1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO FLAG [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. FY21 Budget Work Session

6. CONSENT ITEMS
   a. Approve minutes: December 16, 2019
   b. Check Warrant #17674—12/20/19; Warrant #17677—12/27/19; Warrant #17679—01/01/2020

7. READING FILE
   a. Selectboard Comments
   b. Memo from Sarah Macy re: Assignment of FY19 Fund Balance
   c. Memo from Dennis Lutz re: Status of Winter Operations
   d. Letter from Green Mountain Transit re: annual assessment
   e. Letter from State of Vermont Department of Taxes re: 2019 Equalization Study Results
   f. Upcoming meeting schedule

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION
   a. An executive session is not anticipated

9. ADJOURN

Members of the public are encouraged to speak during the Public to Be Heard agenda item, during a Public Hearing, or, when recognized by the Chair, during consideration of a specific agenda item. The public will not be permitted to participate when a motion is being discussed except when specifically requested by the Chair. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the Selectboard, like all programs and activities of the Town of Essex, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the Town Manager’s office at 878-1341.

Certification: ___________________________ 01/03/2020
TOWN OF ESSEX
SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
Monday, January 6, 2020

SELECTBOARD: Elaine Haney, Chair; Max Levy; Patrick Murray; Andy Watts; Annie Cooper.

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Sarah Macy, Finance Director/Assistant Manager; Susan McNamara-Hill, Clerk; Rob Paluba, IT Director; Charles Cole, Fire Chief; Rick Garey, Police Chief; Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director; Travis Sabataso, HR Director; Ally Vile, Parks and Rec Director; Ron Hoague, Police Captain; Tom Yandow, Buildings Manager; Jenny Willingham, Assistant Clerk; Caitlin Corless, Essex Free Library Director; Karen Lemnah, Assessor; Jill Evans, Community Justice Center Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Dave Kilbon; Margaret Smith; Irene Wrenner.

1. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG
Elaine Haney called the meeting of the Town of Essex Selectboard to order at 8:02 AM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/ CHANGES
There were no additions or changes to the agenda.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL
With no changes to the agenda, no vote for approval was needed.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD
Those from the public in attendance had no comments at this time.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS
a. FY21 Budget Work Session
Ms. Haney shared a brief overview of the day and reminded the Selectboard that formal recommendations and changes to the Fiscal Year 2021 budget would take place at the January 13 Selectboard meeting. Ms. Macy provided an overview of the proposed FY21 budget for the Town of Essex which, at $554,000, totals a 3.34% increase from FY20. She explained that the 4.04% projected tax levy has gone down since the budget was submitted to the Selectboard, due to revenue predicted from recording fees. It is estimated to be a 2.9% increase in the tax rate. She explained that among the driving factors for the FY21 budget increase were personnel costs, which equate to about 60% of the entire budget. She also pointed out an increase to the transfer to capital funds, mostly for building maintenance and software, and that the FY21 budget does not include any new cost sharing initiatives with the Village of Essex Junction.

Chief Cole reviewed the Fire Department budget, with an increase of 2.69% from FY20. He talked about equipment replacement; vehicle maintenance increases due to labor costs; strategies to align salaries with the Village of Essex Junction; and an increase in dues and subscriptions for software systems to manage calls and burn permits. He discussed funding needed to replace Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) machinery. He spoke about the new fire engine purchase. Mr. Levy wondered about staff training, which is level funded, and Chief Cole described efficiencies from engaging with local departments to offset training costs.
He also told Mr. Levy that the department could always use more volunteers to support operations and better inter-department communication.

Mr. Lutz discussed the Public Works budget, which increased overall by 2.94% from FY20. He provided an overview of the Buildings budget, the Highway budget and the Stormwater Budget. He talked about $100,000 of cost increases from salaries, water maintenance, building repairs and vehicles and discussed efforts to balance rising personnel costs with investing in service needs. He discussed a note on his FY19 recent history chart about accrued leave. Regarding the “vehicle transfer to capital” line, Mr. Lutz discussed a leasing strategy that offsets vehicle costs. Mr. Watts wondered why the general supplies line of the FY21 Buildings budget increased due to the election year. Mr. Lutz explained that this was for postage, and is not redundant with the Town Clerk office budget.

Regarding the increase to the Buildings budget, Mr. Lutz noted, and Mr. Teich reiterated, successes related to creating the new Buildings Manager position, filled by Mr. Yandow. They said this position offset costs of maintenance contracts and successfully established new strategies to prioritize and administer buildings projects. Mr. Watts and Mr. Levy talked about the Memorial Hall water project and the library’s handicapped entrance project. Ms. Cooper discussed her interest in encouraging Parks and Rec to consider new income-based strategies to fund some of the Memorial Hall maintenance. Ms. Macy clarified the electricity and natural gas lines increased because these were assigned per building instead of in a shared line.

Regarding the Highway budget, Mr. Lutz discussed the increase to water maintenance due to the effect cold-and-thaw winters is having on streams, from increased salt used on roads. He explained that the salary line change reflects utilizing long-term temps and not filling one position until the merger is decided. He talked about interest in purchasing an excavator instead of replacing the 11-year old backhoe. Mr. Levy wondered how the new budget handles the $60,000 increase from the previous year’s $100,000 Town meeting addition for roads ($40,000 of which was assigned to Village of Essex Junction projects). Mr. Lutz said this was level funded in the FY21 budget and described long-term road expense estimates.

Mr. Murray brought up a discussion about sidewalk plowing, as it relates to changes in the way children are being bused to school. He mentioned a petition circulating from a neighborhood near Fox Run Road, expressing public desire for more sidewalk plowing for students walking to bus stops in the morning. Ms. Cooper suggested a clear line of communication be established between the schools and Public Works about this topic. Ms. Haney requested that Mr. Lutz detail locations, issues, possible strategies and costs associated with plowing these sidewalks. She requested that staff invite the school board president to discuss the topic with the Selectboard at a meeting.

At 10 AM, Ms. Haney called a meeting break and the Selectboard reconvened at 10:13 AM. Ms. Haney opened the floor to public comments. Ms. Wrenner relayed a message from a resident who is concerned about road-crossing safety and hopes that this year’s budget includes funding for more crosswalks, especially near Sand Hill road and Founders School. Mr. Lutz discussed requirements for connecting walkways and said he will study if there are possible locations for signs in that area.

Mr. Lutz resumed his budget overview. He discussed landfill monitoring increases related to phosphorus removal. Ms. Macy talked about phosphorus innovation grant money from the state...
of Vermont and clarified that the phosphorus fund balance is normally transferred to capital. Mr. Levy discussed the state’s Stormwater mandate and the 3-acre rule. Mr. Teich said that the capital plan includes funding for Indian Brook Dam and other stormwater projects. Mr. Lutz talked about multiple Capital Plan projects which will be reviewed at a later date.

At 10:45 AM Chief Garey and Community Justice Center (CJC) Director Jill Evans discussed the CJC funding request of $16,200 for a portion of rent, staffing and a cost of living adjustment. They talked about the challenge of relying on the state’s two-year grant cycles of level-funding to CJC s. Chief Garey stressed the importance sustaining the centers through differentiated funding sources. Ms. Evans shared Essex outcomes related to: Restorative Justice Panels; volunteer engagement; Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA); community dialogue facilitation; and training and support of schools, organizations and groups interested in adopting restorative justice practices. She talked about regional partners and challenges related to funding. Mr. Duggan said Colchester made a $13,000 investment to CJC last year and Milton did not contribute to the program. He said Milton also cut other established program funding due to budget challenges. Mr. Watts, Ms. Evans and Mr. Teich said there is buy-in from local representatives in favor of the CJC and talked about challenges and costs of incarceration. Ms. Cooper expressed strong, personal commitment to the importance of sustaining this program. Ms. Evans discussed the discrepancy between the current and ideal CJC staffing structure.

Chief Garey provided an overview of the Police Department’s FY21 budget. He discussed staffing needs and recruitment, predicting that there will be only two vacancies left on the force by July. He pointed out an increase to Howard Community Outreach services; capital planning for equipment (radios, radio tower, etc.); mental health services for staff; and food expenses for the department’s K-9. Mr. Levy and Mr. Watts wondered if the Police Department could share capital expenses with other departments. Mr. Garey said he would look into this but separate agencies need different base stations for their radio equipment. Mr. Watts wondered about police car replacements and Mr. Garey discussed levels of police department vehicle needs for patrol, utility, administrative and uniform services. Chief Garey clarified for Mr. Watts that the expense in line 185 is not a recurring expense from last year but separate expenses for equipment for two new staff. Captain Hoague shared an overview of department activities, community services and mental health support to officers. He also talked about crime trends and statistics as well as efforts to diversify staffing. Mr. Watts reminded the Selectboard of the VLCT cannabis legislation discussion they have planned.

At 12:07 PM, Ms. Haney opened the floor to public comment. Ms. Wrenner suggested that if CJC funding is being requested of schools, this may trigger funding shifts from the state for this initiative.

At 12:09 PM, Ms. Haney called a lunch break in the meeting then reconvened the Selectboard at 12:36 PM.

Mr. Duggan provided an overview of the Community Development budget for FY21, which he noted is only up 1.5% due to staffing changes. He talked about the search for a new Interim Community Development Director. He pointed out a slight increase in travel; new initiative planning for ETC NEXT; zoning, housing and clean-up projects; plans to establish a housing committee; Town and Village alignment of fees; and level funding of professional services. Mr. Duggan clarified for Mr. Levy that the ETC NEXT plan should be ready for adoption in February, after it passes from the Planning Commission. He clarified for Mr. Watts that this
Mr. Duggan shared the Economic Development budget, focusing on the addition of a part-time economic development coordinator who would start half-way through the year and cost $15,000. He detailed the role and responsibilities of the position and explained that this type of position is found in many other municipalities in Vermont. Mr. Teich clarified that this individual would focus on all of Essex to maintain and grow the Grand List by mobilizing targeted strategies. Ms. Haney expressed interest in creating a shared vision for economic growth with the Trustees. Mr. Levy suggested that if the position be funded, it start at the beginning of FY21.

Mr. Duggan discussed the Health and Welfare budget, which shows a 3% increase, and said that this budget covers the Town and the Village. He pointed out an increase in the Historical Society request and Mr. Watts and Ms. Cooper discussed best ways to reach the consumer demographic of the Historical Society. Mr. Duggan noted that animal control and boarding expenses were moved to the Police Department budget and Mr. Watts clarified with Mr. Duggan that some of the cemetery maintenance funding was moved to Parks and Rec. Mr. Levy wondered why Essex Rescue funding is level when costs normally go up incrementally. Mr. Duggan agreed to look into this.

Mr. Duggan presented the Intergovernmental budget. He pointed out that the Winooski Valley Parks District request is up 3%, and the Green Mountain Transit request, originally expected to increase by 3%, is actually expected to increase at least 4%. The Selectboard discussed concerns with GMT’s request.

Mr. Duggan presented the Manager’s budget, which has increases in salaries and benefits including a raise for the HR Director that took effect January 1, 2020. Mr. Sabataso discussed the new HR system in the FY21 budget. He said the system has a $4,600 annual fee, based on the number of employees served per-month, and an additional, one-time set-up fee in the capital budget. He said the system would improve inter-office efficiencies and compliance and discussed the system’s employee portal access. Ms. Macy explained that program functionality has the potential to interface with finance. The Selectboard also discussed, with Mr. Duggan and Mr. Sabataso, the Manager’s budget expenses for furniture; legal and professional services; and health insurance coverage for wellness through MVP. Ms. Haney suggested engaging all staff in a diversity and implicit bias training.

Mr. Duggan presented an overview of the Selectboard budget, which is up 1.34%. He explained that professional services are down and printing and binding costs are up. Ms. Cooper and Mr. Watts discussed allocating space per department in the Town report and possibly utilizing someone to edit with an eye toward redundancies. Mr. Duggan clarified for Mr. Murray that a book is required for the report, vs. a postcard, according to the Town Charter. Mr. Levy suggested, and Mr. Murray agreed, that the Selectboard chair should have a salary higher than the rest of the Selectboard, due to the higher workload. Ms. Haney suggested that the Selectboard goals, as stated in the budget, should also include pursuing a housing commission, holding another strategic advance, and conducting a formal visioning session. Ms. Macy agreed to move the “Conservation Reserve Fund” line out of the Selectboard budget in the FY2022 budget year. Mr. Teich suggested identifying a date on the annual calendar for setting goals for the new year.

department supports Town outside the Village planning efforts and that a Housing Committee, if created, would focus on the entirety of Essex.

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Ms. McNamara-Hill discussed the Town Clerks office budget, which shows no significant changes. She pointed out that election workers will be up to minimum wage in FY21 and said there may be need for an additional voting machine. She talked about voting security, with no concerns because the process is not electronic and is locked. She talked about the effect early voting has had on workload and discussed, with Ms. Willingham and Ms. Cooper, her goal to become a passport location. Ms. McNamara-Hill also talked about increased postage costs, due to elections; increased fees, due to legislative acts; and the decreased cost of purchased services, which had been utilized to digitize land records. Mr. Watts clarified that a one-time expense for dual monitors in FY20 is not needed again in the FY21 budget. He also stressed the importance of making accommodations for those with disabilities and who do not speak English to eliminate barriers to voting.

Ms. Corless’s presentation of the Essex Free Library FY21 budget, which decreased by 1%, included her explanation of increases in media borrowing of audio books and DVDs. She said the FY21 budget includes a service cost to expand audio and digital options in order to decrease long wait lists. Ms. Corless talked about costs for professional development; discussed planned and continuing capital projects to the library; and said the new website is effective and still a work in process. Mr. Teich mentioned that pay structures between the Essex Free Library and the Brownell library are not yet aligned.

At 2:21 PM, Mr. Paluba provided an overview of the IT budget, stating that the primary driver of its 8.7% increase is technological security across all departments. He talked about plans to implement additional security programs; conduct higher-level trainings to tech staff; and deliver overall antivirus trainings for Essex employees, targeted by role. Mr. Teich talked about the Town’s back-up systems, quarantined risk statistics and automated prevention strategies. Mr. Paluba discussed the NEMRC system’s extra protections. He also explained that the new website roll-out is going well, with a public launch planned by the end of February 2020. He discussed the successful installation of a new phone system for easier transfers between departments; and the implementation of a card system for Essex building access.

Ms. Lemnah introduced the FY21 Assessors Department budget. She talked about costs associated with about the National Assessors Conference, a program license fee for assessor software and the decreased salary line due to Mr. Randy Viens’ retirement. She discussed general supplies and a desk needed for the Assistant Assessor position.

Ms. Macy discussed the Finance Department FY21 budget. She pointed out that it includes funding for budgeting software with cloud services to improve accuracy and efficiencies in the budgeting process. She said the software will cost $10,000 and explained that this step is in alignment with a series of efforts to improve finance department functions over the past two years. Ms. Macy also discussed increases to the salaries line, which includes another year of contracted expertise to help during the budget season. Mr. Watts clarified with Ms. Macy that the budget increase in tax collecting, printing and binding is reflective of NEMRC fee increases, to print and mail bills. Ms. Macy had a conversation with Ms. Haney about debt procedures and how leased police vehicles fit into these processes.

At 2:58, Ms. Cooper departed the meeting, as planned in advance.

Ms. Vile discussed the Essex Parks and Rec (EPR) Administration Budget. She pointed out purchased service expenses related to a database, and funding planned for a new desk in EPR.
administration. Mr. Watts noted that the FMLA one-time expense from FY2020 can be removed from the FY21 budget.

Ms. Vile provided an overview of the Pool Budget and talked about challenges related to maintaining and weatherizing the aging, 41-year-old pool. She pointed out that pool deterioration and other safety factors have caused swim meets to relocate, and with 30 fewer children on the swim teams, less revenue is being generated. Mr. Levy suggested that more money go to the Capital budget to plan for the replacement of the pool in future years.

Regarding the Parks budget, Ms. Vile said that firearms ordinance signs, storm damage fixes, fall cleanup equipment rentals and stipends, and a stipend for the Sexton were included. Mr. Watts suggested that Ms. Vile reconsider if the funding in “other professional services” is needed. Mr. Watts asked how EPR plans to enforce dog ordinance rules related to off-leashing, especially in parking lots. Ms. Vile discussed plans for an increased presence of animal control at Indian Brook Reservoir; a strategy to implement dog receptacle spaces, signifying where off-leashing can begin; and increased use of bike patrols and signage. She said she is considering a program to identify off-leash-ready dogs with larger tags. Ms. Haney asked about Cyanobacteria and E.coli prevention plans for the summer of 2020. Ms. Vile discussed Department of Health requirements and staff availability for monitoring.

Regarding the Senior Activities budget, Ms. Vile discussed increased salary funding to fill a vacancy and address the turn-over in van drivers. She said budget increases also include phone upgrades and driver identification badges. Ms. Vile talked about Senior Center membership numbers and fluctuations with Ms. Haney. Mr. Watts wondered why the group insurance budget line in this budget tripled in cost. Ms. Vile explained that a previous employee only had an individual insurance plan, but the new person has a family plan.

Ms. Haney asked how the EPR co-location efforts with Essex Junction Recreation and Parks (EJRP) has gone this year. Ms. Vile said the departments worked through some adjustments as EJRP transitioned staff and they streamlined programming and processes. She said now they are doing combined planning for the camp brochure.

Ms. Macy provided a final overview of the FY21 budget, but first noted that on January 13 the fund balance, Champlain Housing Trust and revenues will be scheduled for discussion along with the Capital Plan. Ms. Macy pointed out multiple lines in the FY21 budget where she will make changes prior to it being finalized. She discussed how capital cost transfers are conducted each year. She clarified the special police services line for Mr. Watts, which includes an employment rate for extra duties reimbursed by the Town.

Ms. Haney opened the floor to public comments. Ms. Wrenner relayed a comment from a resident asking for increased funding for Saxon Hill maintenance. Ms. Smith suggested that Public Works improve the edge of VT Route 128 because of the hazard it seems to be causing when cars drive in the middle of the road to avoid the damage. She also expressed continued concern with the off-leashing habits of residents bringing their dogs to Indian Brook Park.

6. CONSENT ITEMS

MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to approve the Consent Agenda, with Selectboard comments:

a. Approve minutes: December 16, 2019
b. Check Warrants #17674—12/20/19; Warrant #17677—12/27/19; Warrant #17679—01/01/2020

The motion passed 4-0.

7. READING FILE
   a. Selectboard Comments
      o Mr. Watts noted that the Local Government Day is coming up at the State House, and he plans to attend, as will Ms. Haney.
      o Ms. Haney requested that the evaluations of the Unified Manager be completed. She also reminded the Selectboard that the Gather at the Table event is scheduled to take place at Essex High School on Saturday, January 11.
      o Mr. Levy volunteered to coordinate Selectboard outreach and awareness campaigning prior to Town meeting.
      o Mr. Watts volunteered to arrange for the Town meeting flag ceremony.
   b. Memo from Sarah Macy re: Assignment of FY19 Fund Balance
   c. Memo from Dennis Lutz re: Status of Winter Operations
   d. Letter from Green Mountain Transit re: annual assessment
   e. Letter from State of Vermont Department of Taxes re: 2019 Equalization Study Results
   f. Upcoming meeting schedule
      o Mr. Levy clarified that both meetings on February 3 are taking place at Essex High School.
      o Ms. Haney pointed out the new meeting added for January 27, a public hearing for a voter-backed petition. She also noted that local state legislators will attend the February 3 meeting.

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION
   No executive session took place.

9. ADJOURN

MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 4-0 at 4:11 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cathy Ainsworth
Recording Secretary

Approved this ___21st___ day of _January_, 2020

(See minutes of this day for corrections, if any)

Patrick Murray, Clerk, Selectboard