Town of Essex
Selectboard
Phone: (802) 878-1341
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Regular Meeting AGENDA

Monday, December 2, 2024 – 6:30 PM
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** 6:30 PM
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 14, 2024; November 18, 2024
   b. Approve check warrants: # 18241- 11/1/24; # 18246- 11/22/24
   c. Consider approval of award for Water and Sewer Rate and Fee Study
6. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
   a. Consider approval of Fire Department impact fee study and authorization of staff to begin work on impact fee ordinance
   b. Work session continued on fiscal year 2026 budget
   c. Consider approval of letter to Vermont Department of Taxes re: improper collection of local options tax
   d. *Discussion about the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
7. **READING FILE**
   a. Board member comments
   b. Upcoming meeting schedule
   c. Information regarding a Village Center state designation
   d. Current Status of Public Works Projects
8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
   a. * An executive session is anticipated to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
9. **ADJOURN**

Certification: KML 11/27/24

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2024

SELECTBOARD: Andy Watts, Vice Chair; Kendall Chamberlin, Clerk; Dawn Hill-Fleury; Ethan Lawrence
ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Manager; Charles Cole, Fire Chief; Tom Richards, Deputy Fire Chief; Daniel Roy, Finance Director; Stephen Trenholm, Assistant Fire Chief
OTHERS PRESENT: David Skopin, John Slason, Ken Signorello, MJSS

1. CALL TO ORDER
Mr. Watts called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES
Mr. Duggan requested to include a budget proposal from Mr. Chamberlin in Item 6b.

3. APPROVE AGENDA
No approval necessary, thus no vote held.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD
a. Comments from the public on Consent items and items not on Agenda
Mr. Skopin discussed climate change, suggested the establishment of a climate change mitigation officer in Essex.

5. CONSENT ITEMS
DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to accept the consent agenda as corrected. Motion passed 4-0.
a. Approve minutes: November 14, 2024; November 18, 2024
b. Approve check warrants: # 18241- 11/1/24; # 18246- 11/22/24
c. Consider approval of award for Water and Sewer Rate and Fee Study

6. BUSINESS ITEMS
a. Consider approval of Fire Department impact fee study and authorization of staff to begin work on impact fee ordinance
Mr. Trenholm said that this project is not connected with the new town center project. The impact fee does not affect the current identified deficiencies, only future costs due to growth. Impact fees cannot be relied upon as an income source. Mr. Slason, project consultant, said that Essex is growing in both population and employment, which is impacting the Fire Department. An impact fee will ensure that current standards of services are met with future development. The impact fee estimates are subject to change. 21% of the population in Essex is over the age of 65, which is putting additional pressure on emergency services. There is a significant increase in residential density, and more dense properties require more emergency services per unit than less dense units. The growth rates for the impact fees should be revisited every five years. Impact fees for commercial and industrial uses were also discussed. 60% of calls are EMS related as of 2023. Car accidents, extrication, and non-transit related medical calls are all considered EMS related. In some cases, the demand exceeds the capacity to provide service.

Most fire department staffers are paid on-call, however there are some who are scheduled on a daily basis. The department is operating out of an undersized space, and a new station would allow it to better serve the community. The future station would exceed the needs of the current community, and it is hoped that this property will serve the community for 75+ years. The station will address deficiencies and be built for future growth. Mr. Cole said that a full-time employment model has been discussed, and that it is not included in this plan.

Mr. Slason said that additional growth and demand on staff may necessitate an hourly paid fire department. He discussed impact fee options to guide the conversation. Mr. Richards said that this is an attempt at an incremental approach prior to paying for full-time staff. Answering questions from the Selectboard, Mr. Slason said that the person obtaining a building permit is responsible for paying the impact fee. The town has the legal right to waive impact fees in certain cases. Funds must be spent within six years of collection. It needs to be proven that the payees benefit from the fees that were collected and that projects meet the need of additional development. Growth calculations were discussed, and their impact on potential fees. Mr. Watts requested public input, of which there was none.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard approve the Fire Department Impact Fee study and authorize staff to begin crafting an ordinance to implement impact fees for the Fire Department. Motion passed 4-0.

b. Work session continued on fiscal year 2026 budget

Mr. Roy said that employee health insurance costs have been reduced due to efforts to obtain additional quotes for coverage. Assessing revenue from the City has been added back into the budget and utility adjustments have been made to the buildings budget. This results in a 6.27% increase in municipal taxes from the previous year. Mr. Roy said that an additional $35,000 increase in health insurance costs is expected. Green Mountain Transit funding is difficult to predict as it depends on legislative approval for additional funds. The Selectboard discussed leaving Green Mountain Transit, and Essex will need to provide notice by June of next year. Carryover from the previous year is anticipated, and Mr. Lawrence suggested that next year's budget be better estimated. He is concerned about overspending in salaries which leads to increased fund balance. A draft audit should be available later this week. Answering a question from Ms. Hill-Fleury, Mr. Duggan detailed cemetery funding and expenses. Additional details on the animal control contract will be provided later. Additional information on human services funding will be available at the next meeting, and Mr. Duggan said that the town is getting a legal opinion on whether voters need to approve this on the ballot. The $25,000 allocation for a county-wide equity advisor was discussed, with the majority of the Selectboard not in favor of the position. Predictability of spending in legal and employee education was discussed. Ms. Hill-Fleury said that she does not believe that stipends are working the way that they were intended to in attracting new participants.

Mr. Lawrence suggested that if the stipends are cut Selectboard pay be cut as well and said that he supported it if it helps only one person participate. He also requested additional details on professional services spending. Additional funding for diversity, equity and inclusion was discussed. The clerk, IT, assessing and community development department budgets were discussed. The Selectboard reviewed the potential addition of a new full-time position in Community Development. Mr. Duggan discussed the difficulty in hiring part-time positions. The Economic Development Committee's budget was discussed, with the Selectboard noting that this amount is typically not spent in full. Mr. Lawrence expressed concern about funding priorities in economic development. Mr. Lawrence suggested reducing funding for Green Mountain Transit due to diminished services. Mr. Duggan suggested holding an extra meeting on the evening of December 18th if needed to finalize the budget. Mr. Lawrence said that the town is getting harder and harder to live in due to tax rates and suggested that the tax rate be kept under 4.9%, Ms. Hill-Fleury agreed. Mr. Chamberlin said that he was interested to see what the increase would be if capital expenses were pulled out of the budget and the capital tax increased.

c. Consider approval of letter to Vermont Department of Taxes re. improper collection of local options tax
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, for the Chair and Vice-Chair to work out the language and send this letter. Motion passed 4-0.

d. Discussion about the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
This was discussed during Executive Session.

7. <u>READING FILE</u>
a. Board member comments: Ms. Hill-Fleury said that she will not be running for an additional term on the Selectboard. Mr. Chamberlin expressed support for the creation of a stormwater utility.
b. Upcoming meeting schedule
c. Information regarding a Village Center state designation
d. Current Status of Public Works Projects

8. <u>EXECUTIVE SESSION</u>
a. An executive session was requested to discuss the appointment or employment of a public officer or employee
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to exit executive session. Motion passed 4-0 at 9:58 PM.

9. <u>ADJOURN</u>
DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0 at 9:58 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary

Approved this __16th____ day of _December__, 2024
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)

Kendall Chamberlin
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Kendall Chamberlin, Selectboard Clerk