

**TOWN OF ESSEX
SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, January 28, 2021**

SELECTBOARD: Elaine Haney, Chair; Patrick Murray, Vice Chair; Vince Franco; Dawn Hill-Fleury; Andy Watts.

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Manager; Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director; Sarah Macy, Finance Director/Assistant Manager.

OTHERS PRESENT: Walter Adams, Annie Cooper, Patty Davis, Tracey Delphia, Erin Dickinson, Betsy Dunn, Dan Kerin, Christopher Kline, Edward Malina, Mary Post, Ken Signorello, Margaret Smith, Richard Smith, Ann Wadsworth, Irene Wrenner.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Elaine Haney called the meeting of the Town of Essex Selectboard to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/ CHANGES

Mr. Watts requested that the Temporary COVID-19 Emergency Leave Policy be pulled from the consent agenda and be Business Item 6c. Ms. Haney requested that the minutes of January 22nd be pulled from the consent agenda and be Business Item 6d.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

PATRICK MURRAY made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, to approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Tracey Delphia stated that she is a Justice of the Peace, and a candidate on the March ballot. She asked if she would be able to help with ballot stuffing in her role as Justice of the Peace. Ms. Hill-Fleury stated that she would, however as a candidate, she would not be able to feed the ballots into the counter. Evan Teich, Unified Manager, said that a ballot box would be present in front of the Town Offices, and that it would be chained down and under video surveillance.

Ken Signorello stated that Ms. Haney had publicly accused two citizens, himself and Irene Wrenner, of spreading misinformation about merger. He feels that Ms. Haney has taken advantage of her position on the Selectboard to disparage himself and Ms. Wrenner. Mr. Signorello stated that Ms. Haney has back-tracked on her original claims but asked that she publish a retraction and apology in every publication that printed her original comments. He stated that if this cannot be done, Ms. Haney should step down as Chair. Mr. Signorello stated that he considered a libel suit against the Town of Essex, but will instead further publicize the video he and Ms. Wrenner created in response to merger. He stated that the Selectboard needs more conversation with residents and less confrontation.

Annie Cooper stated that the Selectboard and Ms. Haney are doing a great job. She feels that Ms. Haney does not owe anyone an apology and that the Selectboard is under an attack.

5. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Second Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget

Ms. Haney opened the Public Hearing on Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget at 6:45 pm.

52 Walter Adams asked if the \$67,000 grant from the State of Vermont for reappraisal would be considered
53 revenue, and if it would be seen in the revenue projections. Finance Director Sarah Macy stated that it
54 would not be. Mr. Adams said that he had submitted a budget to the Selectboard, which can be viewed in
55 the reading file. This document is now moot since it was created using an incorrect assumption on the
56 value of the Grand List. He stated that the main takeaways of this budget are suggested changes to the
57 Human Services line item and the deletion of funding for some of the unfilled Police Department positions.
58 Should the Police Department find a suitable candidate, their pay could be funded using surplus funds.
59 Mr. Adams stated that, should salaries and benefits for current employees continue to rise by 4% a year,
60 the municipal budget will need to be raised about 2.5% a year. He said that these increases are not
61 sustainable. Mr. Adams said that Williston has half of Essex's tax rate while Essex is more in line with
62 communities like South Burlington and Colchester.

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64 Ms. Haney thanked Mr. Adams for his careful attention and work on the budget. Ms. Macy echoed Ms.
65 Haney's comments and said that she would be open to seeing how funding for one of the Police
66 Department positions could be eliminated.

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68 In public comment, Irene Wrenner said that the Town of Essex has spent more than \$90,000 on merger
69 related items. This is concerning because merger activities should not be viewed as economic stimulus
70 spending.

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72 **DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by VINCE FRANCO, to close the public hearing at**
73 **7:08 pm. The motion passed 5-0.**

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75 **6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

76 **a. Adopt Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget**

77 Ms. Haney opened discussion to the Selectboard.

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79 Ms. Macy said that she is interested in exploring how funding for Police Department positions can be
80 reduced without the elimination of these unfilled positions. Mr. Franco asked if money can be put aside in
81 the fund balance for this purpose and Ms. Macy confirmed that it could. Mr. Murray said that he would
82 have appreciated hearing about a major change before tonight and that he would want to hear the opinion
83 of the police chief before acting. Mr. Watts disagreed saying since there is no floor vote on the budget at
84 Town Meeting this year, the public hearings are an important way of instituting changes from the public.

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86 Mr. Teich said that the Police Department staffing is currently budgeted at 98%, while the actual staffing is
87 around 94-95%. He noted the tax implications for future years if unbudgeted positions are filled and that
88 any excess amount that is not spent will come back to the Town in the form of fund balance. He wanted
89 confirmation that should a suitable candidate be found, that the Police Department would be able to hire
90 them. He said that the department is in the process of filling two positions and is vetting another
91 candidate. He said that altering the staffing percentages is an easier way to make changes than
92 eliminating officer funding. Mr. Franco noted that reducing this number to 97% is essentially eliminating a
93 half of an officer and can serve this purpose.

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95 Mr. Franco suggested that this idea be incorporated into the FY2023 budget. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked if this
96 change would impact public safety. Mr. Teich noted that if the Town is given the opportunity to fill the
97 positions should a suitable candidate be found, there would not be an impact. The board discussed
98 options for including language in a motion to ensure that this could still be done. Mr. Murray said that an
99 election is coming up and that the composition of the board could change this outcome. Mr. Franco noted
100 that motions can be overridden by a future board.

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102 Ron Hoague, Police Chief, said that he would love to find great candidates to fill these positions tomorrow
103 but that is not realistic. Unless we are able to find certified Police officers who can start immediately, we

104 will not be able to fill these positions in FY22. It will not have an impact on public safety but will not allow
105 for full-staffing.

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107 In public to be heard, Ms. Cooper stated that she appreciates Mr. Adams demeanor during this hearing,
108 and that it has been a pleasure to watch this process.

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110 **ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY that the Selectboard adopt the**
111 **FY22 general fund budget, as amended, in the amount of \$15,926,128. The motion passed 4-1.**
112 **Patrick Murray voted in opposition.**

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114 **b. Adopt Town Annual Meeting Warning**

115 Mr. Watts suggested eliminating the wording about accepting the reports of the officers, as there are no
116 actual ramifications if this report is not accepted. Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Manager, provided
117 additional suggestions based on the change of this meeting from in-person to virtual. Mr. Watts said that
118 he does not believe that the board is ready to warn a vote on merger, and that this should be pushed back
119 to November of 2021. Ms. Hill-Fleury echoed this statement.

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121 In public to be heard, Mr. Adams suggested eliminating the language that says the community dinner is
122 canceled and further clarifying how voting would take place. Ms. Haney noted that the board would do a
123 lot of community outreach and that the warning is an official legal document for the meeting. Ms. Cooper
124 said that she is disappointed to hear that anyone would consider pushing off the vote on merger and that
125 the issue needs to be put to rest. Ms. Dunn said that she believes that merger should also be pushed off
126 so that it can be done correctly. Ms. Wrenner said that the Economic Development Commission had
127 planned on looking into how merger would affect local businesses but that this was never done. This
128 should be completed before merger is warned. Mary Post said that there would be a better chance for
129 merger to pass if the public had been listened to.

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131 Mr. Watts said that the warning is used to act as the meeting agenda and Ms. Haney said that further
132 discussion on the agenda will happen at next week's meeting.

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134 **VINCE FRANCO made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY that the Selectboard approve**
135 **and sign the warning, as amended, for the 2021 Town Meeting, to be effective January 28, 2021.**
136 **The motion passed 3-2. Dawn Hill-Fleury and Andy Watts voted in opposition.**

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138 **6c. Adopt Temporary COVID-19 Emergency Leave Policy**

139 Mr. Watts said that he had requested to remove this document from the consent agenda to ensure that the
140 effective date would be January 1, 2021, rather than TBD. Mr. Teich said that this is correct.

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142 **ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY that the Selectboard adopt the**
143 **proposed Temporary COVID19 Emergency Leave Policy with an effective date of January 1, 2021.**
144 **The motion passed 5-0.**

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146 **6d. Approve minutes: January 22, 2021**

147 Ms. Haney requested the following addition to line 25, "Bruce Post asked the SB chair why she is not
148 listed on the grand list. She responded that questions about her personal finances are inappropriate."

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150 **PAT MURRAY made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard approve the**
151 **January 22, 2021 minutes as amended. The motion passed 5-0.**

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7. CONSENT ITEMS

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY to approve the Consent Agenda:

- a. Approve minutes: January 19, 2021
- b. Check Warrant: #17819 – 1/22/21

The motion passed 5-0.

8. READING FILE

- a. Board member comments
 - Mr. Franco said that the Selectboard practiced good governance tonight and that he respects the governmental budget process.
 - Ms. Hill-Fleury thanked members of the public for their input on the budget.
- b. 1-28-21 Citizen Proposed Budget
- c. Upcoming meeting schedule

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- a. ***An executive session is not expected.**
An executive session did not take place.

10. ADJOURN

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by VINCE FRANCO, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2021

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

Vince Franco, Clerk, Selectboard