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**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
INFORMATIONAL HEARING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY APRIL 6, 2022**

VILLAGE TRUSTEES: Andrew Brown, Village President; George Tyler, Vice President; Rajan Chawla; Dan Kerin; Amber Thibeault

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Brad Luck, Interim Village Manager/Recreation Director; Wendy Hysko; Interim Village Manager/Library Director; Collen Dwyer, Human Resources Director; Chris Gaboriault, Fire Chief; Rick Jones, Public Works Superintendent; Chelsea Mandigo, Water Quality Superintendent; Susan McNamara-Hill, Clerk; Jess Morris, Finance Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Jonathan Breen, Casey Carmolli, Matt Carmolli, Heidi Clark, Diane Clemens, Kevin Collins, Annie Cooper, Erna D., Bill Flick, Kathy Flick, Mariah Flynn Sanderson, Richard Hamlin, Elaine Haney, Rep. Lori Houghton, Dave Johnson, Christopher Kline, Patrick Murray, Deb McAdoo, Resa Mehren, Nate O., Ken Signorello, Harlan Smith, Andy Suntup, Linda Suntup, Irene Wrenner, DB

MODERATOR: Steve Eustis

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Eustis introduced himself and called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

2. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS, AND PROCEDURES OVERVIEW

Mr. Brown introduced all staff in attendance, members of the Board of Trustees and distinguished guests. He thanked people for attending what may be the last Informational meeting of the Village, because beginning in 2023 they may convene instead, as the City of Essex Junction. Mr. Eustis explained how the 2022 Village Annual Meeting would run and provided an overview of meeting procedures.

3. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ABOUT ARTICLE 1:

Mr. Eustis read Article I: Shall the voters approve an annual General Fund Budget in the amount of \$6,310,015 for fiscal year July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, \$3,890,397 of which is to be levied in taxes against the Village Grand List?

Mr. Brown provided a slide overview of the general fund, capital funds, enterprise funds, and estimated utility rate changes. General Fund highlights and contributing factors included newly created staff positions; a planned increase in capital transfer; legal services; paving/ traffic control; elections and grant matching funds. The estimated tax increase to a \$280,000 Village property is \$32.20. He noted that ARPA funds are being used to offset a higher tax increase in FY23. Mr. Brown showed a slide about spending from the Village's six capital funds for: road work, playground equipment; public works equipment, roofing, landscaping, vehicles, debt, waterline, wastewater pump station, and utility access hole rehab. He showed impacts and strategies regarding the Village's enterprise funds.

Mr. Eustis opened public discussion of Article 1.

48 Mr. Flick asked what will happen to the Town taxes paid by Essex Junction residents, if the
49 Governor approves separation. Mr. Brown said there would be no change during the transition, but
50 on July 1, 2023, the residents of the City of Essex Junction (formerly Village) will no longer have
51 Town taxes on their bill, which may result in up to a 7-8% tax decrease.
52

53 **4. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ABOUT ARTICLE 2**

54 Mr. Eustis read Article 2: Shall the voters authorize the Village of Essex Junction to maintain and
55 administer an unrestricted fund balance of up to fifteen percent (15%) of the current year General
56 Fund Operating budget, and require any amount over fifteen percent (15%) be used to stabilize
57 subsequent tax rates?
58

59 Mr. Brown presented a slide regarding the article. He described the fund as the municipal's "rainy
60 day fund" to tap into if there is an unforeseen circumstance or emergency. The request is to raise the
61 ceiling from the current 10% of fund balance to 15% is to align with best practices in municipal
62 government. He said anything over this 15% would be used to offset the tax rate.
63

64 Mr. Eustis opened public discussion of Article 2. There were no questions or comments from the
65 public on this article.
66

67 **5. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ABOUT ARTICLE 3**

68 Mr. Eustis read Article 3: Shall the voters approve the Village of Essex Junction assessing a one
69 percent sales tax, a one percent meals and alcoholic beverages tax, and a one percent rooms tax
70 pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 138(b)?
71

72 Mr. Brown provided a slide overview of the Local Option Tax, which would be a 1% tax assessed on
73 meals, alcoholic beverages, admission charges, personal property purchases, lodging, etc. He said
74 the estimated annual revenue, \$675,000, would be used for Village capital expenses and would
75 replenish the Capital Reserve fund. Alternately, the Capital Reserve Fund is predicted to run out in
76 FY25 if there are no further increases in the General Fund for this purpose. He explained why
77 property tax increases or the Capital Reserve Fund would generate less revenue and have a greater
78 burden on taxpayers than a Local Options Tax. He said that with the tax being placed on purchasing
79 taxable goods, visitors to Essex Junction who use the roads and facilities would help pay for this
80 infrastructure.
81

82 Mr. Eustis opened public discussion of Article 3.

83 Mr. Flick asked if this was a percent tax on personal property. Mr. Brown explained that the tax
84 would not be applied to the sale of a home or vehicle and is more of a shopping tax.
85

86 **6. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ABOUT ARTICLE 4**

87 Mr. Eustis read Article 4: Village of Essex Junction authorize cannabis retailers and retail portions of
88 integrated licensee establishments in the Village pursuant to 7 V.S.A. § 863?
89

90 Mr. Brown provided an overview of the cannabis retail article. He talked about state regulations of
91 cannabis retail that are still being determined, including facility inspections, local rules and controls,
92 and the size of the "no cannabis sales" buffers around schools. Mr. Chawla added that many
93 cannabis regulation rules are not yet finalized and retail sales would not open until October. He
94 acknowledged that this article was not fully discussed as a community but the vote gives the Village
95 control of cannabis sale so it is not being decided for them by the Town.
96

97 Mr. Eustis opened public discussion of Article 4.

98 Ms. Cooper asked if a yes vote on this ballot item would give more control to the Village than if they
99 vote no. Mr. Chawla said that if the Village votes no, there will be no retail in the Village, despite
100 the Town's vote of yes earlier in the year. A Village votes of yes, would allow the Village Trustees
101 to regulate the sale of cannabis in the Village, instead of the Town being the regulating group. He
102 also explained there could be revote options, if desired.

103
104 **7. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ABOUT ARTICLE 5**

105 Mr. Eustis read Article 5: Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Village of Essex Junction in
106 an amount not to exceed Three Million Seventy Thousand Dollars (\$3,070,000), subject to available
107 grants-in-aid, be issued to finance the cost of replacing the Main Street water line?

108
109 Mr. Brown provided a slide overview of the water line article. He said the project to replace the
110 waterline on Main St. would be less expensive than the cost that would be incurred by not fixing this
111 aging infrastructure. He explained that the line would be from the bridge next to the Town Offices at
112 81 Main St. to the water tank off of Upper Main St. He said current capital contributions are
113 sufficient to cover debt payments.

114
115 Mr. Eustis opened public discussion of Article 5. There were no questions or comments from the
116 public on this article.

117
118 **8. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION ABOUT ARTICLE 6**

119 Mr. Eustis read Article 6: Shall the voters approve holding the 2023 Annual Meeting on Wednesday,
120 April 5, 2023 to act upon any articles not involving voting by Australian ballot and to reconvene on
121 Tuesday, April 11, 2023, to vote for the Village officers and transact any business involving voting
122 by Australian ballot?

123
124 Mr. Eustis explained that this is a standard article each year

125
126 **9. ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT ARTICLE 7**

127 Mr. Eustis read Article 7 at 7:54 PM: To elect Village officers required by law including: Moderator
128 (one year term); one Village Trustee (three year term); one Library Trustee (five year term)?

129
130 **10. UPDATE ON INDEPENDENCE AND CITY CHARTER STATUS**

131 Mr. Brown said that the City charter passed unanimously from the House and the Senate floors and
132 was on its way to the Governor for approval.

133
134 Rep. Houghton expressed thanks to the Trustees and Selectboard for finding a path forward with a
135 new charter. She described it as a comprehensive piece of legislation that found support from the
136 State's governing bodies.

137
138 **11. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

139 Mr. Murray spoke briefly about the upcoming vote for school board members. He encouraged the
140 public to research the candidates and pay full attention when determining their votes.

141
142 **12. READING FILE**

143 **a. Annual Report Newsletter**

144 **b. Annual Report**

145

146 **13. ADJOURN**
147 Mr. Brown and Mr. Eustis adjourned the meeting at 7:40 PM.
148
149
150 Respectfully Submitted,
151 Cathy Ainsworth
152 Recording Secretary
153
154

DRAFT