



Town of Essex

Selectboard

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Public Hearing - **AMENDED** AGENDA

Monday, March 4, 2024 – 7:30 PM

The Selectboard for the Town of Essex will hold a public informational hearing to discuss the Australian ballot articles on the 2024 Town Meeting Warning

Essex Middle School, 60 Founders Rd., Essex, VT

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

• **JOIN ONLINE:** [Zoom](#) Meeting ID: 987 8569 1140; Passcode: 032060

• **JOIN CALLING:** (*toll free audio only*): (888) 788-0099 | Meeting ID: 987 8569 1140; Passcode: 032060

This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** 7:30 PM
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC HEARING**
 - a. Review and discuss: **Article I: Shall the Town adopt a budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025 as recommended by the Selectboard in the amount of \$16,106,421?**
 - b. Review and discuss: **Article II: Shall the Town of Essex adopt the proposed 2024 Town Plan?**
 - c. Review and discuss: **Article III: Shall the voters require the Town Annual Report to list the location of commercial properties that received a municipal tax stabilization benefit within the report fiscal year, the amount of that benefit and property owners? (Advisory)**
 - d. Review and discuss: **Article IV: Shall the voters require the Town Annual Report to list the names, position titles, salaries and benefits of all town employees within the annual report fiscal year? (Advisory)**
 - e. Announcement: **Article V: Election of the following: Moderator, 1 vacancy (1-year term) and Selectboard, 1 vacancy (3-year term)**
5. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
6. **ADJOURN**

Certification:  02/21/2024

SELECTBOARD

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES MONDAY MARCH 4, 2024

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Marguerite Ladd, Deputy Manager; Charles Cole, Fire Chief; Caitlin Corless, Library Director; Jill Evans, Community Justice Center Director; Tammy Getchell, Public Information Officer/Assistant to the Manager; Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Karen Lemnah, Assessor; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Rob Paluba, IT Director; Daniel Roy, Finance Director; Travis Sabataso, HR Director; John Sonnick, Moderator; Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; Ally Vile, Recreation Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Craig Agricola, Caroline Ashley, Leslie Jean Ballantyne, Gina Barrett, Mary Brodsky, David Bucke, Wade Carson, Steve Cluett, Patty Davis, Jeff Diedrichsen, Kathy Diedrichsen, Kathy Dodge, Roger Dodge, Steve Dowd, Paula Duke, Betsy Dunn, Leonardo D., Ray Ely, William Fay, Joe Emery, Jerry Fox, Geetha Ganesan, Blake Getchell, Emily Gibbs, Barb Greck, Staci Anne Grove, Caidyn Hancock, Caitlin Haxel, Margaret Hjort, Barbara Isham, Charlotte Kenney, Jim Kenney, Brendan Kinney, Ron Lawrence, Bob Leuang, Sophia Lu, Lauren McCain, Mary McGinn, Martha McLaughlin, Katie Merrick, Susan Miyamoto, Greg Moehn, Linda Hubie Norton, Sharon Norton, Lois Parmelee, Jeanne Piro, Ron Piro, Bruce Post, Mary Post, Betty Poulin, Larry Ransom, David Rome, Linda Rudgers, Bob Russo, Chris Sheftic, Rick Sheftic, Ken Signorello, David Skopin, Kenly Smith, Kirk Smith, Laurence Smith, Lynn Smith, Margaret Smith, Diana Swafford, Joe Teegarden, Kim Thibodeau, Marie Tiemann, Daniel Tso, Francis Raymond, Chuck Vile, Sen. Irene Wrenner, Tim Yandow, Lorraine Zaloom, Sharon Zukowski, Chelsea, Keehn Family, Stefani, PT839

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Watts called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 7:30 PM. He said that Mr. Sonnick, Moderator, would be running the remainder of the meeting.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

No changes, thus no approval required.

4. PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Sonnick said that the Boy Scout Troop 635 and Cub Scouts Pack 635 would lead the presentation of the colors, and that Essex High School student Sophia Lu would sing the national anthem. He thanked the Girl Scouts for greeting residents, the Essex Middle School student government for serving soup, and Essex Middle School staff for their assistance with setup. He introduced the Selectboard, Administration, and local representatives. Ms. Hill-Fleury read the Invocation of Civility. Mr. Sonnick reminded all in attendance that there would be no in-person voting this year.

a. Review and discuss: Article I: Shall the Town adopt a budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025 as recommended by the Selectboard in the amount of \$16,106,421?

Mr. Watts said the Selectboard set a goal of a tax increase no greater than 5%, which is what is proposed. He said that inflation and health premiums are difficulties that the budget is facing. The Selectboard is

proposing to add 15 hours of staff time at the Essex Free Library, a part-time Administrative Assistant in the administration department and a part-time Trails Coordinator. One Senior Van driver has been eliminated due to separation from Essex Junction. The pay rates for per diem firefighters are being increased \$1, as well as adding weekend shifts. \$398,100 of fund balance will be used to offset the tax rate. The FY 2025 proposed budget is \$16.106 million, with a \$705,269 change from the previous fiscal year and a 4.58% increase. This will be a \$80.36 increase for an “average” home in Essex. Mr. Sonnick requested public input. Mr. Lawrence thanked the Selectboard for their service in preparing the budget and keeping costs down.

b. Review and discuss: Article II: Shall the Town of Essex adopt the proposed 2024 Town Plan?

Mr. Watts said that the Town Plan is what is used to determine the future zoning regulations. He described efforts to collect public input on the process and said that this plan provides a clear picture of the intended future for the Town and necessary public policy for such. Mr. Sonnick requested public input, of which there was none.

c. Review and discuss: Article III: Shall the voters require the Town Annual Report to list the location of commercial properties that received a municipal tax stabilization benefit within the report fiscal year, the amount of that benefit and property owners? (Advisory)

Mr. Sonnick said that this is an advisory article resulting from a voter-backed petition. It will give the Selectboard a sense of the will of the Town. Mr. Watts said that he wanted to be clear that this vote is not binding to the Selectboard however they are required to put the question on the ballot. Mr. Sonnick requested public input. Ms. Zaloom said that she was one of the petitioners. She believes that this will add transparency, and make sure that the businesses receiving stabilization agreements are providing good jobs as a result. Mr. Watts said that the information being requested is already public information and can be shared upon request. He said that the Town does follow-up on with the businesses it issues agreements for.

d. Review and discuss: Article IV: Shall the voters require the Town Annual Report to list the names, position titles, salaries and benefits of all town employees within the annual report fiscal year? (Advisory)

Mr. Watts said that this is public information, and available upon request. Mr. Sonnick requested public input. Ms. Zukowski said that she believes that getting this information has been difficult in the past, and she would like to ensure that it is easier to obtain. Mr. Watts said that some municipalities do publish this information and said that if someone asked for this information today it would be provided quickly and clearly. Ms. Zaloom said that she was a petitioner. She believes that this article is important to ensure gender equality among staff and ensure competitiveness.

e. Announcement: Article V: Election of the following: Moderator, 1 vacancy (1-year term) and Selectboard, 1 vacancy (3-year term)

5. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

- Mr. Raymond asked if a 1% sales tax was under consideration, stating that he supports this idea. Mr. Watts said that it will be discussed in the future to accommodate capital and other needs.
- Mr. Leuang asked for clarification about the responsibilities of the Trails Coordinator position, which was given. He encouraged investment in the trail network. He cautioned against the 1% sales tax, noting that it could push employers out of town.
- Mr. Post asked when the reappraisal will occur, and what the process for such will be. Mr. Watts said that reassessments do not affect the budget and are revenue neutral. The capital tax is the exemption to this.

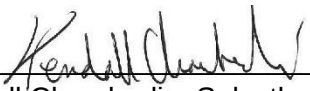
- Ms. Duke said that the 1% tax will be applied to major purchases, and encouraged residents to let retailers know that they do not currently live in a community where this is in place. Mr. Sonnick encouraged residents to use their nine-digit zip code to prevent accidental charges. Mr. Watts asked residents to let town staff or the state if they see a Town business using this tax.
- Mr. Norton suggested that signage be included to delineate the Town and City boundaries. He requested an update on the charter process. Mr. Watts said that last year's charter change went to the legislature, and that it was passed by the House. The just cause eviction was left out as the state would prefer to do this at the statewide level. Ms. Delphia detailed the process of legislative approval, stating that she and Mr. Duggan had testified.
- Mr. Signorello encouraged residents to look at the Town Plan prior to voting, as it will set the stage for the next eight years. He said that three of Essex's seven neighbors have a Local Options Tax and stated that he believes that residents will pay the bulk of it should it be implemented in Essex.
- Ms. Post said that she is concerned that dogs are allowed to run free in Indian Brook Park. She said that this has prevented some people from utilizing the park. She encouraged dogs to be leashed in the park.
- Ms. Dunn said that algae blooms have started appearing in Indian Brook and cited the excrement from off-leash dogs as a possible cause.
- Mr. Leuang said that he is concerned about dog defecation preventing swimming in Indian Brook and referred to this as a dog owner problem.
- Sen. Wrenner said that the charter change bill has passed through the Senate Operations Committee without substantial changes, and that it will be heard on March 12th-March 13th with a potential vote on March 14th.

6. ADJOURN

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, for the Selectboard to adjourn. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:38 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary

Approved this 18th day of March, 2024
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)


Kendall Chamberlin, Selectboard Clerk