



**Town of Essex
Selectboard**

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Special Meeting Agenda

**Friday, November 4, 2022 – 8:00 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.essexvt.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** 8:00 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 2024 Budget Work Session
6. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
 - a. An executive session is not anticipated

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Certification: _____  _____ 10/26/2022

SELECTBOARD MINUTES

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD BUDGET DAY MINUTES FRIDAY NOVEMBER 4, 2022

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Charlie Cole, Fire Chief; Caitlin Corless, Library Director; Jill Evans, Community Justice Center Director; Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Manager; Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Marguerite Ladd, Deputy Manager; Karen Lemnah, Assessor; Sarah Macy, VLCT Government Finance Specialist; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Rob Paluba, IT Director; Daniel Roy, Finance Director; Travis Sabataso, HR Director; Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; Ally Vile, Recreation Director; Tom Yandow, Buildings Superintendent

OTHERS PRESENT: James Dunne, Benny Siddall, Ken Signorello, Margaret Smith, Irene Wrenner, Tom Yandow, Joanna Roberts, Joe

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

Ms. Wrenner asked if public input would be taken on each department's budget. Mr. Watts said that this would be done if time allows.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Work Session

Overview

Mr. Duggan highlighted the issues facing the Town in FY24, including separation from the Village of Essex Junction and inflation. He said that salaries remain the largest expense for the Town. The overall budget proposal is \$15,454,217. Of that, \$10,778,980 would be raised by the tax levy. Conservatively estimating grand list growth at 1 percent, the tax levy would result in a municipal tax rate increase of 21.4 percent, or an increase of \$330 on the average home. The tax levy will decrease in FY24, however the smaller tax base means the Town will face a much higher than normal tax rate increase if it is to maintain services. He detailed areas that management staff has worked to cut where historical spending had not met historical budgets as well as decreased per-capita regional budget costs.

Fire

Mr. Cole said that on-call pay rates are proposed to increase for the first time in 5 years, from \$15.50/hour to \$17/hour and firefighters would again be paid for training to incentivize attendance (pay for training was eliminated several years ago to align with the Essex Junction Fire Department). He said that some of

the equipment costs have gone up substantially and detailed costs associated with records management and calling software. Ms. Macy said that technology subscriptions have been separated out into their own line item, and that the increase is not as large as it appears. Mr. Watts requested public comment. Ms. Wrenner said she is concerned that firefighters are no longer paid trainings, and expressed concern about the legality of this. Mr. Watts clarified that this would be reinstated in the FY24 budget. Mr. Cole clarified that the department pays for mandatory training and follows the law.

Health & Human Services

This budget segment includes costs associated with the Health Officer and Deputy Health Officer, the Town's Human Services Grant program (1% of the general operating budget), Essex Rescue, and appropriations to other organizations whose mission supports health and human services in the area. Mr. Duggan said the Essex Rescue request has gone up quite a bit, at a \$3.87 per capita rate and that there are still conversations to be had with Essex Rescue regarding this. Ms. Hill-Fleury expressed concern that the Town has no say in the Essex Rescue budget. Mr. Duggan said that he has been speaking with other municipalities in the area, and they have discussed the possibility of voting membership for each municipality. Mr. Watts said that the Town has the authority to change the amount given to Essex Rescue, however this would affect other communities and the service levels. Discussion was had on possible payment for dispatch services utilized by Essex Rescue from the Essex Police. More discussion will be had with Essex Rescue regarding options for reducing this cost.

Community Development

Ms. Sonnick said that the Town Plan revision process will be in full swing by the start of the FY24 fiscal year, but public outreach, public hearings, and final edits will take place in the summer and fall of 2024. This work will be conducted in house by staff with the help of Planning Commission and other boards and committees in order to minimize professional services costs. She said that the Town will work towards having a Village and Town Center designation, as this will assist the Town in getting grant funding. The Selectboard expressed support and Mr. Chamberlin asked if sufficient funds were set aside for this. Ms. Macy said that the Town has a Planning Reserve fund where unspent planning funds could be utilized. Mr. Duggan detailed the Conservation Fund, and the Selectboard discussed utilizing this, the fund balance, and the Capital Reserve fund. The Selectboard expressed a desire to get a full accounting of the fund balance. The Board discussed special events, and where the funding for each comes from.

Economic Development

Ms. Sonnick said that the Community Development Department has a part-time Economic Development coordinator who connects with local businesses as well as working on affordable housing and childcare initiatives.

Library

Ms. Corless compared the Essex Free Library budget to other similar communities and said that they are below spending levels for other communities. She discussed sizing and staffing concerns with the library, stating that they would need additional staffing in future years. She expressed concerns about Hoopla usage being unsustainable with the current budget. She explained some of the costs that the Library

Trustees funded, as well as the Friends of Essex Free Library. She discussed the reasoning in discontinuing magazine subscriptions, saying that it was expensive and rarely used. She noted that the Essex Free Library would no longer be contributing to the Brownell Library. Mr. Chamberlin lauded the library for their hard work during the pandemic, and what they have done to help the entire community. Mr. Lawrence asked for information about staffing levels, and Ms. Corless said that the library has had difficulty attracting and keeping substitutes to cover shifts. The Selectboard discussed the potential of putting the \$15,000 that the Essex Free Library used to donate to the Brownell Library back into the budget.

IT

Mr. Paluba said that the budget was impacted by a 10% increase in computer chip prices. He said that laptops that were purchased at the start of COVID will need to be replaced in this fiscal year. Ms. Delphia encouraged Mr. Paluba to cycle out the replacement of equipment so that a large purchase will not be required at once. Ms. Macy spoke about the use for fund-balance, saying that it is a good source for one-time expenses. The Selectboard discussed the current website, and difficulties with it.

Assessor

Ms. Lemnah detailed the tax rate and grand list process to the Selectboard, and revenue gained from the City for assessing services. Mr. Lawrence expressed a desire for Grand List growth to help assist with the tax rate. Mr. Duggan said that the budget is based on 1% grand list growth. Ms. Macy explained that, even though the tax levy is going down, the number of properties that will be responsible for it are going down. Ms. Lemnah discussed reduced vehicle use by the Assessor's office, which has allowed the department to share a vehicle with Community Development.

The Selectboard took a 10-minute break at 10:25 AM.

Public Works

Mr. Martin said that inflation, fuel costs, and material shortages have had a serious impact on the budget and has made forecasting difficult. The department is requesting a total of \$135,000 increase from last year, 47% of which is from an increase in employee benefits and salaries. Mr. Duggan explained the difficulty and predicting overtime costs due to emergencies and storms. Mr. Martin said that the department has worked hard to solicit grant funds to offset budget.

Highway

Mr. Martin said that the major costs increases are stormwater maintenance, health insurance, and sand/salt costs. He said that the department tries to fill their sand and salt shed for the next year at the current year's costs in order to make it more reliable. Summer construction and contracted snow removal has increased due to inflationary pressures. Mr. Duggan said that the Parks & Recreation and Public Works department are going to take a .7FTE position and convert it to be a 1 FTE position which would be shared between the two departments. He noted that many other communities are offering higher wages for Public Works employees, and this can make it difficult to keep employees. Mr. Martin explained the differences in group insurance prices depending on an employee's family structure. Mr. Chamberlin said

that he is concerned that the budget is not sufficient to meet the needs of the Public Works department, the other members of the Board echoed this. Mr. Duggan said that the 15% fund balance contingency may be utilized should it be a bad winter. Mr. Lawrence asked if the fund balance has ever lost money, and it was determined that this has never been the case. Mr. Duggan said that this budget also includes \$600,000 of fund balance. The Selectboard discussed vehicle replacement scheduling. There is a plan to gradually increase the amount of money in this line item. The Selectboard discussed the use of See Click Fix, noting that the price has gone down with the exclusion of the Village. Mr. Martin spoke of how the program has allowed the Department to save a considerable amount of staff time.

Stormwater

Mr. Martin said that the two major cost increases include professional services and summer construction. The Department has been working on soliciting grant funding to televise the sewer lines. He said that the department needs to pay more attention to their stormwater infrastructure in order to maintain it.

Buildings

Ms. Macy said that there is a separate costing center for each building, and that there is a page where they are all aggregated. Mr. Yandow said that First Light will be increasing the cost of their services, however the percentage of the increase is unknown. As a result, the Town of Essex is looking into utilizing Burlington Telecom. Ms. Delphia asked about hard-wired phone connections v. soft connections. She encouraged the Board to utilize soft connection over hard-wired or cellular services.

The Selectboard took a lunch break at 12 and resumed at 12:30 PM.

Recreation Administration

Ms. Vile said that this encompasses three full-time staff members, as well as professional services and software. The Community Events & Celebrations line item has been decreased to match the new population of Essex for the Memorial Day Parade. She mentioned other Town events, such as Explore Essex and Juneteenth, that have been funded via other Town budgetary sources. Mr. Lawrence said that he feels that it is important for Essex to have its own dedicated events, rather than doing combined events with the City.

Buildings, Grounds, and Pool

Ms. Vile said that increases are planned for daily and seasonal rates for the pool. Ms. Delphia asked about who was responsible for maintaining the pool. Ms. Vile detailed reciprocal assistance provided by the Public Works Department. The Sand Hill Pool now has a heater to make it more comfortable, and Ms. Vile said that this may allow the pool to be used in May and September. She discussed the field rental process. She noted that one staff member is 50% in Senior Services and 50% in Parks and Recreation and that many part-time seasonal opportunities remain unfilled.

Senior Services

This line item includes senior programming and van services. Mr. Duggan noted that the Shared Services Agreement with the City of Essex Junction will be in place for half of this fiscal year. Ms. Vile said that

the ridership numbers for the senior bus can vary widely. She compared the number of riders in the Town v. City and noted that there are many non-residents who utilize the Senior Center and are members of such. Mr. Duggan said that, after COVID, there has been more interest in drop-in programs rather than those using the center as a “homebase” for the day. This has shown a need for program space, but possibly not a formal senior center. Mr. Duggan said that, as of January 1, 2024, the Town is not planning on utilizing the shared Senior Center with Essex Junction.

Police

Mr. Hoague said that this budget is focused on maintaining current service levels. Increased funds have been requested for training, community outreach, vehicle replacement, K9 services and salaries. The police department has some open positions that they believe will not be able to be filled. While the Community Justice Center falls under the Town, the Selectboard has very little control over it the budget due to its external funding sources. The Selectboard reviewed the division of costs between the City and the Town. The Selectboard reviewed the vehicles used by the department, as well as their maintenance needs. Mr. Hoague encouraged members of the Selectboard to come over and try out some of their new training programs, and said that he planned to open it up to other municipalities as well.

Administration

Mr. Duggan said that there are no significant changes to this year, however a new administration position may be required in FY25. Mr. Duggan said that the Board member payments come under the Selectboard line item and said that many people are taking advantage of this. He noted a reduction in VLCT dues, as this is done on a per capita basis. The Town is currently looking into methods of reducing Front Porch Forum subscription fees now that the number of neighborhoods for posting is reduced. Ms. Hill-Fleury expressed concern about the effectiveness of Front Porch Forum.

County & Regional Government

This line item is made up of regional and county organizations that support Essex. The numbers listed are projections and finalized data will be available in January of 2023. Mr. Duggan noted that many of these costs will be less than the previous fiscal year since they are based off of population numbers.

Clerk

Ms. McNamara-Hill said that the Clerk’s department will be reduced from three employees to two, however salaries are still slightly up. Revenue will be down due to the fact that the City will have its own clerk’s department and will thus collect those fees. Mr. Lawrence asked if it was still required to mail ballots, Ms. McNamara-Hill said that it was not.

Finance

Mr. Roy said that most increases are due to salaries and benefits. Ms. Macy noted that the Vermont League of Cities and Towns PACIF program is a cost sharing program, not an insurance. If it is a good year, communities may get a credit. The Selectboard discussed how shared properties with the City, such as the Tree Farm, would be affected by these rates. Mr. Sabatano said that the insurance rates are likely to fall in coming years and Mr. Lawrence suggested that the Town offered some incentives for employees if

they go a certain number of days without an accident. Mr. Chamberlin requested that additional information regarding fund balance be included in the budget. Ms. Macy outlined the difference between unassigned and assigned fund balance, and said that in Essex, there is a policy to maintain a 15% unassigned fund balance.

Debt

Ms. Macy said that the police facility bond is the only long-term debt in the budget. The Selectboard discussed the impact of the City's portion and said that the City has the same responsibility to pay for this as they also voted on it. As a result, Mr. Watts wondered if the full debt should be included as a part of the budget.

Revenue

General Revenue is where property taxes and other smaller revenues not attributable to any individual department or activity are budgeted and recorded. Ms. Macy said that revenues that are specific to certain costing centers are reflected in such. Most of the revenue for the Town is property taxes. Ms. Macy detailed the town grand list growth and said that it is generally around 1% a year. She compared figures based on different percentages of growth and the corresponding impact on taxes. Utilization of the fund balance was also discussed, with Mr. Lawrence advocating for reducing the size of the fund balance.

Mr. Watts said that additional budget discussions would be had in the coming weeks. The Selectboard requested follow-up on the following issues: additional Public works needs, Essex exclusive recreation events, the potential impact of Essex Junction joining the Winooski Valley Park District, Tree Farm insurance costs, Essex Rescue contributions, reduced contributions to the Conservation Funds, additional accounting for the Explore Essex event, adding \$15,000 to the library budget, utilizing fund balance for IT materials purchases, increasing landfill monitoring, utilizing statewide cellphone contracts, possible VOIP savings, and potentially utilizing the Building Better Back Roads grant.

6. EXECUTIVE SESSION

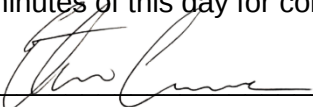
a. An executive session did not occur.

7. ADJOURN

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 3:25 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary

Approved this 21st day of November, 2022
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)


Ethan Lawrence, Selectboard Clerk