Town of Essex

Selectboard
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Special Meeting AGENDA

Thursday, November 14, 2024 – 8:00 AM
81 Main St., Essex Junction, VT 05452

This meeting will be in person and online. The agenda is available in alternative formats upon request.
- **JOIN ONLINE:** Zoom Meeting ID: 987 8569 1140 | Passcode: 032060
- **JOIN CALLING:** (*toll free audio only*): (888) 788-0099
- **WATCH:** Recorded meetings may be viewed on Town Meeting TV and Town of Essex Channels.
- **SCAN** the code on the left for the Zoom meeting link.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** 8:00 AM
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
   a. Comments from the public on Consent items and items not on Agenda
5. **CONSENT ITEMS**
   a. Approve minutes: November 2, 2024; November 4, 2024
6. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
   a. Work session on fiscal year 2026 budget
7. **READING FILE**
   a. Board member comments
   b. Upcoming meeting schedule
8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
   a. An executive session is not anticipated
9. **ADJOURN**

Certification: KML 11/08/2024

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2024

SELECTBOARD: Tracy Delphia, Chair; Andy Watts, Vice-Chair; Kendall Chamberlin, Clerk; Dawn Hill-Fleury; Ethan Lawrence
ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Jenn Booker, Assistant Town Clerk; Charlie 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; Adriane Martin, Recreation Director; Shawn McNamara, Buildings Manager; Rob Paluba, IT Director; Dan Roy, Finance Director; Travis Sabataso, HR Director; Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; Jessica Worn, Assistant Finance Director
OTHERS PRESENT: None

1. <u>CALL TO ORDER</u>
Ms. Delphia called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 8:06 AM.

2. <u>AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES</u>
None.

3. <u>APPROVE AGENDA</u>
Not required.

4. <u>PUBLIC TO BE HEARD</u>
a. Comments from the Public on Items Not on Agenda

5. <u>CONSENT ITEMS</u>
DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to accept the consent agenda as presented. Motion passed 5-0.
a. Approve minutes: November 2, 2024; November 4, 2024

6. <u>BUSINESS ITEMS</u>
a. Work Session on Fiscal Year 2026 Budget
Mr. Duggan provided an overview of the day, noting that department heads have been asked to discuss what is new and different from previous years. He said that he hopes to have the draft budget ready at the end of the year and said that it will be discussed further in additional meetings. The projected tax increase is higher than average due to separation, reducing reliance on fund balance, capital transfer increases and personnel. Proposed staff changes include increased sub hours at the library and the conversion of two part-time positions to full-time in both the Recreation and Community Development departments. There is also a new proposed equity advisory consultant, housed by the regional planning commission.

Fire Department
Mr. Cole said that more funding is proposed for per diem pay to have additional people on staff. Additional salaries are also requested for increases for officer pay. The department has had more calls than they ever had this year. More staff is being requested to address early morning and evening calls. Mr. Chamberlin said that this is almost a 50% increase and asked if there is a possibility of not responding to medical calls, as some towns have chosen to do. Mr. Cole said that a reduction could be looked at, however their licensure as an EMS provider requires them to be always dispatched. The fire department is not able to charge for EMS service calls. Mr. Duggan said that the call minimum has been increased to three hours, as it is hoped

that this will increase call response rates. Mr. Cole discussed the impact of supply chain slowdowns on the budget.

Library

Ms. Corless said that the library would like to improve programming, physical collections and digital collections. Additional funding would allow for the library to hire outside staff to run programs, and Ms. Corless said that the programming rate has not been increased since 2003. She is requesting that this be increased to $3,500. The Echo pass is the most circulated item in the library, and museum passes are a widely requested item. Essex Free Library is a part of an e-book consortium, which can have high wait times. E-books are more expensive than physical books and are only purchased for a specific amount of time. Mr. Lawrence questioned why supplies are increasing by $2,000 and Ms. Corless discussed the increasing prices in library supplies as well as equipment upgrades. Staff will be able to further update the budget when final information on employee health insurance selection is available. Mr. Watts disclosed that his wife is the Chair of the Library Board of Trustees. The Friends of the Library is a separate non-profit who has full control over the funds that they raise. Mr. Watts suggested that the recreation needs assessment also includes library programs. Mr. Duggan discussed the balance between providing free programs in recreation and the need to generate revenue. Ms. Corless said that she is happy to collaborate with the recreation department if the events are not fee-based. Ms. Corless explained the different e-book services and how they can be best used. Ms. Delphia asked if there have been any efforts to combine e-book sharing at the state level. Ms. Corless said that this is done with some sites.

Recreation

Ms. Martin said that the Parks Superintendent role and Trails Coordinator positions are both open and receiving applications. She would like to see a fourth full-time position in the office to better support the department. The department is overdue for a recreation needs assessment and plans for one with the next fiscal year. The recreation department has built credit card fees into programming fees. Ms. Martin is enrolled in a recreation director training program. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked if the park fees cover the cost of maintenance. Ms. Martin said that these may need to be looked at in the future, especially considering the impact of staff time. Mr. Lawrence asked why the town was not using a free service to accept credit cards and discussed the financial impact of unrented space. He noted that there was a large increase in operating funds and a decrease in revenue. Mr. Watts pointed out that some of the funds may be included in the enterprise fund. Ms. Martin said that she will investigate other credit card providers, but that taking cards really helps with the safety of staff on site. Mr. Chamberlin suggested offering a cash discount for in-office purchases. He said that it seems like Essex needs additional staff to maintain the land and suggested that some kind of contracting could be used to save money. The Parks Superintendent will focus on long-term planning and optimization. Essex will no longer maintain the school-owned Prairie Fields. Ms. Martin discussed potential collaboration with the town mechanic for recreation vehicles. Ms. Hill-Fleury noted a 23% budget cut in the senior budget, and Mr. Roy explained that this was a staff salary reallocation.

Assessor

Mr. Duggan said that assessing is one of the last shared services with Essex Junction, and that this is due to come to an end after the reassessment. The Board will further discuss this at their meeting next week. Shared services brings in around $90,000 in revenue yearly. Ms. Lemnah displayed the current budget showing no staff changes and with no shared services. The state pays $8.50 per parcel yearly for reappraisal. There is a significant amount of uncertainty as to how the state will pay and complete reappraisal in future years. Mr. Lawrence said that the cost to stop shared services is only 1% of the total budget increase.

IT

Mr. Paluba discussed software consistency and a move towards the cloud. IT is looking at migration from the current phone system and the possibility of routing calls through existing cell phones. Many of the software purchases are essential for network security.

Community Development

Ms. Sonnick said that the department is proposing to convert the part-time administrative assistant position to a full-time planning technician. This will help to better serve the new Development Review Board. The rate of the new position will move from $22 to $25 an hour, which is on the low to mid side for similar positions. This would also allow the current planner to spend more time on supporting boards and trail work. Answering a question from Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Sabataso said that the insurance rates for employees are affected by how their family structure, but not how each individual family utilizes it. Hiring decisions cannot be made based on family structure or insurance utilization.

Economic Development

This includes fees for memberships that Essex is a part of, such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation.

Police

Mr. Hoague discussed a focus on community engagement and a desire to bring back crime mapping. There is uncertainty with the funding of the community justice center from the state-level. The state is no longer funding the Howard Mental Health program, which provides additional support for mental health issues in the community. The estimated yearly cost for this service is $88,000. The police building has a leaky roof which will need to be repaired. The animal control contractor has requested a fee increase. Neighboring municipalities have increased salaries considerably, and Mr. Hoague is expecting this to be included in upcoming union negotiations. A second lieutenant position will be needed to fill a part-time retirement. The addition of a crime reporting portal will be added into the budget. The town is required to notify the City of Essex Junction of any material changes to the police budget. The Town also presents at the City budget day. Should either party want to leave the agreement, they will need to give five years notice. The current agreement lasts for ten years.

Community Justice Center

Ms. Evans said that the department currently gets 78% of their funding from the Department of Corrections. In Chittenden County, the Attorney General's office will take over this type of work, and thus there is no funding now. Local representatives have said that they are committed to the pre-charge work that the Community Justice Center (CJC) does and said that more will be known in mid-May. The Department of Corrections sent out a request for proposals for the first time in twenty-three years and has said that they are reducing the allocation and will only fund one entity in Chittenden County. It appears that there may not be funding for the Essex reentry coordinator. It is possible that the CJC could be subcontracted to perform work inside of the prisons. Mr. Hoague spoke of the importance of advocating for the CJC at the legislative level.

The Selectboard adjourned for lunch at 12:15 PM. The Selectboard came back in session at 12:51 PM.

Public Works-Buildings

Mr. Martin said that this budget is made up of four different parts: buildings, admin, stormwater and highway. The buildings budget addresses all repairs, maintenance, security and utility for all ten town-owned buildings. Mr. McNamara is working on a draft buildings management plan. Public Works is requesting less in the buildings budget due to reallocation of fuel costs. Ms. Delphia asked if the municipal overflow lot is used often. Mr. Duggan said that it is used sometimes, especially if there are programs in the recreation department. Employees often park in that lot during busy times. A new contract for cleaning services will be out in January, and this will be available for bid by any contractors.

Mr. Martin discussed the needs at the Town Offices, library, fire department, police station, the public works admin building, public works garage, Memorial Hall, Harriet Powell Museum and the Tree Farm buildings. Mr. Duggan discussed the municipal space needs assessment. Mr. Martin discussed the issues associated with the current police station, including heating/cooling, humidity, solar panels and a leaky roof. At some point, it may not be cost-productive to continue to have solar panels as the company who installed them has gone out of business and it is difficult to find someone to repair them. Ms. Delphia asked if there was some type of guarantee, as the building is only ten years old. Mr. Martin said that there is not but that it is a learning lesson for future building projects. Public Works is currently looking to hire an additional engineer and will have the job description and positing available shortly. This is an already approved backfilling position. Memorial Hall will need a new roof and the public works admin building has additional needs as a result of its age. Answering a question from Ms. Hill-Fleury regarding Memorial Hall usage, Mr. Duggan said that additional review of rental fees will occur.

Mr. Martin said that most of the increase in the admin budget is due to labor and benefits costs. Mr. Chamberlin asked if copier costs have ever been examined, and Mr. Roy said that the town has a flat five-year lease cost. In the stormwater budget, labor and benefits are the biggest increase. The Latter Day Saints storm pond project has just gone out to bid. Mr. Martin discussed pet waste pickup and said that bags are handed out for free and that the town receives stormwater credit for this. Mr. Martin discussed stormwater slip lining, which allows the town to use cameras to assess the condition of pipes. Regarding the highway budget, labor and benefits are 40% of expenditures. Summer construction, storm sewer maintenance, salt/sand/gravel and capital transfers are the largest expenditures of this account. The town has around 60% of the salt on hand that will be needed for the winter, as well as enough sand. Mr. Martin detailed the cost benefit analysis of renting v. buying equipment. Mr. Martin discussed the plowing and paving scheduling and said that it is important to keep work to specific areas to minimize the costs of moving the equipment. The town plans to go out to bid this year for roadside mowing services. Changes to employee family structure have been made so there is no health insurance increase for the department this year. Mr. Sabataso discussed health insurance premium figures, and the differences between funding a family and single person plan. Mr. Martin discussed summer construction needs and stated that paving and stormwater maintenance are both priorities.

Clerk/Treasurer

Ms. Booker said that overtime has increased due to elections and that more training has been requested so that she can earn additional certifications. Mr. Duggan said that revenue is down due to separation with Essex Junction. Mr. Chamberlin discussed mailing ballots, noting that many other municipalities are doing so for all elections.

Administration

Mr. Duggan said that the Equity Policy Advisory position has been discussed at the regional level, with the thought that it would be shared between several towns. The department is back to historical spending figures on training. A new Deputy Town Manager will be starting next week.

County & Regional

Mr. Duggan said that this consists of county tax, and all the various memberships that Essex is a part of. Mr. Duggan explained that the Winooski Valley Parks Service is an independent municipality which serves the entire county.

Health & Human Services

This covers the cost of the health officer, human services, historical society, Essex Rescue and cemeteries. 1% of the total budget is allocated to human services. Mr. Chamberlin discussed Essex Rescue's ability to recoup costs, whereas the fire department cannot. Mr. Duggan said that they are only able to recoup the costs of transport. Mr. Duggan said that some type of contract or scope of work could be established in the future for Essex Rescue. Mr. Lawrence explained the funding structure and why Essex Rescue is losing money.

Legislative

This includes board member payments and training.

Finance & Debt & General Revenue

Mr. Roy said that the finance budget includes staff pay and benefits. This is the first year that the town has executed investments with a broker. The budget also includes an increase for audit costs, as this will be sent out to bid next year. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked Mr. Roy if he had any concerns about the overall budget, and he spoke of decisions to be made regarding fund balance.

Mr. Lawrence left the meeting at 3:52 PM.

Ms. Hill-Fleury discussed potential increases in the school budget, and the impact of overall taxes on the community. Mr. Chamberlin said that he believes that Essex should have a capital tax and remove capital transfers from the budget. Reappraisal will show up on the September 2025 tax bill.

7. READING FILE

a. Board member comments: None.

b. Upcoming meeting schedule

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Not held.

9. ADJOURN

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, for the Selectboard to adjourn. The motion passed 4-0 at 4:06 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary

Approved this __2nd____ day of _December___, 2024
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)

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Kendall Chamberlin, Selectboard Clerk