

**SELECTBOARD MINUTES  
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD  
DRAFT BUDGET DAY MINUTES  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2021**

**SELECTBOARD:** Andy Watts, Chair; Sue Cook, Tracey Delphia, Dawn Hill-Fleury, Patrick Murray

**ADMINISTRATION and STAFF:** Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Courtney Bushey, Assistant Finance Director; Charlie Cole, Fire Chief; Caitlin Corless, Library Director; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Bill Ellis, Town Attorney; Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Manager; Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Marguerite Ladd, Assistant Manager; Karen Lemnah, Assessor; Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director; Sarah Macy, Finance Director; Aaron Martin, Assistant Public Works Director; Owisso Makuku, Community Development Director; Susan McNamara-Hill, Town Clerk; Rob Paluba, IT Director; Travis Sabataso, HR Director; Ally Vile, Recreation Director; Tom Yandow, Facilities Manager

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Gina Halpin Barrett, Joe P., Paula Sargent, Ken Signorello, Irene Wrenner, Lorraine Zaloom

**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**

Mr. Watts explained that this is the time during the meeting for members of the public to speak on items not included in tonight's agenda. He encouraged the public to be civil, brief, use appropriate language, refrain from personal attacks, and address comments to the Selectboard Chair. Ms. Sargent said that the Senior Center is in challenging financial times and asked for support and information on the future of the Center. Ms. Wrenner said that she appreciated the Selectboard's careful work in reviewing agreements related to separation.

**5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Work Session**

**Overview, Revenues**

Ms. Macy said that the Selectboard set four budget goals in August: continue funding for equity initiatives and mental health, consider how climate change can be addressed, minimize the financial impact of separation, and addressing tax equity between the Town Outside the Village (TOV) and Town Inside the Village (TIV). Ms. Macy highlighted some of the initiatives that have addressed these issues and said that they will be explained in further detail in the departmental presentations. Ms. Macy said that a Local Option Tax could help to minimize tax impacts from separation. Ms. Macy said that the proposed FY23 Town General Fund budget is \$16,852,175 a 5.8% or \$926,047 increase over the FY22 approved budget of \$15,926,128. As a result of a net reduction in non-tax revenues, the tax levy is a 7.1% or \$1,010,512 increase from \$14,265,056 to \$15,275,568. The Town no longer receives a contribution toward shared management from the Village (about \$120k). Ms. Macy noted some new positions, including the addition of an executive assistant in the Administration Department, and additional finance and recreation staff.

50 She also noted a variety of funding movements to and from the Town and Village. Ms. Cook suggested  
51 noting all costs that are specifically associated with separation. Ms. Macy said that the Town has been  
52 utilizing CDs to help gain interest, however after separation the amount of money that is available to  
53 invest will decrease. Ms. Macy said that FY 2021 had a \$1,695,492 surplus, and that much of this is due  
54 to COVID relief funds, reduction of planned expenditures, and position vacancies. In addition, property  
55 tax deficiencies declined. Around \$300,000 in fund balance will be used to reduce the tax levy.

56  
57 **Debt**

58 Ms. Macy said that the Police Facility bond is the only debt that the Town has, and that interest is  
59 decreasing over time. The Village will still be responsible for their portion of this debt, as it was also  
60 approved by Village voters.

61  
62 **Essex Free Library**

63 Ms. Corless explained changes that have happened to the library since COVID. She said that the library is  
64 proposing a slight increase but would like to put additional funds towards digital subscriptions, as there  
65 has been a significant interest in these materials. Ms. Corless said that circulation is higher than it has  
66 been in several years, mostly due to increased usage of digital materials. She said that the library is  
67 working to add additional devices and hot spots into circulation, as this helps to support equity initiatives.  
68 Ms. Cook asked why the Town continues to contribute \$15,000 to the Essex Free Library and asked if it is  
69 designated for anything. Mr. Watts said that he considered it to be a goodwill donation.

70  
71 **County and Regional**

72 Mr. Duggan said that there are no significant changes, and that this line item is going up 3.5%. He  
73 explained that this amount pays for county services, as well as other non-profit and governmental  
74 organizations which service Essex residents.

75  
76 **Clerk**

77 Ms. McNamara-Hill said that the department is working toward becoming a passport processing office,  
78 however this would require additional document storage. She suggested that the Clerk's office start  
79 charging a fee for special event and catering liquor licenses. Additional funds have been included in the  
80 budget to continue supporting voting by mail.

81  
82 **Public Works, Highway, Stormwater, Buildings**

83 Mr. Lutz detailed some of the work that the department has done in obtaining grants, as well as workforce  
84 challenges in getting construction projects completed. The Department now has two staff members who  
85 are certified to inspect projects, which helps to reduce the need to depend on contracting staff. Mr. Lutz  
86 said that he plans to retire in July, and Mr. Martin will take over running the department. The Public  
87 Works Department is requesting an increase of of 3%, totaling \$106,038. Normally salaries are the main  
88 budgetary increase, however due to retirements and other changes this is not currently the case. Increases  
89 are requested for the following: storm sewer maintenance, sidewalk repair and maintenance, vehicle  
90 replacements, and professional services. Mr. Teich detailed the costs associated with public works  
91 equipment, and supply chain difficulties associated with getting new vehicles. Mr. Lutz presented  
92 budgetary figures since FY 92, and showed how the department works to stay on or under budget. Mr.  
93 Teich said that the Town continues to have the same responsibility to maintain their roads, sidewalks, and  
94 buildings regardless of separation. Mr. Lutz said that gravel roads present some challenges, and that the  
95 elevation differences in the Town can present different weather conditions. Ms. Cook asked how the  
96 Village Public Works budget is different from the Town, as the Village budget has increased at a larger  
97 rate. Ms. Macy said that the Village has a smaller budget, so it is easier for the increase to appear larger.

98 Ms. Delphia asked if the Town Highway Tax could be used, and Ms. Macy said that this was eliminated  
99 last year, and that legal advice would be needed to consider bringing it back. Mr. Watts said that this is  
100 not equitable for the Village, and not in line with current efforts. Mr. Teich said that the local option tax is  
101 another method of gaining funding for highway and other public works projects. Mr. Martin detailed the  
102 department's efforts to keep containments out of the soil, and possible changes at the landfill. In  
103 buildings, Mr. Yandow said that there is a 2.5% increase. He hopes to complete some brickwork at the  
104 Essex Free Library in FY 23, as it has been damaged by salt. Mr. Lutz said that Mr. Yandow's salary, as  
105 well as the rest of public works administrators, have some of their budget paid by the Village. This will  
106 change should separation occur. Ms. Cook asked if the recreation department needs a new building, now  
107 that they are leaving the Maple Street offices. Mr. Teich said that both recreation departments rely very  
108 heavily on the school district for the use of their space. Mr. Yandow said that a program space would be  
109 helpful, and also said that there are a variety of other building needs, such as a new public works garage, a  
110 new fire station, and the possibility of the need for the Town offices to move. Mr. Teich said that the  
111 Town has had significant growth since the 1980s, and there will be a long-term need for a space study.  
112

**Police, Community Justice Center (CJC)**

113 Ms. Macy said that three vehicles need to be replaced this year, and that one patrol position has been  
114 moved to a non-office Community Affairs Liaison position. She also said that this budget includes an  
115 allowance for vacancies, and that the budget is funded at 94%. Mr. Hoague said that there are currently  
116 four vacancies, and that he is unsure when they will be able to be filled. The Community Affairs Liaison  
117 will be handling social media, serve as the public information officer, and plan events. The new K9  
118 member of the police force is now fully certified and has helped on a several drug cases. The budget for  
119 the CJC has increased, as their caseload has increased 60%. The CJC is funded 90% by the Department of  
120 Corrections, however the Town of Essex also provides in-kind support. The budget also contains an  
121 increase for professional services, which will be used for diversity and equity training. Mr. Hoague  
122 explained that the overtime pay has increased due to vacancies, and needs for officers to go to court for  
123 cases that they are involved in. Mr. Hoague said that the department does not make money off of traffic  
124 stops, but that traffic is their number one issue. He also said that meth use is growing in Vermont, and is  
125 one of the most pressing drug issues. The cost for the Howard Center is increasing, as they will be  
126 providing more hours of coverage for their crisis service. Mr. Teich said that police office health and  
127 safety is a major focus, as they see very traumatic things on a frequent basis.  
128  
129

**Finance**

130 Ms. Macy said that there have been minimal changes outside of personnel. She said that she will finish  
131 employment with the Town and Village on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, and that plans are being developed for staffing  
132 changes. Ms. Macy said that she has added additional part-time staffing hours to assist with the costs  
133 associated with separation. When the departments were consolidated, they were not structured to come  
134 apart easily, and professional consultants will be needed to assist with this. Audit costs will increase, as  
135 the Town has needed to do additional auditing as a result of using ARPA funds.  
136  
137

**Health and Human Services**

138 Mr. Duggan said that the Health and Human Services funding remains at 1% of the total proposed budget.  
139 He said that Essex Rescue has asked for a \$164,746 increase to their appropriation in FY23. Future  
140 budgetary increases are expected in future years; however negotiations are possible. Essex Rescue serves  
141 communities on a per capita funding basis, and after separation the Village will be responsible for paying  
142 their portion. A large reason for the increase in their services are senior facilities, group housing facilities,  
143 apartment buildings, overdoses, and COVID-related issues. Essex Rescue will be presenting at a future  
144 Selectboard meeting to inform the Town of their activities. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked for more details about  
145

146 the role of the Health Officer and Deputy Health Officer, as they have requested an increase in stipends.  
147 Mr. Duggan said that they are always available to the public and are there to help with a variety of health-  
148 related issues. A large portion of their work deals with apartments and tenant/landlord issues.

149

150 **Assessor**

151 The only substantive change was a \$10,000 decrease for software that was not purchased. It is anticipated  
152 that a new software will be purchased after reappraisal, which is hoped to be done within the next two  
153 years. In public comment, Ms. Wrenner asked if a consultant has been found to do this work, as she has  
154 heard that there is a significant delay for other communities. Ms. Lemnah said that Essex is less likely to  
155 experience a delay because of its larger size.

156

157 **Legislative (Selectboard)**

158 This budget includes volunteer stipends which will begin this year, as well as Front Porch Forum, Town  
159 Meeting TV, meeting minutes, trainings, dues and professional services. The Board discussed how the  
160 volunteer stipend would be paid out, and Mr. Watts suggested limiting the length of the annual report to  
161 minimize printing costs.

162

163 **Community Development**

164 Ms. Makuku said that the only non-personnel change is an increase in professional development. She also  
165 noted an increase in permitting fees this year, as the prices have gone up. Ms. Makuku said that the  
166 department will be studying the sewer capacity and potential redevelopment at Fort Ethan Allen. The  
167 Board discussed the aging infrastructure in the neighborhood, and the need for upgrades prior to growth.  
168 Mr. Teich noted a recent donation of land to the Town adjacent to Indian Brook, and Ms. Makuku  
169 described some funds that will be spent on improvements to Indian Brook.

170

171 **Economic Development**

172 Mr. Duggan said that this budget will represent a full year of the part-time Economic Development  
173 Coordinator position. This person will pursue grants, work on events and do business outreach and  
174 support. Mr. Teich said that COVID has intensified the need for strong relationships with the business  
175 community, as well as business marketing. The Board discussed the role of the Economic Development  
176 Commission (EDC), and Mr. Duggan spoke about getting the EDC more involved in the planning process.  
177 Ms. Makuku also suggested changing the charter to allow Essex business owners who are not residents to  
178 serve on the commission.

179

180 **IT**

181 Mr. Paluba said that one of the main goals of the department is to bring all workstations to Office 365.  
182 The training budget has also been increased to ensure that staff are fully trained on security issues. Ms.  
183 Cook asked if the current IT budget could support the separation of the Village, IT and Mr. Paluba said  
184 that the elimination of Village services would not have a dramatic impact on the department.

185

186 **Recreation**

187 Ms. Macy reminded the Board that the Senior Center is not included in the Recreation budget. Ms. Vile  
188 said that a new position in administration is required due to the end of co-location at Maple Street Park, as  
189 well as an assistant program director position. This position will help with parks maintenance and assist  
190 Public Works with snow removal. Ms. Vile said that professional services spending has decreased due to  
191 the end of colocation and subsequent shared use of a contract communications coordinator. Ms. Vile said  
192 that it is important to plan for the end of life for the Sand Hill Pool and said that a water heater has been  
193 added to the pool in hopes of extending the season. Mr. Watts asked if the Board should begin budgeting

194 for pool replacement, and Ms. Vile said that this will cost at least five million. She said that the pool  
195 depth of 3.5 feet presents some problems for both swim teams and young children. In facilities, Ms. Vile  
196 said that some trails have needed significant repairs due to natural damage. Ms. Vile clarified the role of  
197 the Tree Farm, and said that the Town holds programs in the space but does not manage it. She also said  
198 that there are no plans to change the fee structure at Indian Brook. In Senior Services, Ms. Vile said that  
199 the Department is looking for additional Senior Bus drivers. Ms. Vile noted that the Senior Center is a  
200 Village-owned property managed by a Town employee, and that parking can be a problem. Mr. Teich  
201 explained the concerns brought forth by Ms. Sargent during Public to be Heard, and Ms. Vile explained  
202 how the Center is budgeted and funded. Mr. Teich said that the Senior Center has not been able to hold as  
203 many fundraisers as in the past, due to COVID. Discussions were had regarding the future of the space,  
204 and the relationship between the Town and Village. Mr. Teich suggested that the Selectboard give the  
205 Senior Center some additional funds to keep the organization solvent. He said that the Center is very  
206 important to the community, and that it would be expensive and inefficient to separate it.  
207

**Administration**

208  
209 Mr. Duggan said that this department is looking at a 45% increase, due to the loss of the revenue from the  
210 Village. This budget still includes three managerial positions and was made prior to the Board's decision  
211 not to extend Mr. Teich's contract. A new Executive Assistant position has been added, as the Town will  
212 no longer have any administrative support after separation. Additional funding for diversity and equity  
213 initiatives have been included in this budget, which will be overseen by the Committee on Equity Essex.  
214 Mr. Watts said that the Board will discuss managerial roles during Executive Session.  
215

**Fire**

216  
217 Mr. Cole said that the department needs equipment, personnel, and a new building. Essex Fire does not  
218 have a tall enough fire truck and relies on mutual aid support when needed. There are staffing shortages at  
219 all fire departments in the county, and it is becoming difficult to get mutual aid services. The department  
220 is not able to respond to as many medical calls as it used to and wait times for ambulances are longer than  
221 is desirable. The station is not up to current codes. The current budget requests 40 per diem hours for staff  
222 members to support the department and go on calls. The radio infrastructure needs replacement, and a  
223 \$100,000 transfer to capital for this purpose is presented in this budget. Radio service in the more rural  
224 areas of town is currently very unreliable.  
225

**Discussion**

226  
227 Ms. Macy said that the Board needs to think about the number of staff members in the manager's office,  
228 the use of the fund balance, and any other directives they wish staff to consider. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked if  
229 ARPA money could be used to fund the Fire Department, Ms. Macy said that this needed to be  
230 investigated further. Mr. Teich reminded the Board that these are one-time funds, and not a long-term  
231 solution. He suggested the use of a local option tax. The Board discussed the possible use of human  
232 services funding to fund Fire Department radio infrastructure. Mr. Murray said that he is not comfortable  
233 using such a large portion of the budget to fund capital improvements for something that Village residents  
234 are not getting any use of, and that it is important for residents to get a benefit for their taxes. Mr. Teich  
235 encouraged the board to allocate as much as possible to capital needs. He also encouraged the Board to do  
236 whatever possible to stay a paid on-call department, as adding staff members can cause huge budgetary  
237 increases. The Board discussed the possibility of future impact fees for developers. Ms. Macy said that  
238 the Selectboard is currently ahead of schedule and said that decisions primarily need to be made regarding  
239 administrative staffing, fund balance, and fire department expenditures. Two meetings regarding the  
240 budget will be held on November 15 and December 6. In public comment, Ms. Wrenner said that the  
241 Village Fire Department was raising their hourly rate and giving bonuses and encouraged the Town to do

242 the same. Mr. Signorello said that the TOV highway tax has been in place since the 1950s and was used  
243 to help with the tax inequity between the TOV and TIV.  
244

245 **b. Discussion about personnel**

246 This was held in Executive Session.  
247

248 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

249 **TRACEY DELPHIA made a motion, seconded by SUE COOK to accept the consent agenda.**

250 **Motion passed 5-0.**

251 a. Approve Minutes: November 1, 2021  
252

253 **7. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

254 **a. An executive session may be requested to discuss the employment of public employees**

255 **SUE COOK made a motion, seconded by TRACEY DELPHIA, that the Selectboard enter into**

256 **executive session to discuss the employment of a public employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A.**

257 **Section 313(a)(3), to include the Town Attorney, Unified Manager, Deputy Manager, Human**

258 **Resources Director, and Assistant Manager. The motion passed 5-0. DAWN HILL-FLEURY made**

259 **a motion, seconded by TRACEY DELPHIA to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0.**

260 **Executive session ended at 5:07 PM.**  
261

262 **8. ADJOURN**

263 **DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, for the Selectboard to**  
264 **adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 5:08 PM.**  
265

266 Respectfully Submitted,

267 Darby Mayville

268 Recording Secretary  
269  
270  
271