

Board of Finance

Town of Essex
29 West Avenue
Essex, CT 06426
Via Remote & In Person- 7:00 PM

MINUTES

Thursday March 21, 2024

Members in Attendance:	Campbell Hudson, Chairman
	Terry Stewart
	Mary-Louise Polo
	Ethan Goller
	Brian Weinstein
	Vincent Pacileo III
Others in Attendance:	Norman Needleman, First Selectman
	Stacia Libby, Selectwomen
	Bruce Glowac, Selectman
	Jim Francis, Treasurer
	Tracey Celentano, Finance Director
	Kelly Sterner
	Danielle Schumacher, Board Clerk
	Rob Bibbiani, Tri-Town Youth Services Bureau

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM by Chairman Campbell Hudson

2. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

*MOTION made by Terry Stewart to approve the Agenda with the amendment of moving the Public Comment section to #4. **SECONDED** by Vincent Pacileo III. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.*

3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES: REGULAR BOF MEETING ON FEBRUARY 15, 2024**

*MOTION made by Terry Stewart to approve the minutes from the February 15, 2024 regular Board of Finance Meeting. **SECONDED** by Mary-Louise Polo. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.*

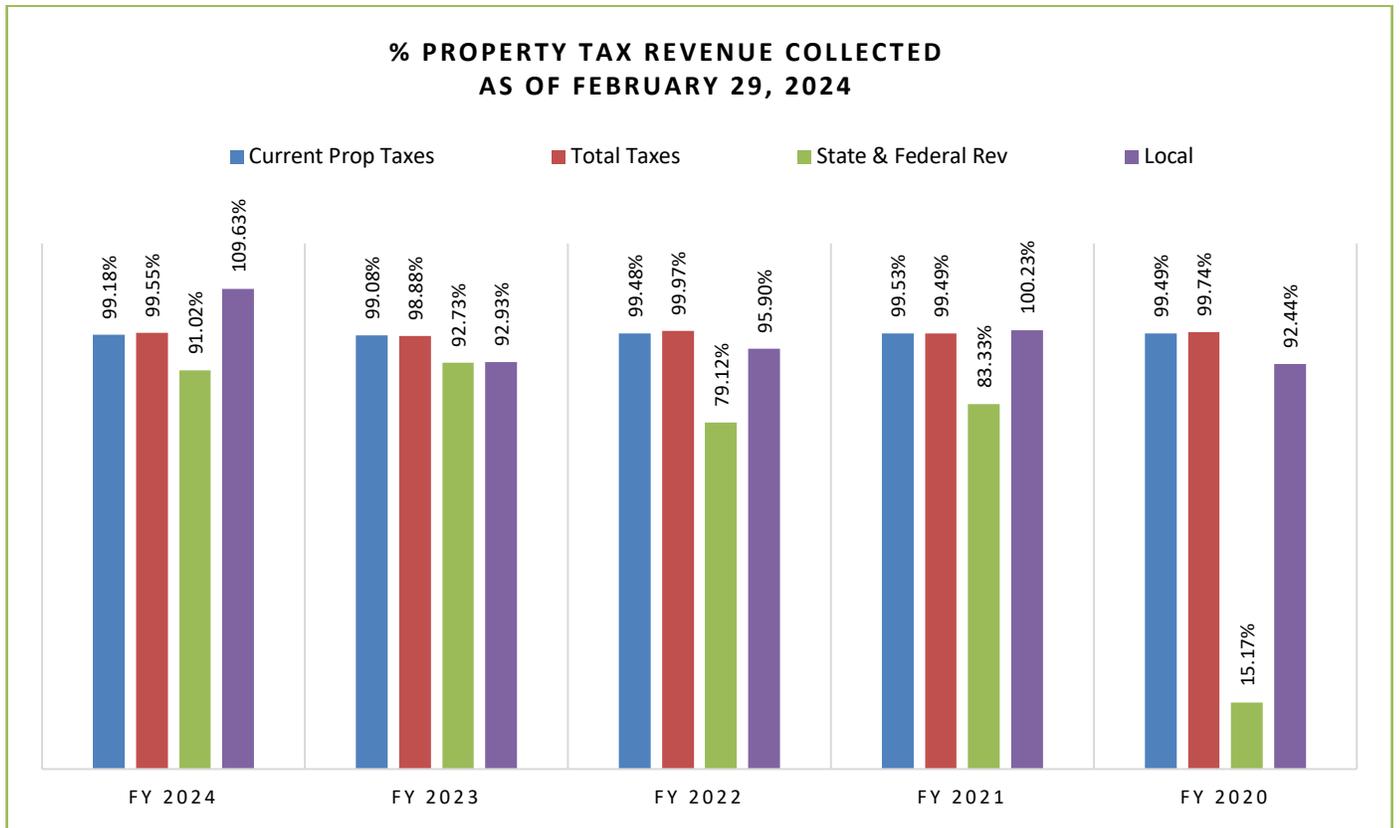
4. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Rob Bibbiani from Tri-Town Youth Services Bureau spoke to the board. He said that he took over as executive director in December. He said that they have had the opportunity to present a request for funding to the two towns of Chester and Deep River. Their request is \$79,000 more than last year due to the fact that the 10 year grant they had received from the CDC has ended. He said as a non-profit they tend to pay salaries that are lower than average and do not offer any benefits.

5. **FINANCIAL REPORT**

REVENUES

February tax collections brought in \$1,219,771 with current property taxes accounting for all but \$31K of the total. This brings the current property tax collection rate to 99.18% which is comparative to prior years.



As of February month-end, the YTD total tax collections were \$25,156,998 or 99.55% of the fiscal year total compared to 98.88% as of February 2023 and 99.97% as of February 2022. Local revenues totaled \$66K in February and \$601K (109.63%) collected YTD, which is above prior years. Conveyance Taxes and Building Permits continue to trend positively. As of the end of February, Conveyance Tax Fees exceeded the full budget amount by \$84.7K (194.09%). Building Permits collected are \$55.6K (144.49%) of budget with four months remaining. Total revenues collected came in at 98.75% of budget versus 97.76% for February 2023 and 98.33% for February 2022 month end. These totals reflect the budgeted deficit amount of \$226,580.

EXPENDITURES

Expenditures for the month of February totaled \$1,895,817 bringing spending YTD to \$18,687,657 or 70.43% of budget. Selectmen’s budget expenditures made up \$534,358 of the total spending. As of February month-end, the Selectmen’s budget spending YTD is \$6,711,528 or 71.90% of budget compared to 70.55% as of February 2023 and 70.90% at February 2022 month-end. February expenditures include normal operations and payroll related expenses totaling \$396,406 (3 payroll month). Budgeted expenses include \$10K appropriation approved at the February BOF meeting for the Elections department (Early Voting)

GENERAL FUND

FY 2023-2024 – IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES/SAVINGS & RISKS/OVERRUNS

As of 2/29/2024

Opportunities/Savings

Draft until approved by Board of Finance.

• Selectmen Office	\$75K +/-	Elected Payroll/Full Time Payroll Net
• Municipal Revenue Sharing Grant	\$102.6K	Not budgeted – did not expect to receive.
• Conveyance Taxes	\$150K +/-	Real Estate Activity (e.g., Essex Meadows)
• Building Permits	\$75K +/-	
• Interest	\$7.5K	

Risks/Overruns

• Animal Control	\$18K +/-	Regional ACO – Full Time Position
• Local PILOT	\$16.4K	Essex Place
• Budgeted Deficit	\$226.6K	
• Elections	\$10K	Early Voting – Appropriation Approved
• Town Clerk	\$18.5K	Training – Overlapping Staff
• R4 Board of Education	TBD	

a. **ESTIMATED FEBRUARY YTD UPDATE**

Discussed above

b. **AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) SUMMARY**

Tracey Celentano said that the town is officially under \$200,000 for ARPA funds. These funds have been primarily used for capital improvements. If #26 for the postage meter and #27 for the transfer station are approved, we will be down to \$31,110. The deadline to have a contract in place to use the funds is December 31st and it must be spent by December 31, 2026.

6. **SELECTMEN’S REPORT**

First Selectman Norman Needleman started by saying that he was very surprised that Essex Meadows changed hands again at a 50% profit. There has been a lot of goings on with planning and zoning in regards to the node conversation and all of the rumors that were out there were absolutely wrong.

Mr. Needleman reported that the Board of Selectmen drafted a unanimous resolution regarding the regionalization discussion. He said that we shouldn’t combine the issue with repairing John Withrop. They are going to send a very clear letter stating that at the present time the town is not interested in discussing regionalizing. The Board of Selectmen agrees that we have no choice but to support the bond because we have been backed into a corner because consultants were called in. If we don’t vote yes on this referendum the whole project will be put on hold.

Chairman Campbell Hudson said that a copy of the letter from the Board of Selectmen along with a well drafted letter from the Board of Finance is included in the packet.

7. **OLD BUSINESS**

None

8. **NEW BUSINESS**

a. **BOS FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025 BUDGET PRESENTATION**

Mr. Needleman reported that the Selectman have gone through the budget several times before presenting to the Board of Finance. One of the big drivers is adding to the support of Tritown Youth Services based on the other towns contributing.

The Ambulance Association is asking for additional funds as they are struggling right now. This is due to the large number of Medicaid patients and the reimbursement rates. There has been nothing taken out of the capital sinking fund so far. One of the things on the horizon is the R4 budget, which

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includes a facilities director. This does not include the cost of the bond, the field, or the security system. They are looking at about \$20million worth of debt for the regional schools.

Terry Stewart commented that they may not need the \$10 million in bonds that were acquired for the athletic fields.

Mr. Needleman said that there are emergency remediation funds that can be applied for, and that Lon Seidman has been doing research.

Mr. Needleman on to say that the Town has gone to the regional Animal Control Officer model, and he is currently negotiating with Westbrook to bring in a 4th town. This would allow us to have a second person part time to cover when the ACO is not there.

Rob Bibiani said that the caseload trend for Tritown Youth Services has definitely been higher over the last 3 years. They have lost staff across the board and there is currently no clinical staff. They are looking to have someone come in part time, maybe 10 hours a week for counseling. There is a statewide problem with youth services bureaus, in Middlesex County alone he is one of 3 new executive directors. Campbell Hudson asked if the increase in budget is contingent on the other two towns making on a comparable contribution. Norman Needleman stated all three first selectmen have recommended it.

Terry Stewart asked about the transfer station. Norman said that the tipping fees have gone up. One project that he is working on is figuring out a regional waste authority. The MIRA policy for decades has been to keep our trash in the state. The town chose to raise the permit fee for the first time along with a significant increase in the cost of demolition material.

b. ARPA REQUEST – POSTAGE METER

Tracey Celentano reported that the Town received three quotes. Pitney Bowes is strongly recommended These quotes were obtained a few months ago. The \$7,500 requested is for equipment and postage supplies.

MOTION made by Ethan Goller to approve an appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$7,500 to be allocated from the American Rescue Plan Act Funds to be used to purchase a new postage meter and related supplies. SECONDED by Mary-Louise Polo. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.

c. ARPA REQUEST – TRANSFER STATION FENCING

MOTION made by Terry Stewart to approve an appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$12,000 to be allocated from the American Rescue Plan Act Funds to be used for fencing at the Transfer Station. SECONDED by Ethan Goller. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.

d. SINKING FUND REQUEST – MUNICIPAL PROPERTY

Tracey Celentano said that there is a email from Andy Kressley included in the packet.

MOTION made by Brian Weinstein to approve an appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$10,000 to be allocated from the Municipal Property Sinking Fund to be used for roof repair on the Essex Fire Station. SECONDED by Terry Stewart. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.

MOTION made by Vincent Pacileo III to approve an appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$2,500 to be allocated from the fire department sinking fund to be used for the repair or replacement of the apparatus compressed air. SECONDED by Brian Weinstein. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.

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e. **APPROPRIATION – DOG FUND**

Tracey Celentano said that there is an email included in the packet. As of December 1st the structure of the dog fund has changed.

MOTION made by Mary-Louise Polo to approve a fiscal year 2023-2024 supplemental appropriation for \$18,000 to be allocated to Animal Control (Dog Fund) to offset the costs associated with the reorganization and hiring of a full time Animal Control Position. Subject to approval at Town Meeting. SECONDED by Terry Stewart. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.

f. **BOS LETTER - STRUCTURE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Vincent Pacileo III said that he certainly understands the position taken by the Board of Selectmen as its role is to weigh in on these types of issues. He believes that the Board of Finance should not endorse a position on this or similar issues and maintain a more neutral, non partisan role. If the Board of Finance decides to take a position on this specific issue, what will the next potentially be? He offered alternatives for Board of Finance members to express their opinions and asked that his name be removed from the proposed letter.

Norman Needleman said that he is concerned that here will be an end run about restructuring the regional school district. He wants to send a clear message to the other two towns that now is not the time.

Ethan Goller suggested the wording “the Essex Board of Finance recommends that the current priority for our towns is”

MOTION made by Ethan Goller to approve the sending of a letter from the Board of Finance regarding regionalization with the following amendment;

- ***Add Region 4 to the Board of Education***
- ***Remove the Essex Board of Finance***
- ***The Essex Board of Finance voted to support the reopening of John Winthrop Middle School***

SECONDED by Brian Weinstein. Passed 5-1 (Yes-Campbell Hudson, Terry Stewart, Mary-Louise Polo, Ethan Goller, Brian Weinstein. No- Vicent Pacileo III)

9. **COMMUNICATIONS AND CORRESPONDENCE**

Campbell Hudson said that there is a letter included in the packet from Dan and Lauren at 1 North Main Street in Ivoryton. They are concerned about the increase in the mill rate.

The board discussed and authorized return correspondence stating that the mill rate will likely change due to the increase in the grand list.

Norman Needleman said that he had also sent them an email.

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION made by Vincent Pacileo III to adjourn the meeting at 9:01 PM. SECONDED by Ethan Goller. Passed unanimously. Motion carried.