, as well as solicit feedback and a possible scoping study from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC), given the large scope of this change and area.

Councilor Certa noted that the public provided feedback during strategic planning activities about how the City needs to be more multi-modal and pedestrian and cyclist-friendly. He said he looks forward to receiving recommendations and feedback from the Bike Walk Advisory Committee on this input and what is feasible

161 for the City to implement to make the roadways more multi-modal. Director Yuen spoke about the
162 collaborative work on correcting the Google mapping inaccuracies. He said that the product will end up
163 showing where there are gaps and where future efforts could be focused.
164

165 The following public comments were received:

- 166 • Harlan Smith spoke about the great work the Committee has accomplished. He spoke about some
167 of the work that Colchester has done on its pedestrian walkways, saying that they seem wide enough
168 to plow, and also asked whether they are this wide to accommodate both bicycle or pedestrian traffic.
169 He also asked how this has been funded. He said it would be great to have wide walkways or a river-
170 walk in the City. Mr. Hagan replied that connecting pathways such as this are slow-moving projects.
171 Director Yuen noted that the requirements for bicycle/walking paths is 8 feet of width, and that typically
172 only a portion of them are plowed in winter.
173

174 Mr. Hagan noted that there will be turnover on the committee coming up and that 4 seats will be opening up
175 this summer.
176

177 e. Discussion and Consideration of Regional Committee Appointments

178 The City Council interviewed Mike Sullivan for potential reappointment to the Chittenden Solid Waste District
179 (CSWD) Board. Mr. Sullivan spoke about his time on the Board, saying that he has enjoyed it. Councilor
180 Certa asked for an update on CSWD's MRF project, and asked for more information on whether there are
181 more composting programs that the City can be taking advantage of. Mr. Sullivan replied that in terms of
182 composting, most of the pickup is done by commercial vendors, but that the City could benefit from more
183 education on how to use their organic waste. He said that the MRF is due to come online in 2025.
184

185 City Manager Mahony then spoke about the other regional boards the City has representation on, some of
186 which have seats that need re-appointment, as terms expire in May/June. These include CCRPC, CSWD,
187 Green Mountain Transit, Town Meeting TV, and the Tree Farm Management Group. She noted that staff
188 have recommended candidates for a majority of the boards.
189

190 Councilor Haney noted that she is stepping down from her position as a representative on the CCRPC, and
191 this position will need to be filled.
192

193 **Councilor Certa made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the Council appoint the following**
194 **positions:**

- 195 • **CCRPC (PAC): Appoint Chris Yuen as Representative and Michael Giguere as Alternate to**
196 **the Planning Advisory Committee for CCRPC;**
- 197 • **Chittenden Solid Waste District: Appoint Mike Sullivan as Representative and Amber**
198 **Thibeault as Alternate;**
- 199 • **Green Mountain Transit: Appoint Raj Chawla as Representative;**
- 200 • **Town Meeting TV: Appoint Amber Thibeault as Representative and Marcus Certa as**
201 **Alternate;**
- 202 • **Tree Farm Management Group – Appoint Marcus Certa as Representative.**
203

204 **The motion passed 5-0.**
205

206 f. Discussion and Consideration of Road Extension Request from Gabe Handy

207 City Manager Mahony said that Gabe Handy is requesting that Cherry Street be extended as a public road
208 to provide frontage necessary to subdivide a lot for housing, and that Cherry Street is already a public road
209 on the west side of South Summit Street. She noted that this request would be to simply extend the length
210 of that public road to accommodate the public road frontage necessary for a subdivision in this zoning district.
211 She said that if this is a possibility, it would ultimately go through the Development Review Board (DRB)
212 standard processes, but that this is a preliminary step. She noted that if this extension goes through, they
213 will also need to put in a sidewalk.

214
215 Alexis Brown spoke on behalf of Mr. Handy, noting that they are thinking about doing senior housing in this
216 location, and appreciate the consideration of extending the public road to make this a possibility. She said
217 that they anticipate doing the parking across from the proposed lot.
218

219 Councilor Certa said that this request seems reasonable. Other Councilors concurred.
220

221 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, that the Council**
222 **authorize the City Manager to continue discussions with Mr. Handy on this conceptual public road**
223 **extension for Cherry Street, under the conditions herein, including but not limited to an official public**
224 **road acceptance process that will come back before the Council at a future date. The motion passed**
225 **5-0.**
226

227 g. Strategic Planning Report and Presentation
228 Agenda item removed.
229

230 h. *Discussion and Consideration of an Executive Session to discuss a contract
231 Not needed.
232

233 **7. CONSENT ITEMS**

- 234 a. Approve Meeting Minutes: May 8, 2024
235 b. Appointments of the City Clerk and Audit Firm
236 c. Finalize Council Meeting Schedule Adjustments
237 d. VLCT Letter of Appreciation for Furniture Donation
238 e. Liquor License Approvals
239

240 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Certa, to approve the consent**
241 **agenda as presented. The motion passed 5-0.**
242

243 **8. COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**

244 City Manager Mahony noted the upcoming retirement of Police Lieutenant Robert Kissinger, after 24 years
245 of service.
246

247 City Council President Chawla noted the upcoming Memorial Day parade on Saturday.
248

249 Councilor Miller noted that it is Public Works Week, and expressed thanks for the City's amazing Public
250 Works Department. Other Councilors concurred.
251

252 **9. READING FILE**

- 253 a. Check Warrant #24045 5/17/2024
254 b. Appraisal Update
255 c. All Hazard Mitigation Plan CY2023 Progress Report
256

257 **10. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 258 a. *An Executive Session may be needed to discuss a contract
259 None needed.
260

261 **11. ADJOURN**

262
263 **City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to adjourn the meeting.**
264 **The motion passed 5-0 at 8:45 P.M.**
265

266 Respectfully Submitted,

267 Amy Coonradt