

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
TRUSTEE MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2022

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Marguerite Ladd, Assistant Manager; Brad Luck, Recreation & Parks Director; Sarah Macy, Finance Project Specialist.

OTHERS PRESENT: Annie Cooper, Genevieve Melle, Carmen Verasamy

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Brown called the meeting of the Village Trustees to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/ CHANGES

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

No changes, thus no approval required.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Ms. Melle thanked the Board for their hard work towards becoming an independent municipality.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Budget Workshop including discussion of use of ARPA funds in the operating budget

Ms. Macy said that three changes have been made to the budget since Budget Day, which include the utilization of excess fund balance and the addition of funds for both the IT contract and the City Manager search. The budget represents a 12.2% increase in expenditures from the current fiscal year. She pointed out several budgeted staffing changes, as well as fire department pay structure changes. Mr. Luck asked the Board if they were interested in using AARPA funds for capital projects, including renovations to Lincoln Hall. Mr. Luck noted several line items that he proposed to reduce by spending the funds using money from the current fiscal year. Mr. Brown said that the current increase is more than typical, and this is primarily due to the impact of untangling Village departments from their Town counterparts. Ms. Thibeault asked for clarification on the impact of utilizing AARPA funds, Ms. Macy said that this would reduce the impact on the tax burden considerably. Mr. Luck warned the Board that, should Essex Junction not become an independent municipality next year, they could see another large increase during the next budget cycle. Ms. Macy clarified that she had recently learned that all funds could be used for the provision of governmental services but said that she would not like to see AARPA funds to be used to bring the tax levy increase down by previous levels. Mr. Teich also said that public input is recommended to be used to decide how to spend these funds. Mr. Luck encouraged the Board to consider funding for 2 Lincoln Street and said that FY 2023 is the optimal time to make changes to the building. The Board decided to institute the Fire Department pay raise on January 1st. No changes have been made to the Capital Fund since Budget Day, and Ms. Macy and Mr. Luck reviewed small changes to program and enterprise funds. By utilizing AARPA funds, the total tax increase will be 1.2%, with an approximate 10% increase to water and sewer rates. The next budget discussion is scheduled for February 8th. Mr. Luck asked for guidance regarding the website process from the Trustees.

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b. Consider Warning Budget Public Hearing

This discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

c. Discuss City Manager Hiring process

Mr. Luck said that he recommends creating a hiring planning committee, consisting of two Trustees, a youth, and members of the public. This committee will decide how the hiring process should occur, and what type of citizen input would be present in the process. Mr. Chawla encouraged the Board to consider having a representative from the Essex BEST committee on the hiring planning committee. Ms. Thibeault requested that the Board take into consideration the input of Village business owners who do not live in the Village, as well as non-citizen residents. Mr. Tyler said that a nine-member board seemed large and suggested a smaller size. He also encouraged the Board to put this process to see the results of the legislative process on independence and questioned the need for a youth seat. Mr. Chawla said that a larger Board will allow more residents to have input and encouraged diversity of the committee. Mr. Luck encouraged the Board to consider if they wanted to hire a manager should the legislature not approve the charter change. The Board discussed appropriate representation on the committee, as well as the ideal size.

In public input, Ms. Melle encouraged the Board to do this process differently than in the past, and encouraged them to consider candidates besides, “old white men.” She encouraged them to put their diversity initiatives into action. Mr. Brown said that he does not want the public to think that the Board was in any way disparaging the current manager, and that they are thankful for Mr. Teich’s work in the community. Ms. Cooper and Ms. Verasamy said that youth representative is essential on this committee. Ms. Cooper said that her son developed leadership skills due to his service on boards in high school. Mr. Chawla encouraged the Board to be more inclusive when listing requirements for board service, and make sure that interest in a major criteria. Mr. Luck said that it is intended for this to be a community, grassroots led process. This is not a committee that represents the interests of the Trustees, but a committee that represents the interests of the public. Mr. Tyler said that there are certain skill requirements that a manager must have, and that not searching for a candidate who would meet these would be setting the candidate up to fail. Mr. Luck said that this committee would not be changing the job description but would be working more on the advertisement. He also spoke of the benefit of engaging youth in the decision-making process. The Board made the decision to seek out candidates for these roles.

d. Discussion about a Village-only local options tax for annual meeting ballot

Mr. Brown said that the Selectboard has decided not to pursue a local options tax this year, and that he wanted to ask if the Trustees are interested in pursuing this for the Village. Mr. Teich explained that this would be a 1% tax on sales, which could be further separated out by other categories. He said that these funds could be used for capital projects. Mr. Brown said that he is not looking for approval tonight, but for the Trustees questions and concerns about this issue. Ms. Thibeault asked for clarification of the timing of the tax, Mr. Teich said it would take several months for revenue to result from it. Ms. Thibeault also asked for clarification on how the shared zip code with the Town of Essex would impact this tax, Mr. Teich said that this is something that could be determined by the state utilizing GIS. Ms. Thibeault suggested that the Village provide FAQs on the local option tax to combat disinformation. The impact on CVE, including independent vendors at events, and concert sales was discussed, as well as online shopping. Mr. Teich said that he believes that a local option tax will help to take some of the tax burden away from residents and share it with others who do business in the community. Mr. Kerin cautioned the Board from relying on such a tax. Mr. Brown said that he hopes that these questions can be answered at the next meeting, and then the Board can decide how to go forward at this time.

97 **e. Discuss process for annual meeting and other ballot items**

98 Mr. Teich said that he is expecting the state to pass legislation allowing municipal annual meetings to be
99 virtual. Mr. Brown indicated his support for conducting the meeting in this fashion, as well as mailing
100 ballots to registered voters. Mr. Tyler encouraged the Board to consider sending a newsletter to all
101 households explaining the independence process. Mr. Luck asked the Trustees if there was an interest in
102 increasing the fund balance threshold from 10% to a higher number, as well as if the Board would like to
103 include cannabis sales on the Town meeting ballot. Mr. Brown indicated support for increasing the fund
104 balance, providing that independence is approved by the legislature. Mr. Chawla encouraged the Board to
105 include cannabis on their next agenda so that it can be discussed and added to the ballot.

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107 **f. Discussion and possible action about contracts with the Town of Essex**

108 After making minor edits, the Board indicated their support for the documents. Mr. Luck will present the
109 edited documents to the Selectboard at their meeting next week for approval.

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111 **g. Discussion and possible action about contract negotiations with an employee**

112 **Motion by ANDREW BROWN, second by GEORGE TYLER, to approve the separation agreement**
113 **between the Town of Essex, Village of Essex Junction, and Evan Teich. Motion passed 5-0.**

114 Mr. Brown thanked Mr. Teich for his hard work and service to the community.

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116 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

117 **Motion by GEORGE TYLER, second by DAN KERIN to approve the consent agenda. Motion**
118 **passed 5-0.**

119 Mr. Tyler expressed his thanks to Ms. Thibeault for volunteering to serve as the Regional Representative to
120 CCTV/Town Meeting TV.

121 **a. Approve minutes: December 14, 2021; December 21, 2021**

122 **b. Approve Check Warrants: #17283—December 30, 2021; #17284—January 7, 2022**

123 **c. Amend the 11/23 minutes to read 97-103 Pearl St.**

124 **d. Consider appointing Amber Thibeault as Regional Representative to CCTV/Town Meeting TV**

125 **e. Request from Essex Westford School District to mail ballots to all active, registered voters**

126 **f. Public Nuisance Ordinance – Trash Hauling update**

127 **g. Consider approval of storm water projects as part of the Stormwater Agreement with Town of**
128 **Essex**

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130 **7. READING FILE**

131 **a. Board member comments:** Mr. Brown thanked the Public Works Department for their hard work
132 clearing snow and ice on Christmas. Mr. Tyler thanked Mr. Shaw for his service on the Planning
133 Commission.

134 **b. Town Local Options Tax information**

135 **c. Independence Summary & Timeline**

136 **d. Email from Steven Shaw re: Planning Commission resignation**

137 **e. Budget Status Report – December 2021**

138 **f. Upcoming meeting schedule**

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140 **8. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

141 ~~a. Executive session for contract negotiations with an employee~~

142 No Executive session was held.

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144 **9. ADJOURN**

145 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by AMBER THIBEAULT, to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0**
146 **at 9:28 p.m.**

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148 Respectfully Submitted,
149 Darby Mayville
150 Recording Secretary

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