

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES
April 2, 2014**

Moderator Steve Eustis welcomed the assemblage to the 122nd Annual Meeting of the Village of Essex Junction. The meeting was broadcast live on Channel 17. The Essex Junction High School Chamber Choir sang the Star Spangled Banner and the Air Force Junior ROTC Color Guard led the assemblage in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees included:

- Village Board of Trustees - George Tyler (Village President), Dan Kerin (Village Vice President), Andrew Brown, Elaine Sopchak, Lori Houghton.
- Village administration - Manager, Pat Scheidel; Co-Assistant Manager & Finance Director, Lauren Morrisseau, Co-Assistant Manager & Clerk, Susan McNamara-Hill; Community Development Director, Robin Pierce; Administrative Assistant to the Village Manager, Patty Benoit; Assistant Zoning Administrator, Terry Hass; Public Works Superintendent, Rick Jones; Water Quality Superintendent, Jim Jutras; Engineer, Rick Hamlin; Attorney, Dave Barra; Essex Junction Fire Chief, Chris Gaboriault; Brownell Library Director, Penny Pillsbury, Brownell Library Board Chairwoman, Christine Packard.
- Town of Essex Selectboard members - Irene Wrenner, Andy Watts, Mike Plageman, and Brad Luck.
- State Representatives - Linda Waite-Simpson and Tim Jerman.
- Recording Secretary, Marianne Riordan.

Moderator Eustis called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM and explained the procedure to be followed.

ARTICLE 1: Shall the voters act upon the report of the auditor?

MOTION by Chuck Barry, SECOND by Glenn Rogers, to approve Article 1 as read.

DISCUSSION: None.

VOTING ON ARTICLE 1: unanimous; motion carried. Article 1 is adopted.

ARTICLE 2: Shall the voters approve the annual General Fund budget in the amount of \$3,468,826 for fiscal year July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015 of which \$2,942,914 is to be levied in taxes against the Village Grand List?

MOTION by Ray Weed, SECOND by Claire Wilcox, to approve Article 2 as read.

DISCUSSION: A presentation on the FY15 budget was given. Village President George Tyler remarked:

- **The budget is \$124,000 greater than last year (3.7% increase) which is an impact of \$27.93 per year or \$2.30 per month on the average household in the village.**
- **The increase is mainly due to health insurance increases, capital fund contribution, and stream flow monitoring to meet state storm water requirements.**
- **Based on feedback from the public through Heart & Soul the citizenry is happy with the operation of the village overall so the Trustees trimmed what**

could from the budget, but had to cover costs and the cost to maintain the status quo has increased.

- The village is at a crossroads and facing challenging decisions. There has been a cost shift to all in the community from the downsizing of IBM.
- Some initiatives have been taken on a test basis, such as a shared manager with the town and consolidation of some departments with the village and town. The result is a savings of \$65,000.
- The Trustees will be looking for more cost saving measures.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Carl Wermer proposed reducing the library budget by \$25,000 (from \$736,000 to \$711,000) as a step in the right direction to containing cost growth without impacting infrastructure.

MOTION by Carl Wermer, **SECOND** by Deb McAdoo, to reduce the village budget by \$25,000.

DISCUSSION ON REDUCTION OF BUDGET: Comments were made as follows:

- Jan Abbott urged the voters to vote against the decrease, noting money will be needed to replace the retiring Library Director.
- Dorothy Bergendahl said reducing the budget means library hours will have to be trimmed from 60 hours per week (open six days a week).
- George Dunbar, III, suggested exploring coordinating hours with the town library. Mr. Dunbar noted the library budget consumes 20% of the entire village budget.
- Pat Scheidel said the Essex Selectboard sees the town library as a valuable asset. The town library has support groups championing its existence through bake sales, book sales, and such to raise money for items that are not part of the budget books. The number of full and part-time employees is static. Essex Free Library is not the community and cultural center like the Brownell Library and there is demand for more services due to the location of CHIPS and the Senior Center.
- Jessica Martin spoke in support of both libraries, but noted the proposed reduction does not have to be a painful cut. Creative thinking with the budgetary process, looking at the numbers, peak hours and demands, and perhaps moving some activities to other places in the community could be considered.
- Deb McAdoo recalled sidewalks on both sides of the roads are not being plowed because of budget reductions. The elderly who cannot shovel their sidewalk need to be considered. Public safety should be taken care of first.

CALL THE QUESTION by Chuck Barry, **SECOND** by Claire Wilcox, on discussion of reducing the budget by \$25,000. Discussion ceased.

VOTING ON CALL THE QUESTION: Lack of 2/3 majority; motion does not carry.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON REDUCTION OF BUDGET: Comments were made as follows:

- Glenn Rogers cited per capita costs for libraries in the state according to the Institute of Museum & Library Services and noted Brownell Library has the highest per capita cost (\$65.55). There are only two other libraries in the state in the \$60/capita range. All others range from \$16.86 (Essex Free) to

\$58.54 (Williston). Brownell Library is an outstanding library as well as a tremendous burden on taxes.

- **Paul Dame asked for an explanation of the increase due to a one time expenditure of \$25,000 for a new library director. Elaine Sopchak explained Penny Pillsbury is retiring. There is \$2,000 in the budget to cover the cost of interviews which is .3% of the increase. The remainder of the increase is due to a change in bookkeeping to even out the cost of health care across all village departments. The budget for the Adult and Juvenile Collection has been flat for past years, but the cost of materials is increasing so there could be a decline in the number of books on the shelves yet an increase in costs. There are line items in the budget that the library cannot control, such as utilities, health care, building costs. Many of the line items in the budget are flat. Regarding coordinating hours, Brownell and Essex Free are opened opposite of each other.**
- **Jeff Glaspie calculated that \$27 per house per year covers a budget increase of \$140,000 and \$25,000 is 42 cents per month for the average household which is not much to keep the library open.**
- **Dotty Bergendahl stated when comparing per capita cost consider that Burlington has 4.5 times the population and Colchester and South Burlington have twice the population size to the village.**
- **Carl Wermer stated 'per capita' cost reflects the number of people using the library which is more than just villagers. Fewer users mean less demand. Staffing and hours are under the control of the library and can be reduced.**
- **Saramichele Stultz suggested grants be explored to support the library as more of a community center, noting there is CHIPS so there may be duplication of services. The library provides twice the amount of services than the town library and should show why the money is needed versus what the town needs. Elaine Sopchak pointed out Brownell Library serves many more towns than just Essex. The library is in the home card system.**
- **Sean Foley asked if any measures have been taken to reduce the insurance increase. Pat Scheidel stated village employees pay 14% of the cost. The village is not part of the insurance exchange, but does get a better product at a discount. The insurance company reimburses the village a set amount for sound use of insurance.**
- **Raj Chawla pointed out the library served 134,638 people. Libraries in other towns do not compare to the Brownell Library. With other area activities like the farmers market the library is a community center and if the village were to create another community center there would be an entirely new budget. The library is expensive and choices need to be made. The village should choose to find a way to stop sending money to the town.**

CALL THE QUESTION by Raj Chawla, SECOND by Alan Wilcox, on reducing the budget. Debate ceases.

VOTING ON CALL THE QUESTION: 2/3 majority of ayes; motion carried.

VOTING ON DECREASING THE BUDGET BY \$25,000: majority of nays; motion does not carry.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON ARTICLE 2 AS DRAFTED (budget of \$3,468,826): Comments were made as follows:

- George Dunbar, III, mentioned past payments from the town toward the fire ladder truck totaling \$100,000 with no subsequent adjustment to the rolling stock fund.

MOTION by George Dunbar, III, **SECOND** by Glenn Rogers, to reduce the budget by the additional \$100,000 received from the Town of Essex in the past two years by reducing the rolling stock fund.

DISCUSSION ON REDUCTION OF ROLLING STOCK FUND: Comments were made as follows:

- Glenn Rogers reported at the town's annual meeting erroneous statements were made that the ladder truck was paid off and no longer is a debt carried by the village and the money is being paid to the Essex Junction Fire Department. Actually there is still \$250,000 owed on the ladder truck and the payment from the town goes toward paying down the debt.
- Pat Scheidel mentioned significant purchases using the rolling stock fund will include a diesel dump truck (\$148,405) and a sidewalk plow (\$144,350) and removing \$100,000 from the general fund contribution for FY15 would leave only \$83,624 toward those purchases. The current equipment is well used and maintained, but does eventually wear out and need to be replaced. Reducing the budget will delay replacement which could impact service.
- George Dunbar, III, calculated there would be \$51,000 remaining even with \$100,000 taken out of the rolling stock fund.

VOTING ON REDUCTION OF ROLLING STOCK FUND: majority of nays; motion does not carry.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON ARTICLE 2 AS DRAFTED (budget of \$3,468,826): Comments were made as follows:

- Harris Abbott compared tax rates from 1994 (\$.2193) to 2002 (\$.2143) to 2013 (\$.2554) noting prices have increased considerably higher. Delaying will mean higher cost in the future.
- Steve Eustis mentioned the reappraisal in 2007 where property values were recalculated.

CALL THE QUESTION by Claire Wilcox, **SECOND** by Ray Weed, on Article 2 as drafted (budget of \$3,468,826). Debate ceases.

VOTING ON CALL THE QUESTION: majority of ayes; motion carried.

VOTING ON ARTICLE 2 (budget of \$3,468,826): majority of ayes; motion carried. Article 2 is adopted.

ARTICLE 3: Shall the voters approve holding the 2015 Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 1, 2015 to act upon any articles not involving voting by Australian ballot and to reconvene on Tuesday, April 14, 2015 to vote for the village officers and transact any business involving voting by Australian ballot?

MOTION by Chuck Barry, **SECOND** by Mary Jo Engel, to approve Article 3 as read.

DISCUSSION: The following proposal was made:

MOTION by Raj Chawla, **SECOND** by Ray Weed, to hold the village annual meeting on Saturday, April 4, 2015.

DISCUSSION: George Tyler noted the charter for the village specifies the first Wednesday of April as the day of the annual meeting. The state legislature must approve a change in the charter.

VOTING ON CHANGE OF MEETING DAY: Prior to the vote Moderator Eustis ruled the motion out of order since the village charter prevents a change in the meeting day.

VOTING ON ARTICLE 3: unanimous; motion carried. Article 3 is adopted.

ARTICLE 4: To transact any other business that may lawfully come before the meeting.

Comments/announcements:

- Consideration should be given of a different way to do business in light of approximately 100 people in attendance at the annual meeting making decisions involving the entire community.
- Request is made to allow unregistered voters to speak. The request was granted.
 - Isaac Johnson, 8th Grade student, ADL Middle School, Ms. Eldridge's Social Studies Class, asked how young people can get involved in the community. Suggestions included participating in government activities, attending trustees/selectboard meetings or hosting these meetings at school, volunteering, encouraging others, finding a passion and making where you are a better place.
 - Corporal Jim Spaulding warned of the potential loss of the Air Force Junior ROTC program at the high school due to the federal sequestration unless at least 100 students enroll by October, 2014. The program which began in 1978 provides leadership development and encourages involvement in the community.
- Diane Clemens invited all to attend the work sessions on the comprehensive plan update or to send comments to the Planning Commission.
- Mike Plageman complimented the village and town on the outstanding public works departments and snow removal effort this past winter.
- Annie Cooper stated people do not attend meetings or get involved because of lack of knowledge and understanding of what is going on and who people are. George Tyler stated the village is in the process of updating the comprehensive plan which must be updated every five years. Villagers are urged to attend the Planning Commission work sessions and make their voice heard.
- Linda McKenna asked about the consultant to be hired by the village for the downtown area. George Tyler explained the initiative to hold a charrette with the community, property owners, and investors to discuss the village downtown area and long term plans.
- Glenn Rogers suggested tax rates and increases as well as the impact on the property owner be shown on one page of the annual report. Mr. Rogers also warned of the unknown impact of the Affordable Care Act which will mean hard times coming to all.
- Jen McKenzie questioned why the article on the next annual meeting date is put forth if the charter dictates the day. Pat Scheidel explained the charter mandates giving annual notice and setting the date.
- Greg Morgan suggested the article for the annual meeting be crafted to hold the meeting per the charter and reconvene on Saturday.
- Results of the opinion poll show a majority in favor of moving the 2016 village meeting to Saturday and combining the village and school annual meetings to be held on the same Saturday.
- Candidates for office include:
 - Moderator – Paul Dame, Steve Eustis
 - Village Trustee – Dan Kerin, George Tyler

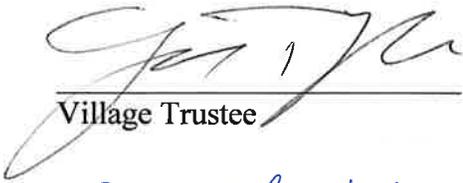
- Library Trustee – Andy Kolovos
- There is a vacancy of the village capital projects committee. Interested individuals are urged to volunteer.

Adjournment

MOTION by Dorothy Bergendahl, SECOND by Mary Jo Engel, to adjourn the 122nd Annual Meeting of the Village of Essex Junction. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 PM. Voting by Australian ballot will take place on April 8, 2014 from 7 AM to 7 PM at Essex Community Educational Center.

Attest:



Village Trustee



Village Trustee



Village Clerk