

Town of Essex  
**Human Services Funding Committee**  
Minutes

**Thursday, Jan. 16, 2014**

9 AM

81 Main Street

Present: Brad Luck and Irene Wrenner, Selectmen; Ann Myers, Personnel Assistant; Pat Scheidel, Town Manager, Doug Fisher, Finance Director.

Minutes of Nov. 19 meeting were approved with one revision.

Members discussed the contents of Andy Watts' e-message dated Jan. 15.

Andy suggested using 'gift' rather than 'grant' to describe HSF donations. Pat said the latter term has been used loosely here.

Doug's research found an old heading, "Human Services, Grants, Subscriptions," used as a catch-all in prior budgets.

At the May 5, 1986 Town Meeting, per its minutes, citizens urged the Selectboard to fund "expenditures and contributions" to a list of agencies. The largest contribution went to the VNA. (Nearby towns that Ann surveyed have similarly funded the VNA to a greater extent than other recipients.) The Town has not required recipients to put our donation to a specific purpose, as would be typical of a grant.

Andy's question about the criteria used to fund (or not) dog food purchases was addressed with a reminder that our name ('human services') indicates that animals are not the focus.

Andy had inquired about the difference in funding a request via a specific line item.

When an outside entity, such as the Winoochi Valley Park District or Little League, receives funding year-after-year at Town Meeting, that org may be deemed worthy eventually of its own line item in the

Operating Budget or inside the Recreation Program Fund.

The Memorial Day Parade donation goes to the Essex Parade Committee, Inc.

Andy suggested "quantized levels of funding". Committee members felt that a one-size fits all (or even three sizes) award was unnecessarily limiting to recipients, who may need funding levels outside the tiered amounts that were proposed.

Andy asked, why not save the time of selecting orgs and merely award each requestor a line item in the budget. Members felt the current process asked and answered some important questions about whom the org is serving, plus auditors want to see evidence of some such process here.

The list of orgs under consideration is presented at a spring Selectboard Meeting. Awards are discussed publicly.

Doug distributed information on Vermont's Nonprofit Corporations Law. While it's fairly easy to apply for nonprofit designation here, getting the tax-exempt status from the IRS is much more work.

Ann had talked to someone at United Way as to how an org becomes a UW Agency. Members agreed it was okay to have multiple funding recipients with the same parent org, so long as they met our criteria and were serving different human needs.

The Selectboard can set limits on the amount of the funding 'pie' an org can get.

Stopping grants for a year seemed like it would mess with a good thing. And, for

example, what would Essex Rescue do if municipalities ceased donating for a year?

Members explored the idea of requiring a specific project with defined benefits. Doug suggested that if we specify outcomes, we must more closely manage their efforts. He believes it's more efficient for the Town to help fund the goals that each agency has in place, which their own boards have vetted and their own staff manage.

Brad asked: What can we do to bring new orgs in, so this process isn't working just for the orgs we already fund? Can we publish this opportunity for new orgs to get on the list, to get a piece of the 'pie'?

Members wondered aloud how much time and money the Town should spend on outreach when most orgs have personnel who should be tuned into typical sources of revenue, such as towns.

Then, we brainstormed how to get the word out without spending money to advertise: WCAX calendar, Front Porch Forum, press release to newspapers.

Ann will ask The United Way how they find recipients. Brad volunteered to draft an RFP and press release. Irene will check on the definition of Human Services in state statute and update the Selectboard on our progress. March 1 will be the target date to complete these actions.

Members decided, for now, to keep the application form we've used thus far.