Town of Essex
Selectboard
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Special Meeting Agenda

Saturday, May 14, 2022 – 8:30 AM
81 Main St., Essex Junction, VT 05452

This meeting will be in person and online. Available options to watch or join the meeting: • **VISIT www.essex.org/zoomselectboard** for direct meeting links and options to participate. • **JOIN ONLINE:** Zoom Meeting ID: 987 8569 1140; Passcode: 032060 or https://zoom.us/j/98785691140?pwd=WENqeFhITGVDS0Q5blROdkhuS3RkZz09 • **JOIN CALLING:** (*toll free audio only*): (888) 788-0099 | Meeting ID: 987 8569 1140; Passcode: 032060

1. **CALL TO ORDER** 8:30 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. Introductions: Warm-up questions
   b. Introductions: Guidelines for group decision-making and representation as a group
   c. Strategic Planning: Management presentation and Selectboard questions
   d. Strategic Planning: Identification of Selectboard goals for coming year
   e. Public Comment
   f. Strategic Planning: Evaluate draft representation of Selectboard goals
   g. Closing remarks

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Certification: ____________________ 05/12/2022

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL MEETING
May 14, 2022

SELECTBOARD: Andy Watts, Chair; Tracey Delphia, Vice Chair; Ethan Lawrence, Clerk; Kendall Chamberlin; Dawn Hill-Fleury.

ADMINISTRATION: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Marguerite Ladd, Deputy Manager.

OTHERS PRESENT: Patty Davis; Jennifer Knauer, Facilitator; Bruce Post; Mary Post; Paula Sargent; Ken Signorello; Margaret Smith; Lorraine Zaloom.

1. CALL TO ORDER
Andy Watts called the meeting of the Town of Essex Selectboard to order at 8:00 AM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES
None.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL
No changes were made and no approval was needed.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD
a. **Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda**

Patty Davis spoke about activities in Danville with regards to their public forests and land. She said they are obtaining tax abatement for passive recreation. She also spoke about Saxon Hill and that hunting should not be allowed.

Paula Sargent spoke about the senior center. She said she has visited the center to ensure that seniors are being well-served and the program is being well-run and has several recommendations for improvement. She said there needs to be a full-time coordinator at the senior center. She said the partnership between the parks and recreation department and the seniors needs to improve. She also talked about the upcoming building renovation at the Village of Essex Junction Offices at 2 Lincoln St., saying that collaboration is needed between the Town, its recreation department, and the seniors who use services at the center.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS
a. **Introduction: Warm-up questions**

Jennifer Knauer introduced herself and her role as an impartial facilitator for a structured strategic planning session. She said the overall goal for this session is to have a roughly prioritized list of strategic goals, and to ensure that the list is manageable, feasible, and collectively relevant.

She asked each Selectboard member what they are paying attention to this year. Mr. Chamberlin said he is focused on the budget. Mr. Watts said he is focused on stability and having productive and collaborative relationships with other communities. Ms. Delphia said she is focused on the budget, but also on unintended consequences of changes, interconnections, leveraging efficiencies, and community input. Mr. Lawrence said he is focused on the budget and savings, the creation of a plan to have a Town center (a municipal center or plaza), and capital spending. Ms. Hill-Fleury said she is focused on the budget, improved ways of communicating with the public, the creation of a municipal center, and rebooting some of the boards and commissions.

Ms. Knauer asked each member what they are enthusiastic about. Mr. Chamberlin said he is enthusiastic about the Town's new independence and future. Mr. Watts said he is enthusiastic about focusing on issues other than merger and separation. Ms. Delphia said she is excited about forging a new path and vision for the Town. Mr. Lawrence said he is excited about independence. Ms. Hill-Fleury said she is excited for the future of the Town.

b. **Introductions: Guidelines for group decision-making and representation as a group**

Ms. Knauer confirmed that the Selectboard generally tries to make decisions by consensus and a majority vote. Mr. Watts outlined rules for meetings, such as hand-raising and not interrupting.

c. **Strategic Planning: Management presentation and Selectboard questions**

Mr. Duggan said staff have provided information on the budget, management goals, feedback from the community on American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, and a memo recapping the progress made over the past year. Ms. Ladd spoke more about the memo, which was drafted on June 5, 2021. She said they could use it to gauge progress on the items identified within it (including the Tree Farm agreement, equity and inclusion, cannabis, ARPA funding, and the Joint Housing Commission).

Mr. Chamberlin said there is a fair amount of concern from department heads about job security and positions, and that he would prioritize operations and efficiencies during budget season rather than looking at staff cuts. Ms. Delphia said that "efficiencies" and "streamline" can be interpreted as cutting positions, but that they can also be used to signify working on processes. Mr. Lawrence clarified that he wants to look at staffing levels and vacant positions and whether vacant positions are needed, not cut staffing. Mr. Chamberlin observed that towns tend to get locked into a way of doing business and that the Town should think more creatively around forming future budgets. Mr. Lawrence said they should look at the dollar comparison between conducting repairs on current facilities versus putting that funding toward creating a new municipal center.

Mr. Duggan then provided an overview of the fiscal year 2023 budget goals. These are to continue funding equity initiatives and mental health support, addressing climate change, mitigating negative financial impacts of separation, diversifying revenue, addressing the impact of separation and work toward equity between the Town and the Village, a number of staffing changes, and dissolving the consolidated services with the Village. Mr. Watts noted that the budget has been approved by the voters and the intent today is not to change the budget, but to discuss activities between now and the FY24 budget.

d. **Strategic Planning: Identification of Selectboard goals for coming year**

Ms. Knauer reviewed the draft priorities list with the Selectboard. As they reviewed priorities and activities, Ms. Delphia noted that it would be useful for the Selectboard to be aware of staff projects and activities in order to gauge staff bandwidth. The Selectboard also discussed increasing communication between staff and the Selectboard in order to keep the latter informed about activities that may affect constituents in the Town. They also discussed circulating an employee newsletter and a community newsletter.

The Selectboard discussed activities around appointments to boards and committees, a broader board and committee revamp, and the establishment of a Charter Committee. They discussed at length the consideration of membership requirements on boards and committees in the context of separation from the Village. Selectboard members said they would like public input and comment about residency requirements for membership on boards and commissions.

The Selectboard discussed changes to the Town Meeting process, given that voting will switch to Australian Ballot this year. Mr. Watts said that only voting on the budget is by Australian ballot, but voting on something like the local option tax would be on the floor. He also noted that discussion is needed around how necessary an informational meeting will be a day prior to voting day if ballots continue to be mailed to residents (which is also a decision point).

The Selectboard discussed town identity, events, and promotion, and how that topic may also intersect with trails promotion and economic development. Mr. Watts added that the conversation around zip code may fit in here as well. He also added that constituents have expressed interest in conducting some promotional activity or event in the rural part of Essex (such as a town fair).

The Selectboard discussed trails promotion. Mr. Lawrence noted that there is active public discussion around Saxon Hill and asked whether the Selectboard needs to assist the Conservation & Trails Committee with that topic. Ms. Delphia said that both acceptable use and wayfinding are important to consider for trails in Essex. She said that more signage would be helpful to expand trail use and increase community awareness. Ms. Hill-Fleury said that given the amount of public comment on trails, this topic should be elevated on the priority list. Ms. Delphia suggested working with the Conservation & Trails Committee and staff to establish goals and initiatives. Ms. Knauer noted that if the Selectboard would like to change acceptable use regulations, it may be a longer-term goal for the Town. Mr. Duggan said he will reach out to department heads and the Conservation & Trails Committee to determine the potential scope for this work.

Ms. Knauer asked the Selectboard to think about important priorities that have not yet been discussed. Mr. Watts said that river access is an important topic that should be addressed with the trails discussion. He also said they should discuss the development of a 5-year capital plan. Ms. Delphia said they should add climate change in general, and in particular, the impacts of development on environment, community, and services. Mr. Lawrence said he would like to work on equity issues around the election process in Essex. Ms. Hill-Fleury said developing a police commission. Mr. Lawrence and Ms. Hill-Fleury said they would like to plan for the future of emergency services, town offices, community center, senior center, recreation, and public works. Mr. Chamberlin said he would like to assess equity of services for residents (parts of Essex subsidizing other parts), and in the context of climate change he would like to concentrate on renewable impactful actions (e.g., heating and cooling efficiencies).

e. **Public Comment**

Bruce Post said this meeting has become a project planning meeting. He said that a strategic plan would include an environmental scan, which would examine resources and budget but also public sentiment. He said he would like to see the Town seek public opinion from residents about how they envision a new Essex in terms of challenges, hopes, and plans.

Mary Post said it is important to have more opportunities for public input and public meetings for residents. She said the Selectboard and staff should think more creatively about the future of the Town. She noted that Margaret Smith (who had to leave early) said the Town should be talking more about the effects of climate change, and also suggested that the Town put out a newsletter for residents.

Lorraine Zaloom asked about revenue-bearing departments in the budget, in terms of expanding and increasing revenue. She also suggested seeking some kind of designation for the Essex Experience in order to bring more grant opportunities into the Town.

Patty Davis said that Danville, Vermont had a similar strategic planning meeting, but that they conducted extensive community outreach in order to solicit feedback. She said that Selectboard members can find more information on this on Vermont's Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) website.

Mr. Watts said that they have not yet discussed downtown designations, but confirmed that staff are currently pursuing options.

f. **Strategic Planning: Evaluate draft representation of Selectboard goals**

Selectboard members then categorized the above important priorities that were brought up right before public comment and incorporated them into the overarching work streams and timeline. Ms. Knauer asked whether the visual of the timeline created from this set of exercises accurately captures the Selectboard's current sentiments. Selectboard members confirmed that it does.

g. **Closing remarks**

Selectboard members thanked staff and members of the public for participating in this exercise.

6. <u>ADJOURN</u>

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 12:32 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt, Recording Secretary

Approved this_21st_ day of_June, 2022
(See minutes of this day for corrections, if any)

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Ethan Lawrence, Selectboard Clerk