

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
December 9, 2020

TRUSTEES: Andrew Brown, President; George Tyler, Vice President; Raj Chawla; Dan Kerin; Amber Thibeault.

ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Courtney Bushey, Assistant Finance Director; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Chris Gaboriault, Fire Chief; Wendy Hysko, Brownell Library Director; Wendy Johnson, Brownell Library Interlibrary Loan Librarian; Ricky Jones, Village Public Works Superintendent; Jim Jutras, Water Quality Superintendent; Brad Luck, Essex Junction Recreation and Parks Director; Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director; Sarah Macy, Finance Director/Assistant Manager; Robin Pierce, Community Development Director; Hannah Tracy, Brownell Library Assistant Director; Tom Yandow, Facilities Manager

OTHERS PRESENT: Dottie Bergendahl, Brownell Library Trustee; Diane Clemens, Planning Commission; Shelia Porter, Brownell Library Trustee

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Brown called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

No changes were made to the agenda.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

With no changes to the agenda, a motion to approve was not needed.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

No inquiries were made.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

6. FY22 Budget Work Session

8:40 AM, Fire: Chris Gaboriault, Fire Chief, presented a budget that is up approximately 1.5 percent, not counting the rolling stock transfer into the operating budget. Chief Gaboriault is proposing increasing the starting rate for firefighters to \$15.50, in line with what is offered by the Town of Essex. He said that roughly half of current firefighters have 0-3 years of service, and that retention continues to be a concern. Chief Gaboriault noted that it takes around three years to obtain engineer status, which enables a firefighter to operate all of the machinery. Mr. Brown asked if anything could be done to retain firefighters. Chief Gaboriault stated that there is a high cost of living in the area and that the increase in salary would be helpful. The Trustees discussed other options for increasing firefighter retention including reaching out to former firefighters to inquire why they left, increased station amenities, and offering some type of incentive for longevity. Chief Gaboriault mentioned the future need for a new fire station, the

45 status of which may be determined by the result of the impending merger vote with the Town
46 of Essex.

47
48 9:06 AM, Library: Wendy Hysko, Brownell Library Director, and Sarah Macy, Finance
49 Director/Assistant Manager, presented the Brownell Library budget. Ms. Macy noted that
50 staffing changes at Brownell have reduced the overall budget by around \$29,000. Ms. Hysko
51 said that the biggest change in the library budget this year is technology, as COVID has required
52 an extensive change in how the library is operated. She said that curbside pickup has been
53 difficult on her staff, as many of them enjoy the interaction with the public. Ms. Hysko praised
54 Public Works for their efforts in building a pavilion for Brownell. Dottie Bergendahl, Brownell
55 Library Trustee, inquired about the availability for mental health assistance for Brownell
56 employees, as well as mechanisms for allowing volunteers back in the building. She noted that
57 the library would like to begin the book sale in some form.

58
59 9:35 AM: Sarah Macy provided the Village Trustees with a brief overview and highlights of the
60 proposed budget. The proposed FY22 Village General Fund budget is \$5,647,578 a 5.2% or
61 \$279,923 increase over the FY21 approved budget of \$5,367,655. The proposed budget
62 includes moving the highway rolling stock contribution into the highway segment which is then
63 funded by the Town budget. This is included assuming this change will be agreeable to both the
64 Trustees and the Selectboard and that the Town Highway Tax would be eliminated as part of
65 the change. As such, the change to the property tax levy is \$85,127 or 2.3%. Assuming the
66 grand list grows at the seven-year average of 0.84% and factoring in known tax stabilization
67 agreements this would produce a tax rate increase of 1.22% -- an \$11.28/year increase on a
68 \$280,000 home. The largest items of the increase include salaries & benefits, increase in capital
69 transfer, and buildings & grounds. No new debt is proposed in the Village.

70
71 For Administration, Ms. Macy stated that this fund covers board member payments,
72 contribution to the manager's salary and benefits, contribution to HR, the cost of the
73 Town/Village Clerk, Administrative Assistant, and the Assistant to the Manager. The increase in
74 salaries has been offset by a reduction in benefit plan levels. Mr. Tyler noted that the line item
75 for Board Member payments has increased from \$2,500 to \$10,000 and asked for further
76 explanation. Mr. Duggan said that stipends are an issue that continues to come up, and that
77 offering some type of payment will help to increase the diversity of participation for the
78 Village's boards, commissions, and committees. Stipends would be offered on a voluntary
79 basis, and Mr. Duggan estimates that about 67% of board and committee members would
80 accept a stipend proposed to be \$50 per meeting. The Trustees requested that a broader
81 conversation about this issue take place at the end of the meeting.

82
83 Mr. Chawla inquired about a proposed subscription to the CivicClerk software. He said that he
84 is uncomfortable with this because the Village has not agreed to take on the CivicPlus website
85 service. Mr. Teich said that the current website is difficult to use, and that this software will
86 provide a considerable benefit to staff in preparing meeting documents. Mr. Tyler said that the
87 current website was a result of a community desire for improved communication, and that he
88 would like this discussed in more detail at the end of the meeting.

89

90 10:10 AM, Break: Mr. Brown excused the members to take a short break.

91

92 10:29 PM, Buildings: Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director, said that funds have been transferred
93 to this budget so that Facilities Manager Tom Yandow can take care of the building budgets for
94 all of the Village buildings. Mr. Yandow noted some concerns with the buildings including lack
95 of additional space on the electric grid at Lincoln Hall, deteriorating brickwork at several
96 buildings, the need to do air testing in the basement of Lincoln Hall, and roof issues. The
97 possibility of adding a second floor to the recreation building at Maple Street was also
98 discussed. Ms. Macy noted that some of these projects are explained in more detail on
99 separate capital budget sheets. Mr. Chawla said that the Town of Essex would have a
100 responsibility to fund part of the construction on the recreation building because they also have
101 staff working there.

102

103 11:16 AM, Highway: Ricky Jones, Public Works Superintendent, presented the proposed
104 Highway budget. Proposed increases include more funds for salt and paving expenses. Mr.
105 Chawla noted that he would like to see more regular funding for specific bike/walk initiatives
106 each year.

107

108 11:27 AM, Water: Mr. Jones continued presenting with the proposed budget for Water. He
109 noted that engineers will be looking at replacing the water main on Densmore Drive.

110

111 11:31 AM, Sanitation: James Jutras, Water Quality Superintendent and Mr. Jones presented the
112 Sanitation budget. Mr. Jutras noted that the budget is up 2.4%. Mr. Jones noted that the
113 Supersucker 5000 truck needs replacement.

114

115 11:42 AM, Wastewater Treatment Facility: Mr. Jutras presented the Wastewater Treatment
116 Facility's proposed budget and provided some updates from the department. He noted that
117 this year's budget is flat. Work is being done to address odor control complaints. Mr. Tyler
118 asked if effluence is being tested for COVID. Mr. Jutras said that this has been done in the past
119 but is not currently occurring.

120

121 11:57 AM, Break: Mr. Brown excused the members to take a lunch break.

122

123 12:36 PM, Community Development: Mr. Pierce gave an update on his department's budget.
124 He noted that there is a \$23,000 increase from the previous year's budget, the majority of
125 which is to be spent on impending updates to the Land Development Code. Mr. Brown asked if
126 there were plans to add additional rectangular rapid flashing beacons in the Village. Mr.
127 Chawla noted that this was also a concern for the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee. Ms. Macy
128 brought forth budgetary figures for the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee and said that the
129 committee has never spent their entire budget of \$6,000. The rectangular rapid flashing
130 beacons are estimated to cost around \$5,700, and as a result the Trustees decided to increase
131 the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee's budget by \$3,000 to accommodate for the purchase of at
132 least one of the beacons. The board discussed differences between the development fees

133 between the Village and surrounding communities. Mr. Pierce noted that there is no such thing
134 as an "average" year in development, due to the influence of large projects. Mr. Tyler inquired
135 about using money in the Land Acquisition Fund and Economic Development Fund to pay for
136 improvements in the Village.

137
138 1:13 PM, Economic Development: Mr. Pierce was joined by Mr. Luck for this section. Mr. Pierce
139 noted that this is a dynamic budget that is home to the matching grant fund, community
140 events, and has also been used in the past to fund a staff position. This is mostly level funded
141 from last year. Mr. Luck noted that he would like to establish a way for members of the
142 community to access money to host public events.

143
144 1:19 PM, Recreation: Mr. Luck noted that salaries and benefits have made up much of the
145 budgetary increase. He said that, due to COVID, program and pool revenues are down. Mr.
146 Luck mentioned that the department had offered childcare for students when the local schools
147 were closed. He said there is a need for a new roof and work on the Maple Street pool. Mr.
148 Chawla and Mr. Brown expressed a desire for the Town of Essex to pay equitably for these
149 improvements.

150
151 Mr. Luck discussed EJRP programs and noted that all of the direct expenses for these programs
152 are from fees. He said that there is a large increase in revenue because EJRP now provides
153 summer camp services to students in Essex, Essex Junction, and Westford. He said that pool
154 revenue may be down again next summer, and if the pool is to be opened it will most likely be
155 doing so at a loss. The Trustees praised recreation staff for their work during the pandemic in
156 creating programs to serve residents. Mr. Brown encouraged Mr. Luck to discuss potential
157 program synergies with Essex CHIPS.

158
159 2 PM, Break: Mr. Brown excused the members to take a short break.

160
161 2:10 PM, Capital, Transfers & Misc.: The Trustees discussed capital projects at length. Mr.
162 Yandow noted the importance of having an elevator at Lincoln Hall, as it is currently not up to
163 ADA code. Without improvements to the electrical grid, this will not be possible.

164
165 3:30 PM, Wrap-up: Mr. Brown brought up the issue of volunteer stipends, and his desire for a
166 larger conversation on the issue. This will be discussed at a future meeting with the intention
167 for staff to create a plan to implement this. Further research will be done to see if an increase
168 to Trustee compensation will need to be voted on.

169
170 Mr. Brown discussed the idea of liquidating the Land Acquisition Fund. The Board is in favor of
171 having further conversations about this. Mr. Chawla noted that he is concerned about the
172 Village going with the CivicClerk software, and that it is imperative that the Trustees continue to
173 have input on the website. The Trustees also continued to express their concern about
174 inequities in recreation funding between the Town and Village.

175
176 **7. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

177 An executive session was not necessary.

178

179 **8. ADJOURN**

180 **George Tyler made a motion, seconded by Amber Thibeault, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at**
181 **3:43 PM.**

182

183 Respectfully Submitted,

184 Darby Mayville, Recording Secretary

DRAFT