

CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING  
WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 18, 2024

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

**ADMINISTRATION and STAFF:** Regina Mahoney, City Manager; Colleen Dwyer, HR Director; Susan McNamara-Hill, Clerk/Treasurer; Ashley Snellenberger, Communications and Strategic Initiatives Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Clayton Clark, Diane Clemens, Craig Dwyer, Lillian Dwyer, Ronald Frey, Resa Mehren, Max Mueller, Dennis Thibeault, Sharon WP

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Chawla called the meeting of the City Council to order at 6:30 PM.

**2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/ CHANGES**

None.

**3. APPROVE AGENDA**

No changes, thus no approval required.

**4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

**a. Comments for Public on Items not on Agenda**

None.

**5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Discussion and Consideration of Ballot Process**

Ms. McNamara-Hill said that, since COVID, Essex Junction has been mailing ballots to all registered voters, with return postage included. This has been a large expense, and many ballots go unreturned. She suggested mailing postcards to all registered voters informing them that they will need to request a ballot. This is the same thing that the school district anticipates doing as well. This request would be valid for all votes during a particular year. Mr. Certa suggested sending out postcards to all residents, rather than just to registered voters. Ms. Haney suggested investigating the possibility of obtaining a bulk mail permit. All indicated support for mailing postcards rather than ballots to all voters. As the Council is unsure if the school district has made a formal decision, Ms. Mahoney suggested that support for this idea be communicated to the school district. The Council will review this year's turnout as compared to other annual meetings which have had universal mailings. In public input, Ms. Mehren suggested that there be a way for the voter to indicate if they would like return postage. Ms. McNamara-Hill said that this could be done through postcards but not through online requests.

**b. Planning Commission Brief to Council**

Ms. Clemens, Chair of the Planning Commission (PC), read a letter summarizing their work in 2024. This included research on implementing a rental registry, renewing the Village Center Designation and work on the Land Development Code. All Councilors thanked Ms. Clemens for the PC's hard work. Answering

47 a question from Mr. Miller, Ms. Clemens spoke of the importance of diversified housing stock and said  
48 that developers are stating that they cannot rationalize the cost for building larger units. She said that the  
49 separation of the DRB and PC has allowed the PC to speak more freely with developers to learn about  
50 barriers to development. She said that developers have been minimizing the number of parking spaces  
51 due the availability of Green Mountain Transit (GMT) bus service. Mr. Chawla expressed a desire for  
52 additional owned, rather than rented units. Additional conversations on affordable housing and a diverse  
53 housing options will be had at a later meeting.

54  
55 **c. Discussion and Consideration of Land Development Code Amendments Introduction and Warn**  
56 **a Public Hearing**

57 Mr. Yuen said that the PC is working on the Transit-Orientated Development Master Plan, which will lead  
58 to changes in the Comprehensive plan in 2026. The Connect the Junction project will be wrapped up in  
59 the next six months. As a result of these initiatives, the PC chose to make minor changes to the Land  
60 Development Code (LDC). These include rewriting sign ordinances, residential density changes,  
61 stormwater changes and the regulation of food trucks. The sandwich board sign regulations have been  
62 expanded to allow for signs within 15 feet of an entryway. Content neutrality is included in sign  
63 regulations. Two principal structures will be permitted per lot. Four units will be allowed per lot, however  
64 the lot coverage and setbacks will still apply. Triplexes and fourplexes will be excluded from the  
65 definition of multi-family housing and thus be able to be approved administratively. Food trucks will be  
66 allowed to operate on private property year-round, however long-term use of diesel or gasoline generators  
67 is not permitted. Mr. Chawla said that he would like to see additional restrictions on food truck generators.  
68 There will be a fifty-foot setback for cannabis cultivation.

69  
70 Ms. Thibeault said that she would like to review this document at an additional meeting prior to a public  
71 hearing, all agreed. The LDC will be discussed further at the Selectboard meeting on January 22, 2025.  
72 In public comment, Mr. Dwyer said that he is in support of setback requirements for growing cannabis.  
73 He said that he lives next to a cannabis cultivator and discussed the financial and social costs of having  
74 marijuana grown within five feet of his property line.

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76 **d. Discussion and Consideration of the New Ethics Policy**

77 Ms. Mahoney said that the state passed a new Ethics Policy which will go into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>. This  
78 law requires municipalities to provide a process for handling ethical complaints, assigning a person for  
79 bringing such complaints to and requiring additional training for staff and elected officials. Complaints  
80 can be filed online and will go to Ms. Dwyer, Human Resources Director. Mr. Chawla requested public  
81 input, of which there was none.

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83 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by MARCUS CERTA, that the City Council adopt the**  
84 **Essex Junction Municipal Code of Ethics as presented; procedures for the investigation of**  
85 **complaints as presented; and designates the Human Resources Director as the municipal officer to**  
86 **receive complaints alleging violations of the Municipal Code of Ethics. Motion passed 5-0.**

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88 **e. Discussion and Consideration of Green Mountain Transit's Request for a Special Assessment**

89 Mr. Clark, Executive Director of GMT, said that a special assessment is being requested due to the current  
90 fiscal crisis. The funds from this special assessment will be used to fund a driver buyout as well as a new  
91 assessment methodology. The special assessment is voluntary; however, all municipalities must agree to  
92 such in order for it to be charged. The special assessment for Essex Junction is \$27,045 and will be billed

93 as the money is spent. Ms. Haney said that she is concerned that the legislature will not provide additional  
94 funds regardless of the member municipalities vote and said that she is unsure if the lobbying will bear  
95 fruit. Mr. Clayton said that five committees are discussing GMT and that he is hopeful to get the funds.  
96 Answering a question from Ms. Haney, Mr. Clark said that every effort has been made to reduce and  
97 modify routes prior to cutting them. Answering a question from Mr. Chawla, Mr. Clark said that CATMA  
98 is offering more funds than ever before, however these are still limited. GMT is working to create an  
99 affiliated non-profit to gain donation revenue. He explained how unlimited local access agreements can  
100 currently be used as local matches for federal grant purposes; however, this may change in the future. Mr.  
101 Chawla said that public transportation is essential for Essex Junction and recommended supporting this  
102 assessment. Mr. Certa said that he would like to include this in the budget so that there are opportunities  
103 for public feedback. Mr. Chawla requested public input, of which there was none. Mr. Clayton said that  
104 should Essex Junction vote to include the special assessment in their budget, and the budget is unable to  
105 pass, they would not be expected to pay. Mr. Clayton said that cuts to bus routes also result in cuts to the  
106 ADA transit services.

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108 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by ELANE HANEY, that the City of Essex Junction**  
109 **accepts the GMT Special Assessment of \$27,045 for FY26. Motion passed 5-0.**  
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111 **f. Discussion and Consideration of City Council Meeting Policy and Participation Guidelines**

112 Ms. Snellenberger said that the current Essex Junction meeting policy has been combined with the  
113 Vermont League of Cities and Towns meeting policy. She said that the draft public engagement guidelines  
114 could be read at the start of each public meeting. Ms. Haney suggested that “collective silent  
115 acquiescence” and motions to limit debate not be included, all agreed. The Board discussed the allowable  
116 amount of time each person should be permitted to speak, and how to prevent inappropriate use of public  
117 comment. Mr. Chawla suggested collecting all public questions and answering them after the public  
118 comment period. He said that this will help to avoid staff being put in uncomfortable positions. Ms.  
119 Mahoney will incorporate changes and include it for approval later.

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121 **g. Consideration of Appointments to the Recreation Advisory Committee**

122 This was discussed during Executive Session.  
123

124 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

125 **ELAINE HANEY made a motion, seconded by MARCUS CERTA, to approve the Consent Agenda.**  
126 **Motion passed 5-0.**

127 **a. Approve Meeting Minutes: December 3, 2024**

128 **b. Approve Sludge Management Plan Update, and Authorize City Manager to Sign the Land**  
129 **Application Recertification**

130 **c. Approve Dog License Fee Increase – Revised from the 12/11/24 agenda**  
131

132 **7. COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**

133 Ms. Mahoney said that two Wastewater staff recently passed state certification exams. There is a planned  
134 power outage for Friday, December 20<sup>th</sup> and Monday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> at Lincoln Hall. Staff will be  
135 working from home during this time.  
136

137 **8. READING FILE**

138 **a. Check Warrant #24064 12/13/24**

- 139 **b. Regional Boards and Committees Memo**
- 140 **c. Reappraisal Update Press Release**
- 141 **d. Police Community Advisory Board Minutes 11/19/24**
- 142 **e. Planning Commission Minutes 12/5/24**
- 143 **f. Bike Walk Advisory Committee Minutes 12/12/24**
- 144 **g. Tri-Town Joint Committee Minutes 12/10/24**

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146 **9. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

147 **a. An Executive Session was needed to discuss Appointment of Public Officials**  
148 **Motion by RAJ CHAWLA, seconded by MARCUS CERTA, that the City Council enter into**  
149 **executive session to discuss the appointment of public officials, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to**  
150 **include the City Manager. Motion passed 5-0 at 9:22 PM.**

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152 **Motion by RAJ CHAWLA, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, to exit executive session. Motion passed**  
153 **5-0 at 9:24 PM.**

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155 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, to appoint Cora Delucia, Jocelyn**  
156 **Emilio, and Joshua Birmingham to a two-year term, from now until June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and from July**  
157 **1, 2025-June 30, 2026 to the Recreation Advisory Committee. I also make the motion to appoint**  
158 **Bridget Meyer, Rachel Hamm Vaughan, Patrick Lynch to a one-year term from now until June 30,**  
159 **2025, and from July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026, to the Recreation Advisory Committee. Motion passed**  
160 **5-0.**

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162 **10. ADJOURN**

163 **Motion by RAJ CHAWLA, seconded by ELAINE HANEY, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 9:25**  
164 **PM.**

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166 **Respectfully Submitted,**  
167 **Darby Mayville**  
168 **Recording secretary**

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