



**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 145 Maple St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Wednesday, January 22, 2025
6:30 PM

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This meeting will be in-person in the Community Room at the Essex Police Department located at 145 Maple Street and available remotely. Options to watch or join the meeting remotely:

- **WATCH:** the meeting will be live streamed on [Town Meeting TV](#)
- **JOIN ONLINE:** [Join Zoom Meeting](#)
- **JOIN CALLING:** (toll free audio only): (888) 788-0099 | Meeting ID: 944 6429 7825; Passcode: 635787

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [6:30 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
 - a. Comments from Public
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. *Interview and Consideration of Recreation Advisory Committee Youth Member [10 Minutes]
 - b. Discussion and Consideration of Land Development Code Amendments Introduction and Warn Public Hearing [30 Minutes]
 - c. Discussion and Consideration of the FY26 General Fund Budget and Warn Budget Public Hearing [30 Minutes]
 - d. Consideration of Council Member Appointments to the Governance Committee [10 Minutes]
6. **CONSENT ITEMS**
 - a. Approve Meeting Minutes: January 8, 2025
 - b. Acting as the Cannabis Control Commission Approve Passion Fruit Farms Tier 1 Indoor Cultivation License Renewal
 - c. Approve Submittal of Certificate of Highway Mileage
 - d. Approve Appeal Submittal of 2024 Equalization Study Results
 - e. Approve Amtrak RFQ Award
 - f. Approve Stevens Park Grant Application
 - g. Approve Memorial Park Policy Updates
7. **COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT**
8. **READING FILE**
 - a. Check Warrant #24066 01/10/2025
 - b. City Charter with Changes as Approved by the Legislature in 2024
 - c. 2024 K9 Nova Review
 - d. Community Justice Center Funding Support Letter
 - e. Wike Walk Advisory Committee Minutes 01/09/25
9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
 - a. *An Executive Session may be needed for the Appointment of Public Officials
10. **ADJOURN**

CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION CITY COUNCIL

MEETING AGENDA – January 22, 2025

Members of the public are encouraged to speak during the Public to Be Heard agenda item, during a Public Hearing, or, when recognized by the President, during consideration of a specific agenda item. The public will not be permitted to participate when a motion is being discussed except when specifically requested by the President. Regarding zoom participants, if individuals interrupt, they will be muted; and if they interrupt a second time they will be removed. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the City Council, like all programs and activities of the City of Essex Junction, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the City Manager's office at 802-878-6944 TTY: 7-1-1 or (800) 253-0191.

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
January 22, 2025**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Regina Mahony, City Manager; Jess Morris, Finance Director; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Diane Clemens, Steve Eustis, Piper Goodkind, Elena Juodisius, Scott McCormick, Elijah Massey, Kirstie Paschall, George, Jeanne.

1. CALL TO ORDER

City Council President Chawla called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

City Council President Chawla request moving Consent Item #6a to be Business Item #5e.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

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

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

None.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. *Interview and Consideration of Recreation Advisory Committee Youth Member

The City Council interviewed Piper Goodkind for a seat on the Recreation Advisory Committee as a youth member. She spoke briefly about her background and interest in serving on the Committee. Councilors asked questions of the candidate, and she was given the opportunity to ask questions of the Council.

b. Discussion and Consideration of Land Development Code Amendments – Introduction and Warn Public Hearing

Community Development Director Yuen and members of the Planning Commission began the discussion of the latest round of proposed Land Development Code (LDC) amendments. City Council President Chawla noted that the Council would like to hold off on the portion of the LDC that deals with sandwich board signs, so that they can discuss it further at a February City Council meeting and involve business owners and other stakeholders in that discussion. Councilor Thibeault asked for background on the proposed language in 714 related to marquee signs. Commissioner Massey began by noting that much of the language in the proposed amendments aligns with regulatory language from other municipalities, such as Burlington. Director Yuen noted that the proposed amendments are based on what kind of land uses are allowed in each of the zoning districts. City Council President Chawla asked if marquee signs could be used by businesses other than theaters, and Director Yuen replied that this type of sign could be used by any business that meets the dimensional requirements, and that it would be subject to design review by the Development Review Board (DRB). Councilor Thibeault asked about the string lighting requirement in section 704 and Commissioner Massey replied that in the context of the LDC, string lights generally mean white lights used to illuminate outdoor spaces such as patios and restaurant seating, and Director Yuen noted that if the string lights are for commercial use they should be switched off after close of business, but if they are for residential use, they should be turned off after 10:00 PM. Councilor Thibeault asked about any discussion related to electronic message board signs, and Director Yuen replied that the LDC allows for electronic message board signs for municipal use. Councilor Thibeault asked about discussion related to projecting signs in section 714, and

Director Yuen replied that the regulation distinguishes between blade signs and larger projecting signs, which are useful for larger multi-story buildings, and that the City doesn't currently have any projecting signs.

Councilor Certa asked how the City's regulations deem whether lighting is intrusive or not. Commissioner Massey replied that the Planning Commission has largely based requirements on lived experience rather than a quantitative limit such as wattage to determine whether lighting is intrusive. Director Yuen added that the LDC contains requirements about internally illuminated signs and how bright they can be, though they have not yet had to issue a violation for this. He noted that any large establishments would be required to go through a site plan application to make any changes, and that there is a lighting plan component to this which details how intensely individual lights can be lit. Councilor Certa noted a focus in state statute on maximizing density in already-dense areas, and asked whether the City has a clear sense of what the maximum density would look like. Commissioner Juodisius replied that there was public feedback on this, given the new allowance of fourplexes in single-family zoned districts, but she noted that lot coverage, height limits, parking requirements, and setback requirements all still apply, which limits the amount of infill that could occur. Director Yuen also added that though four-plexes are now treated like duplexes in that they don't require a lighting plan for approval, there are still strict requirements on the type of lights that can be installed, such as maintaining dark sky compliance.

City Council President Chawla asked about requirements for temporary food trucks, such as business hours, generator requirements, and location requirements. Director Yuen replied that allowing for a very temporary food truck (up to 30 days) was a compromise, but there hadn't been lengthy discussion about other requirements for temporary food trucks. He noted that temporary food trucks are not allowed in residential zoning districts, but only where eating and drinking establishments are already allowed.

Councilor Certa asked whether existing businesses were considered when discussing the impact of string lights downtown. Commissioner Massey replied that yes, several sites were part of the string light discussion, and the proximity of a number of restaurants downtown to a number of residential complexes is what informed the 10:00 PM recommended shut-off time for those types of lights. Councilor Certa noted that string lights can help play a role in safety for parking lots at night, and asked whether a waiver of that 10:00 PM cut-off time would be possible in certain circumstances. Commissioner Massey noted that there are numerous options for safe walkways and safe pedestrian transportation corridors that don't include string lights. City Council President Chawla suggested outreaching to the businesses in question in this discussion and ask them to speak to how these proposed amendments would impact their business. Director Yuen noted that prior to these proposed amendments, string lights were not permitted in the LDC because they are not dark sky compliant, and noted that this wasn't written to be a major change relative to the existing regulations.

The following public comments were received:

- Steven Eustis asked whether a requirement could be included in the LDC to require a small amount of public spaces in setbacks, not just 5- or 6-foot-wide sidewalks and then a wall in front of a building (for example), as this presents certain accessibility issues to building fronts. Director Yuen replied that there are no explicit requirements in the LDC that ground level storefronts need to be at the same level as the sidewalk, and that he has asked the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Master Plan consultants to look into this further.

Councilor Thibeault said she would like to remove the marquee and projecting sign sections of these amendments, given that Essex Junction is a small city and she doesn't see those types of signs in this community. Councilor Certa said he would also like to have clarity on requirements around political signs. Director Yuen replied that for the projecting and marquee signs, removing this from the amendments won't have an immediate impact because none of these sign types exist in the Junction currently. He noted that there could be impacts in the future if (for example) shopping centers are developed downtown. Councilor Thibeault said she would be amenable to removing those sections for now but revisiting it when amendments related to the TOD work are brought forward. Councilor Certa agreed about removing them for now. Councilors Miller and Haney said they would not be in favor of removing marquee and projecting sign amendments from the proposal. City Council President Chawla said he would be in favor of waiting until the public hearing on the LDC amendments to make a decision on whether those amendments should include

the marquee and projecting sign regulations. He also said he would like to see the cut-off time for food trucks to mirror that of the noise ordinance (10:00 PM), with an exception for the Champlain Valley Fair events. Other Councilors agreed with this. Councilors also agreed to leave the string lighting language as proposed and take public comment on it during the public hearing related to the LDC amendments. Director Yuen clarified that for election period signs, they are permitted up to 60 days before the election and must be removed no later than 3 days after the election, and that public rights-of-way are available for election period signs two weeks prior to an election (which is aligned with surrounding municipalities). City Council President Chawla also added that the sandwich board sign language should be left in the proposal, but the references should be modified.

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council warn the Land Development Code Amendments as discussed, including the proposed changes made during this meeting, for a public hearing on February 12, 2025. The motion passed 5-0.

c. Discussion and Consideration of the Fiscal Year 2026 General Fund Budget and Warn Budget Public Hearing

City Manager Mahony began by noting that the changes between the initial version and this second version of the General Fund budget for FY26 have resulted in a 2% (\$287,887) increase over FY25's GF budget, and is supported by a tax rate increase of 1.5%. She also noted updates to the enterprise fund budgets, saying that they will continue to change in the next several months as more FY25 experience comes in. She further noted more information about the unassigned fund balance and approaches to more proactively build it up. She said that while 15% is best practice, the City/Village has been at around 7% for the last number of years, and staff are comfortable with not requiring a fund balance of 15% and continuing to prioritize budgeting for capital needs. She also noted that the Council has the ability to reassign funds in an emergency, or enter into a short-term borrowing agreement. She then spoke about the \$25,000 to fund a shared equity policy advisor through CCPRC, noting that these funds were included in Winooski's budget, but not in South Burlington, Essex, or Shelburne's budgets. She said that she will follow up with counterparts in Winooski and at CCPRC on next steps. She provided an update on the EJRP facilities study, saying that while a ten-year Master Plan is needed, there is more immediate need for a multi-purpose gym space and that it may be most practical to plan for this in FY26 along with a Public Works building bond. She spoke about the timing of the loader and sweeper replacements in the rolling stock capital plan, saying that they were both able to be moved up a year (FY28 and FY29, respectively). She also noted that delaying the purchase of a command vehicle for the Fire Department would make no practical difference on moving up the timing for the loader and sweeper. Councilor Haney provided an update on her conversation with GBIC. She spoke about GBIC's value to Essex Junction, primarily in support of Global Foundries. She said she would recommend funding the GBIC line in the budget, given that GBIC also provides support to the broader Chittenden County area.

City Manager Mahony spoke about the community meal event that will take place on Saturday, January 25, at which City staff will present the proposed budget. She said that any edits from Councilors tonight will be incorporated into the version that is presented on Saturday.

Councilor Haney said she would be in favor of creating a line item in the budget to continue to grow the unassigned fund balance. She suggested setting aside 1% of the budget each year to include in the unassigned fund balance until the balance reaches 15% (which would take ten years). Councilor Miller noted that several unions are entering into contract negotiations this year, which will lead to large increases in salaries that the City has no control over. He said that while Essex Junction's budget increase this year is moderate, there may be strong future headwinds to contend with. He said he would be in favor of trying to move the replacement of the loader and sweeper up sooner, given that they may be costly to repair if they break down. Councilor Certa said that he would like to have an understanding of EJRP's total needs (through a facilities study). City Manager Mahony noted that EJRP is able to be relatively nimble in terms of its programming and that focusing first on a multi-purpose gym space will not be to the detriment of developing an overarching, holistic plan. Councilor Certa asked if anything regarding GBIC has changed between last year and this year, given that the City did not fund its GBIC line last year. Councilor Haney replied that this primarily had to do with the makeup of the Council last year, as well as the perception that GBIC caused the departure of several businesses from Essex Junction. City Council President Chawla noted that he also

challenged GBIC to diversify their board last year, and said that they have since made improvements in that regard. Councilor Certa asked about the funding for the senior center and where it is within the budget. Finance Director Morris replied that it is not part of the General Fund but in its own separate fund, which was raised through fees or revenues specifically for senior programming. She noted that adult programming is included in the General Fund. All Councilors thanked staff for presenting a lean budget.

Councilors continued to discuss potential changes to the budget. They discussed Councilor Haney's proposal for a separate line item to increase funding for the unassigned fund balance. City Council President Chawla said he would be open to it, and would like to obtain public input on it during public hearings and the budget presentation. Councilors Certa said he would also be open to it, given the upcoming community discussion around the budget. Councilor Thibeault said she would be open to include it as a line item, but asked for staff's opinion. City Manager Mahony said that the Council can increase the General Fund to include this line item at its discretion. She cautioned that utility rates are also increasing, but the exact number is not yet known. Finance Director Morris said she would be supportive of this additional line item. Councilors discussed moving up the replacement of the sweeper and loader, and Finance Director Morris noted that it would require another \$200,000 to \$400,000 transfer from the General Fund into rolling stock in order to move those replacements up. Councilors supported including the GBIC line item in the budget.

Councilor Haney made a motion, seconded by City Council President Chawla, to set the public hearing on the FY26 Budget as amended this evening for Wednesday, February 12, 2025 at 6:30 P.M. The motion passed 5-0.

d. Consideration of Council Member Appointments to Governance Committee

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to appoint Elaine Haney and Marcus Certa to the Governance Committee until the completion of the outlined work, or by November 1, 2025. Member terms will last for the duration of the Committee's existence. The motion passed 5-0.

e. Approve Meeting Minutes: January 8, 2025

City Council President Chawla noted that the spelling of Steve Eustis's name should be corrected on Line 216.

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to accept the minutes as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

6. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Approve Meeting Minutes: January 8, 2025 **now Business Item #5e**
- b. Acting as the Cannabis Control Commission Approval Passion Fruit Farms Tier 1 Indoor Cultivation License Renewal
- c. Approve Submittal of Certificate of Highway Mileage
- d. Approve Appeal Submittal of 2024 Equalization Study Rates
- e. Approve Amtrak RFQ Award
- f. Approve Stevens Park Grant Application
- g. Approve Memorial Park Policy Updates

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

7. COUNCILOR COMMENTS & CITY MANAGER REPORT: City Manager Mahony noted the community lunch event on Saturday January 25 at 11:30 A.M. at Champlain Valley Expo, that a number of community members and organizations will be present, and that the FY26 proposed budget will be presented.

8. READING FILE

- a. Check Warrant #24066 01/10/2025
- b. City Charter with Changes as Approved by the Legislature in 2024
- c. 2024 K9 Nova Review
- d. Community Justice Center Funding Support Letter
- e. Bike Walk Advisory Committee Minutes 01/09/2025

9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. *An Executive Session may be needed to discuss the Appointment of Public Officials

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, that the City Council enter into executive session to discuss the appointment of public officials, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to include the City Manager. The motion passed 5-0.

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0 at 9:33 P.M.

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Miller, to appoint Piper Goodkind and Oona Osbourne to the Recreation Advisory Committee with terms expiring on June 30, 2026. The motion passed 5-0.

10. **ADJOURN**

City Council President Chawla made a motion, seconded by Councilor Haney, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 9:35 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt