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**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
October 25, 2023**

Present: Norman M. Needleman, First Selectman
Stacia R. Libby, Selectman (via Zoom)
Bruce M. Glowac, Selectman

Norman Needleman called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Norman Needleman welcomed everyone to the Board of Selectmen in person and remote public access meeting via Zoom.

In attendance: First Selectman Norman M. Needleman, Selectman Stacia R. Libby (via Zoom), and Selectman Bruce M. Glowac.

Others in attendance: Finance Director Tracey Celentano, Essex Fire Engine Company #1 Fire Chief Andrew Kressley, Robert Parkerson, Kelly Sterner, Janice Atkeson, DG Fitton, Barbara Rutigliano, Attorney David Royston, Peter Decker, Jeff Going, and Karla Lindquist.

Approval of Agenda:

Motion was made by Stacia Libby to approve the agenda. Bruce Glowac seconded the motion. All in favor.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion was made by Bruce Glowac to approve the October 4, 2023 Regular Meeting Minutes. Stacia Libby seconded the motion. All in favor.

Informational Items, Communications and Correspondence

Selectman Needleman reported the Town was awarded a Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) grant in the amount of \$444,000 to improve the Essex Village pedestrian environment and flood resilience by making several improvements to Ferry Street.

Public Announcements / Comment:

Jeff Going gave a brief update to the Board of Selectmen on the status of the Thatchbed Island protection and restoration project.

OLD BUSINESS:

Capital Committee: Mr. Glowac reported the committee met at Comstock Field to look at flood mitigation.

There was mention that the new River Road Sidewalk is already being used, but the bridge will not be installed until spring 2024.

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NEW BUSINESS:

Appointments and Resignations Board and Commissions None

Board and Commission Vacancies

Conservation Commission – 2 Alternate Members

Park and Recreation Commission – 2 Alternate Members

Gateway Commission – 1 Regular Member

Gateway Commission – 1 Alternate Member

CT Water's Customer Advisory Council (CAC)

Connecticut Water & Marine Water is asking the Town to appoint a resident of the community who is a customer of Connecticut Water to serve on CT Water's Customer Advisory Council (CAC). The purpose of the council is to enhance communications with their customers and communities. The meetings are held every 3 to 6 months via Zoom. Please let Selectman Needleman know if you are interested in representing the Town of Essex or call 860-767-4340 x 112 for more information.

Gateway Commission

The Town is looking for two representatives, a regular and an alternate for the Gateway Commission. The commission meets once a month on the fourth Thursday at 7 pm at RiverCOG or via Zoom. Meetings typically last between 1 to 2 hours. At the meeting, the commission members review all referrals. Additional information on this commission can be found at <https://ctrivergateway.org/about/>. Please let Selectman Needleman know if you are interested in representing the Town of Essex or call 860-767-4340 x 112 for more information.

Open Town Board and Commission positions can be found at https://www.essexct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3116/f/uploads/boards_and_commissions_website_30.pdf

The application to join a Board or Commission can be found at: https://www.essexct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf3116/f/file/application_to_volunteer_for_board_or_commission_fillable_4_13_18.pdf

American Rescue Plan Funds:

The remaining balance is \$196,084. These funds must be committed by December 31, 2024 and spent by December 31, 2026.

Thatchbed Island

The project is progressing, but costs were more than anticipated.

The Board of Finance, at their October 19, 2023 meeting, approved and recommended to the Board of Selectmen and to a Town Meeting an additional appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$40,000 to be allocated from the American Rescue Plan Act Funds for the protection and restoration of Thatchbed Island.

Motion was made by Norman Needleman, with the approval from the Board of Finance, to approve an appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$40,000 to be allocated from the American Rescue Plan Act Funds (ARPA) for the protection and restoration of Thatchbed Island. Bruce Glowac seconded the motion. All in favor.

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Essex Ambulance Association

DG Fitton reported the new ambulance project is progressing, but costs for the equipment and the radios were more than anticipated. The Selectmen stated they would approve and recommend the request for additional funding for the ambulance, but stated the funds should not be used for any radios because the Town was awarded funding from the CT Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and those funds are to be used to upgrade the emergency equipment/radios.

Motion was made by Bruce Glowac to recommend to the Board of Finance an appropriation in an amount not to exceed \$35,000 to be allocated from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds to cover the shortfall on the new ambulance. Norman Needleman seconded the motion. All in favor.

Merit Service Retirement Plan

The Board of Selectmen, Retirement Board, and the Essex Fire Engine Company #1 are all seeking ways to recruit and keep volunteer firefighters. There is discussion of adjusting and increasing the merit service plan for years going forward. Peter Decker reported the Retirement Board is recommending increasing to \$23.00 per month for credited service effective January 1, 2024. The Merit Service plan is based on a calendar year. Active members need 50 points to be eligible for the pension and 10 years to be vested. There is a cap at 30 years. This change would be for new and current active members starting on January 1, 2024 and for those who are not currently collecting. This benefit would help with recruitment and would be an attraction to new members and an incentive to keep members. The request would be to change the current multiplier from \$16.65/month to \$23.00/month for all years after 1/1/24.

Motion was made by Norman Needleman to approve the adoption of the amendment to the multiplier for the Town of Essex Merit Service Retirement Plan. The amendment would need to go to a Public Hearing and a Town Meeting. Bruce Glowac seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Draft Lofts Tax Credit Agreement

Attorney David Royston presented to the Board of Selectmen the Draft Lofts Tax Credit Agreement. Attorney Royston stated the agreement specifies what the tax credit can be used for, which is restricted to maintenance and upkeep and long-term reserves. First Selectman Needleman inquired what the definition of a default is. Attorney Royston said a default would be something like a default of the mortgage or lack of compliance with state statutes, etc. The term of the agreement is for 30 years which would start in March of 2022. HOPE Partnership is coming to the Town after the project is done to ask for the abatement of the taxes, when this is usually done prior to the project being completed. Mr. Needleman requested that if there is a change of ownership, that the Town be allowed to open and review the agreement. Mr. Needleman also stated that this agreement would need to be reviewed by a Town attorney. Attorney Royston stated he would amend the current draft agreement with Mr. Needleman's suggestion and would send it to the Selectmen.

Motion was made by Bruce Glowac to table this request until the next meeting. Stacia Libby seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

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Signage Request on Town Property

The Selectmen discussed the possibility of creating and installing a nice welcome informational sign by the Town's exit ramps. There was discussion of the clutter of signs along West Avenue and the possibility of having all those signs on one sign for a cleaner look. Stacia Libby would work with Public Works Director in the creation of consolidating and beautifying signage in Essex.

250th Anniversary of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence – July 4, 2026

Mr. Needleman met with the Essex Historical Society this past week to discuss the event and to talk about plans for the celebration. A lot of organizations want to participate. First Selectman Needleman asked Selectman Libby to be the chair of the 250th Anniversary Planning Committee.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes – Essex Place

Janice Atkeson presented to the Board of Selectmen several issues with the Essex Place HVAC system and the damages it has caused to several units. There have been extensive repairs to all the units, attorney's fees, and unscheduled maintenance of the HVAC units have been quite costly. According to the engineer studies, the HVAC units were installed improperly. They are going to have to replace all the units and some of the walls and ceilings in some of the units. Ms. Atkeson is requesting a tax abatement from the Town to help get them through. Ms. Atkeson did mention they have submitted an insurance claim for \$992,000 to repair all the units in the building. The Selectmen stated that the taxes for Essex Place could pay later and the PILOT would not accrue any interest.

Sinking Fund Request – Essex Fire Department

Essex Fire Engine Chief Andrew Kressley reported their 1994 Pierce Engine is aging, but still reliable and useful piece of apparatus. A new one would cost \$1.2 million if ordered today. The Fire Department is requesting an amount not to exceed \$150,000 from the Essex Fire Department Sinking Fund to refurbish the 1994 Pierce Engine 652.

Motion was made by Bruce Glowac to approve and recommend to the Board of Finance the appropriation of a sum not to exceed \$150,000.00 from the Fire Department Sinking Fund to refurbish the 1994 Pierce Engine 652. Said sum to be taken from the Essex Fire Department Sinking Fund. Stacia Libby seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Permit Fees

Motion was made by Norman Needleman to waive all Town of Essex Permit Application Fees for the Essex Veterans Memorial Hall project. Bruce Glowac seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Centerbrook Meeting House

Selectmen Glowac and Libby are still waiting for the draft letter of agreement from Campbell Hudson's office. Selectmen Libby and Glowac and the Board of Finance are in support of the possibility of the Town acquiring the Centerbrook Meeting House, but they would like to review the agreement prior to making any decisions.

Motion was made by Bruce Glowac to table this request until the next meeting. Stacia Libby seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

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Public Hearing

Motion was made by Norman Needleman to set a Public Hearing for Wednesday, December 13th, 2023 at 4:45 p.m. for the purpose of an Amendment to the Merit Service Retirement Plan. Stacia Libby seconded the motion; it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Set Town Meeting

Motion was made by Norman Needleman to set a Special Town Meeting for Wednesday, December 13th, 2023 immediately following the Public Hearing. Stacia Libby seconded the motion; it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.

Set Town Meeting

Motion was made by Bruce Glowac to set a Special Town Meeting for Wednesday, November 1, 2023 at 4:55 pm in Conference Room A. Stacia Libby seconded the motion. All in favor.

Public Comment / Announcements: None

SELECTMEN GENERAL DISCUSSION:

Mr. Needleman reported that effective December 1, 2023 the Town of Essex will have a new full time Animal Control Officer that will be shared with Essex, Deep River, and Chester. Mr. Needleman reported having two part time Animal Control Officers is not working. The position will be posted. The Town is also looking for an appropriate ACO vehicle, something more like a van and the Town will keep the SUV as a backup vehicle.

There was discussion that the John Winthrop Middle School mold remediation project is progressing, but it will take time. It is hopeful the insurance company will help cover some of the claim.

Motion was made by Bruce Glowac to adjourn the meeting at 8:28 p.m. Stacia Libby seconded the motion. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Maria P. Lucarelli