



**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 81 Main St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Tuesday, November 9, 2021
8:00 AM

E-mail: manager@essex.org

www.essexvt.org

Phone: (802) 878-1341

This meeting will be held both remotely and in person. Available options to watch or join the meeting:

- **WATCH:** the meeting will be live streamed on [Town Meeting TV](#).
- **JOIN ONLINE:** [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#). Depending on your browser, you may need to call in for audio (below).
- **JOIN CALLING:** Join via conference call (*audio only*): (802) 377-3784 | Conference ID: 262 078 42#
- **PROVIDE FULL NAME:** For minutes, please provide your full name whenever prompted.
- **CHAT DURING MEETING:** Please use “Chat” to request to speak, only. **Please do not use for comments.**
- **RAISE YOUR HAND:** Click on the hand in Teams to speak or use the “Chat” feature to request to speak.
- **MUTE YOUR MIC:** When not speaking, please mute your microphone on your computer/phone.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [8:00 AM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
 - a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Work Session
 - b. *Discussion about personnel
6. **CONSENT ITEMS**
 - a. Approve minutes: November 1, 2021
7. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
 - a. *An executive session may be requested to discuss the employment of public employees
8. **ADJOURN**

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 Chair, 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 Chair. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the Selectboard, like all programs and activities of the Town of Essex, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the Town Manager's office at 878-1341.

Certification:  11/05/2021

SELECTBOARD MINUTES

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD BUDGET DAY MINUTES TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2021

SELECTBOARD: Andy Watts, Chair; Sue Cook, Tracey Delphia, Dawn Hill-Fleury, Patrick Murray

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Courtney Bushey, Assistant Finance Director; Charlie Cole, Fire Chief; Caitlin Corless, Library Director; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Bill Ellis, Town Attorney; Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Manager; Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Marguerite Ladd, Assistant Manager; Karen Lemnah, Assessor; Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director; Sarah Macy, Finance Director; Aaron Martin, Assistant Public Works Director; Owiso Makuku, Community Development Director; Susan McNamara-Hill, Town Clerk; Rob Paluba, IT Director; Travis Sabataso, HR Director; Ally Vile, Recreation Director; Tom Yandow, Facilities Manager

OTHERS PRESENT: Gina Halpin Barrett, Joe P., Paula Sargent, Ken Signorello, Irene Wrenner, Lorraine Zaloom

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Watts called the Town of Essex Selectboard to order at 8:00 AM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

No changes, approval not required.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

Mr. Watts explained that this is the time during the meeting for members of the public to speak on items not included in tonight's agenda. He encouraged the public to be civil, brief, use appropriate language, refrain from personal attacks, and address comments to the Selectboard Chair. Ms. Sargent said that the Senior Center is in challenging financial times and asked for support and information on the future of the Center. Ms. Wrenner said that she appreciated the Selectboard's careful work in reviewing agreements related to separation.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Work Session

Overview, Revenues

Ms. Macy said that the Selectboard set four budget goals in August: continue funding for equity initiatives and mental health, consider how climate change can be addressed, minimize the financial impact of separation, and addressing tax equity between the Town Outside the Village (TOV) and Town Inside the Village (TIV). Ms. Macy highlighted some of the initiatives that have addressed these issues and said that they will be explained in further detail in the departmental presentations. Ms. Macy said that a Local Option Tax could help to minimize tax impacts from separation. Ms. Macy said that the proposed FY23 Town General Fund budget is \$16,852,175 a 5.8% or \$926,047 increase over the FY22 approved budget of \$15,926,128. As a result of a net reduction in non-tax revenues, the tax levy is a 7.1% or \$1,010,512 increase from \$14,265,056 to \$15,275,568. The Town no longer receives a contribution toward shared management from the Village (about \$120k). Ms. Macy noted some new positions, including the addition of an executive assistant in the Administration Department, and additional finance and recreation staff.

She also noted a variety of funding movements to and from the Town and Village. Ms. Cook suggested noting all costs that are specifically associated with separation. Ms. Macy said that the Town has been utilizing CDs to help gain interest, however after separation the amount of money that is available to invest will decrease. Ms. Macy said that FY 2021 had a \$1,695,492 surplus, and that much of this is due to COVID relief funds, reduction of planned expenditures, and position vacancies. In addition, property tax deficiencies declined. Around \$300,000 in fund balance will be used to reduce the tax levy.

Debt

Ms. Macy said that the Police Facility bond is the only debt that the Town has, and that interest is decreasing over time. The Village will still be responsible for their portion of this debt, as it was also approved by Village voters.

Essex Free Library

Ms. Corless explained changes that have happened to the library since COVID. She said that the library is proposing a slight increase but would like to put additional funds towards digital subscriptions, as there has been a significant interest in these materials. Ms. Corless said that circulation is higher than it has been in several years, mostly due to increased usage of digital materials. She said that the library is working to add additional devices and hot spots into circulation, as this helps to support equity initiatives. Ms. Cook asked why the Town continues to contribute \$15,000 to the Brownell Library and asked if it is designated for anything. Mr. Watts said that he considered it to be a goodwill donation.

County and Regional

Mr. Duggan said that there are no significant changes, and that this line item is going up 3.5%. He explained that this amount pays for county services, as well as other non-profit and governmental organizations which service Essex residents.

Clerk

Ms. McNamara-Hill said that the department is working toward becoming a passport processing office, however this would require additional document storage. She suggested that the Clerk's office start charging a fee for special event and catering liquor licenses. Additional funds have been included in the budget to continue supporting voting by mail.

Public Works, Highway, Stormwater, Buildings

Mr. Lutz detailed some of the work that the department has done in obtaining grants, as well as workforce challenges in getting construction projects completed. The Department now has two staff members who are certified to inspect projects, which helps to reduce the need to depend on contracting staff. Mr. Lutz said that he plans to retire in July, and Mr. Martin will take over running the department. The Public Works Department is requesting an increase of 3%, totaling \$106,038. Normally salaries are the main budgetary increase, however due to retirements and other changes this is not currently the case. Increases are requested for the following: storm sewer maintenance, sidewalk repair and maintenance, vehicle replacements, and professional services. Mr. Teich detailed the costs associated with public works equipment, and supply chain difficulties associated with getting new vehicles. Mr. Lutz presented budgetary figures since FY 92, and showed how the department works to stay on or under budget. Mr. Teich said that the Town continues to have the same responsibility to maintain their roads, sidewalks, and buildings regardless of separation. Mr. Lutz said that gravel roads present some challenges, and that the elevation differences in the Town can present different weather conditions. Ms. Cook asked how the Village Public Works budget is different from the Town, as the Village budget has increased at a larger rate. Ms. Macy said that the Village has a smaller budget, so it is easier for the increase to appear larger. Ms. Delphia asked if the Town Highway Tax could be used, and Ms. Macy said that this was eliminated

last year, and that legal advice would be needed to consider bringing it back. Mr. Watts said that this is not equitable for the Village, and not in line with current efforts. Mr. Teich said that the local option tax is another method of gaining funding for highway and other public works projects. Mr. Martin detailed the department's efforts to keep containments out of the soil, and possible changes at the landfill. In buildings, Mr. Yandow said that there is a 2.5% increase. He hopes to complete some brickwork at the Essex Free Library in FY 23, as it has been damaged by salt. Mr. Lutz said that Mr. Yandow's salary, as well as the rest of public works administrators, have some of their budget paid by the Village. This will change should separation occur. Ms. Cook asked if the recreation department needs a new building, now that they are leaving the Maple Street offices. Mr. Teich said that both recreation departments rely very heavily on the school district for the use of their space. Mr. Yandow said that a program space would be helpful, and also said that there are a variety of other building needs, such as a new public works garage, a new fire station, and the possibility of the need for the Town offices to move. Mr. Teich said that the Town has had significant growth since the 1980s, and there will be a long-term need for a space study.

Police, Community Justice Center (CJC)

Ms. Macy said that three vehicles need to be replaced this year, and that one patrol position has been moved to a non-office Community Affairs Liaison position. She also said that this budget includes an allowance for vacancies, and that the budget is funded at 94%. Mr. Hoague said that there are currently four vacancies, and that he is unsure when they will be able to be filled. The Community Affairs Liaison will be handling social media, serve as the public information officer, and plan events. The new K9 member of the police force is now fully certified and has helped on a several drug cases. The budget for the CJC has increased, as their caseload has increased 60%. The CJC is funded 90% by the Department of Corrections, however the Town of Essex also provides in-kind support. The budget also contains an increase for professional services, which will be used for diversity and equity training. Mr. Hoague explained that the overtime pay has increased due to vacancies, and needs for officers to go to court for cases that they are involved in. Mr. Hoague said that the department does not make money off of traffic stops, but that traffic is their number one issue. He also said that meth use is growing in Vermont, and is one of the most pressing drug issues. The cost for the Howard Center is increasing, as they will be providing more hours of coverage for their crisis service. Mr. Teich said that police officer health and safety is a major focus, as they see very traumatic things on a frequent basis.

Finance

Ms. Macy said that there have been minimal changes outside of personnel. She said that she will finish employment with the Town and Village on December 3rd, and that plans are being developed for staffing changes. Ms. Macy said that she has added additional part-time staffing hours to assist with the costs associated with separation. When the departments were consolidated, they were not structured to come apart easily, and professional consultants will be needed to assist with this. Audit costs will increase, as the Town has needed to do additional auditing as a result of using ARPA funds.

Health and Human Services

Mr. Duggan said that the Health and Human Services funding remains at 1% of the total proposed budget. He said that Essex Rescue has asked for a \$164,746 increase to their appropriation in FY23. Future budgetary increases are expected in future years; however negotiations are possible. Essex Rescue serves communities on a per capita funding basis, and after separation the Village will be responsible for paying their portion. A large reason for the increase in their services are senior facilities, group housing facilities, apartment buildings, overdoses, and COVID-related issues. Essex Rescue will be presenting at a future Selectboard meeting to inform the Town of their activities. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked for more details about the role of the Health Officer and Deputy Health Officer, as they have requested an increase in stipends.

Mr. Duggan said that they are always available to the public and are there to help with a variety of health-related issues. A large portion of their work deals with apartments and tenant/landlord issues.

Assessor

The only substantive change was a \$10,000 decrease for software that was not purchased. It is anticipated that a new software will be purchased after reappraisal, which is hoped to be done within the next two years. In public comment, Ms. Wrenner asked if a consultant has been found to do this work, as she has heard that there is a significant delay for other communities. Ms. Lemnah said that Essex is less likely to experience a delay because of its larger size.

Legislative (Selectboard)

This budget includes volunteer stipends which will begin this year, as well as Front Porch Forum, Town Meeting TV, meeting minutes, trainings, dues and professional services. The Board discussed how the volunteer stipend would be paid out, and Mr. Watts suggested limiting the length of the annual report to minimize printing costs.

Community Development

Ms. Makuku said that the only non-personnel change is an increase in professional development. She also noted an increase in permitting fees this year, as the prices have gone up. Ms. Makuku said that the department will be studying the sewer capacity and potential redevelopment at Fort Ethan Allen. The Board discussed the aging infrastructure in the neighborhood, and the need for upgrades prior to growth. Mr. Teich noted a recent donation of land to the Town adjacent to Indian Brook, and Ms. Makuku described some funds that will be spent on improvements to Indian Brook.

Economic Development

Mr. Duggan said that this budget will represent a full year of the part-time Economic Development Coordinator position. This person will pursue grants, work on events and do business outreach and support. Mr. Teich said that COVID has intensified the need for strong relationships with the business community, as well as business marketing. The Board discussed the role of the Economic Development Commission (EDC), and Mr. Duggan spoke about getting the EDC more involved in the planning process. Ms. Makuku also suggested changing the charter to allow Essex business owners who are not residents to serve on the commission.

IT

Mr. Paluba said that one of the main goals of the department is to bring all workstations to Office 365. The training budget has also been increased to ensure that staff are fully trained on security issues. Ms. Cook asked if the current IT budget could support the separation of the Village, IT and Mr. Paluba said that the elimination of Village services would not have a dramatic impact on the department.

Recreation

Ms. Macy reminded the Board that the Senior Center is not included in the Recreation budget. Ms. Vile said that a new position in administration is required due to the end of co-location at Maple Street Park, as well as an assistant program director position. This position will help with parks maintenance and assist Public Works with snow removal. Ms. Vile said that professional services spending has decreased due to the end of colocation and subsequent shared use of a contract communications coordinator. Ms. Vile said that it is important to plan for the end of life for the Sand Hill Pool and said that a water heater has been added to the pool in hopes of extending the season. Mr. Watts asked if the Board should begin budgeting for pool replacement, and Ms. Vile said that this will cost at least five million. She said that the pool depth of 3.5 feet presents some problems for both swim teams and young children. In facilities, Ms. Vile

said that some trails have needed significant repairs due to natural damage. Ms. Vile clarified the role of the Tree Farm, and said that the Town holds programs in the space but does not manage it. She also said that there are no plans to change the fee structure at Indian Brook. In Senior Services, Ms. Vile said that the Department is looking for additional Senior Bus drivers. Ms. Vile noted that the Senior Center is a Village-owned property managed by a Town employee, and that parking can be a problem. Mr. Teich explained the concerns brought forth by Ms. Sargent during Public to be Heard, and Ms. Vile explained how the Center is budgeted and funded. Mr. Teich said that the Senior Center has not been able to hold as many fundraisers as in the past, due to COVID. Discussions were had regarding the future of the space, and the relationship between the Town and Village. Mr. Teich suggested that the Selectboard give the Senior Center some additional funds to keep the organization solvent. He said that the Center is very important to the community, and that it would be expensive and inefficient to separate it.

Administration

Mr. Duggan said that this department is looking at a 45% increase, due to the loss of the revenue from the Village. This budget still includes three managerial positions and was made prior to the Board's decision not to extend Mr. Teich's contract. A new Executive Assistant position has been added, as the Town will no longer have any administrative support after separation. Additional funding for diversity and equity initiatives have been included in this budget, which will be overseen by the Committee on Equity Essex. Mr. Watts said that the Board will discuss managerial roles during Executive Session.

Fire

Mr. Cole said that the department needs equipment, personnel, and a new building. Essex Fire does not have a tall enough fire truck and relies on mutual aid support when needed. There are staffing shortages at all fire departments in the county, and it is becoming difficult to get mutual aid services. The department is not able to respond to as many medical calls as it used to and wait times for ambulances are longer than is desirable. The station is not up to current codes. The current budget requests 40 per diem hours for staff members to support the department and go on calls. The radio infrastructure needs replacement, and a \$100,000 transfer to capital for this purpose is presented in this budget. Radio service in the more rural areas of town is currently very unreliable.

Discussion

Ms. Macy said that the Board needs to think about the number of staff members in the manager's office, the use of the fund balance, and any other directives they wish staff to consider. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked if ARPA money could be used to fund the Fire Department, Ms. Macy said that this needed to be investigated further. Mr. Teich reminded the Board that these are one-time funds, and not a long-term solution. He suggested the use of a local option tax. The Board discussed the possible use of human services funding to fund Fire Department radio infrastructure. Mr. Murray said that he is not comfortable using such a large portion of the budget to fund capital improvements for something that Village residents are not getting any use of, and that it is important for residents to get a benefit for their taxes. Mr. Teich encouraged the board to allocate as much as possible to capital needs. He also encouraged the Board to do whatever possible to stay a paid on-call department, as adding staff members can cause huge budgetary increases. The Board discussed the possibility of future impact fees for developers. Ms. Macy said that the Selectboard is currently ahead of schedule and said that decisions primarily need to be made regarding administrative staffing, fund balance, and fire department expenditures. Two meetings regarding the budget will be held on November 15 and December 6. In public comment, Ms. Wrenner said that the Village Fire Department was raising their hourly rate and giving bonuses and encouraged the Town to do the same. Mr. Signorello said that the TOV highway tax has been in place since the 1950s and was used to help with the tax inequity between the TOV and TIV.

b. Discussion about personnel

This was held in Executive Session.

6. CONSENT ITEMS

TRACEY DELPHIA made a motion, seconded by **SUE COOK** to accept the consent agenda.

Motion passed 5-0.

a. Approve Minutes: November 1, 2021

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION

a. An executive session may be requested to discuss the employment of public employees

SUE COOK made a motion, seconded by **TRACEY DELPHIA**, that the Selectboard enter into

executive session to discuss the employment of a public employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A.

Section 313(a)(3), to include the Town Attorney, Unified Manager, Deputy Manager, Human

Resources Director, and Assistant Manager. The motion passed 5-0. **DAWN HILL-FLEURY** made

a motion, seconded by **TRACEY DELPHIA** to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0.

Executive session ended at 5:07 PM.

8. ADJOURN

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by **PATRICK MURRAY**, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 5:08 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Darby Mayville

Recording Secretary

Approved this ___15th_____ day of __November____, 2021

(See minutes of this day for corrections, if any)



Tracey Delphia, Clerk, Selectboard