Town of Essex

Selectboard
Phone: (802) 878-1341
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Regular Meeting AGENDA

Monday, November 18, 2024 – 6:30 PM
81 Main St., Essex Junction, VT 05452

This meeting will be in person and online. The agenda is available in alternative formats upon request.
- **JOIN ONLINE:** Zoom Meeting ID: 987 8569 1140 | Passcode: 032060
- **JOIN CALLING:** (*toll free audio only*): (888) 788-0099
- **WATCH:** Recorded meetings may be viewed on Town Meeting TV and Town of Essex Channels.
- **SCAN** the code on the left for the Zoom meeting link.

1. CALL TO ORDER 6:30 PM

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

3. APPROVE AGENDA

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from the public on Consent items and items not on Agenda

5. CONSENT ITEMS

a. Approve check warrants: # 18243- 11/08/24

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. *Interview of a volunteer to serve as the Essex representative on the Chittenden County Communications Union District Board - Hubie Norton

b. Discussion with Winooski Valley Park District

c. Presentation and discussion about municipal complex planning at 80 & 90 Upper Main Street

d. Consider approval of Susie Wilson Road Scoping Study recommendation

e. Consider approval of charter amendment articles for submission to the Town Clerk

f. Discussion about 2025 Town Meeting preparation

g. Work session on fiscal year 2026 budget

h. * Discussion about contracts

7. READING FILE

a. Board member comments

b. Upcoming meeting schedule

c. Email from Ian Carroll Re: Planning Commission and Development Review Board Crossover

d. Fire Department impact fee study

e. Housing Commission Resignation - Deb Flannery

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION

a. * An executive session is anticipated to discuss contracts

9. ADJOURN

Certification: KML 11/15/24

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
November 18, 2024

SELECTBOARD: Tracey Delphia, Chair; Andy Watts, Vice Chair; Kendall Chamberlin, Clerk; Dawn Hill-Fleury, Ethan Lawrence.
ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Lemnah, Town Assessor; Aaron Martin, Director of Public Works; Daniel Roy, Finance Director; Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director.
OTHERS PRESENT: Karen Adams, Jeff Bachiochi, Lauren Chicote, Patty Davis, Chris Gendron, Hubert Norton, Ken Robie, Ken Signorello, Jeff Theis, Irene Wrenner, Lorraine Zaloom, M.J.S.S.

1. CALL TO ORDER
Chair Delphia called the meeting of the Town of Essex Selectboard to order at 6:30 P.M.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES
Town Manager Duggan noted the addition of a memo regarding the Chittenden County Communications Union District to Business Item #6a, which includes more information on the length of the term.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL
None needed.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD
a. Comments from Public on Items not on Deliberative Agenda
Town Manager Duggan introduced Karen Adams as the new Town Deputy Manager and spoke about her background and qualifications. The Selectboard welcomed Deputy Manager Adams.

Ken Signorello noted that the Conservation and Trails Committee has voted to become a Commission, which is required in statute to be approved by the voters, so he requested at a future meeting the Selectboard discuss putting an item on the ballot for Town Meeting Day to create a Conservation Commission.

5. CONSENT ITEMS
a. Approve check warrants: #18243 – 11/08/2024

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion passed 5-0.

6. BUSINESS ITEMS
a. *Interview and of a volunteer to serve as the Essex representative on the Chittenden County Communications Union District Board – Hubie Norton
The Selectboard interviewed Hubie Norton to serve as the Essex representative on the Chittenden County Communications Union District Board. The candidate introduced himself and spoke about

his interest in serving on the Board. He and the Selectboard discussed the term duration for this position, and the Selectboard said they would make an appointment at their December 16, 2024 meeting.

b. Discussion with Winooski Valley Park District

Nick Warner, Executive Director, and Jeff Theis, the Essex Trustee, of the Winooski Valley Parks District, presented the WVPD Annual Report. They provided a brief overview of the District, which includes 8 municipalities and a portfolio of over 1,700 acres of permanently conserved land across 18 public parks. Mr. Warner said that the participating municipalities supply over 80% of the funding for the district, which is used to fund the district's three staff. He spoke about leveraging grants and a significant number of volunteers to support the district. He also noted that they act as a fiscal agent for other nonprofits and serve as a contracted resources for member municipalities for activities such as trail maintenance. He spoke about number of significant flooding events that have occurred over the last several years, noting that they have learned a lot about water resiliency through those experiences. He spoke about the properties the District is in the process of acquiring, including a 29-acre parcel owned by the Town of Williston. Mr. Chamberlin asked whether the percentage the Town pays increases when the District acquires a new parcel, and Mr. Warner replied that the percentage the Town pays is determined by its equalized grand list and its population. Mr. Chamberlin asked if the District has done any contracting for the Town of Essex, and Mr. Warner replied that they have not to date. Mr. Watts thanked the District for playing such a significant role in the work on developing a canoe launch in the Town.

c. Presentation and discussion about municipal complex planning at 80 & 90 Upper Main Street

Chris Gendron, a project manager with Stantec, provided a presentation on an update for the municipal complex project on Upper Main Street. He said they are currently in the process of refining the project based on public input obtained earlier in the year through stakeholder engagement meetings and developing a final mater plan and a conceptual plan for the municipal complex itself. He spoke about results of a survey fielded on preferred alternatives for the complex and buildings. He spoke about architectural programming for the various buildings that would be part of the complex. He spoke about next steps, including presenting a final master plan, continuing to refine architectural programming, and noted that the next in-person engagement opportunity will be on December 11, 2024 at the Essex Town Hall. Ms. Delphia asked if they were considering three floors for a town office building, and Mr. Gendron replied that they are considering three floors to decrease the building's footprint and maximize efficiencies. Mr. Watts asked for a status update on the designation process, and Community Development Director Sonnick replied that it will take about a year to obtain that designation, given recent legislation. She said she is also working to obtain Village Center designation for the Town's historic center. She also noted that TIF district funding is still a potential option for funding, though the process is complex.

The following public comments were received:

- Hubert Norton asked whether the Town has considered wetland mitigation to better utilize the parcels where the project site is located. Mr. Gendon replied that mitigation is something that should be considered, though the process can be difficult.

Ms. Delphia asked about the number of survey respondents they are hoping to obtain, and Mr. Gendron replied that they are hoping to receive around 200 responses. He and Director Sonnick provided information on where the survey can be found. Mr. Chamberlin asked if all options require using the piece of land adjacent to the intersection, and Director Sonnick replied that all three options utilize that land and noted that VTrans would prefer the Town to start with the Billy Butler as the main access point instead of the midblock, given that it is already signalized. Mr. Watts noted that some of the plans utilize more land for the Fire Station than the Town owns, and Mr. Gendron replied that they have met with the owner of the adjacent parcel and had encouraging conversations about using part of that space in one of the options presented.

d. Consider approval of Susie Wilson Road Scoping Study recommendation

Public Works Director Martin and Ken Robie, a VTrans representative, spoke about this item. Director Martin noted that there are three projects in design in the Susie Wilson Corridor for traffic impact mitigation, and VTrans would like to move them from design to scoping. Mr. Robie said that projects are specifically for the Susie Wilson Road intersections with Route 15, Kellogg Road, and the Susie Wilson Road Corridor in between the two. He provided a brief overview of the project history and the reports and studies that pertain to the projects. He said the requests tonight are for the Selectboard to confirm support fore the Route 125 intersection preferred alternative, confirm support for the Corridor Conceptual Design, and select the preferred alternative for the Kellogg Road intersection. He provided a summary of the alternatives considered for the Route 15 intersection and associated traffic studies and the Selectboard discussed the preferred alternative. Jeff Bachiochi provided public comment and asked several questions about the alternatives considered for the Route 15 intersection project, and Mr. Robie and Director Martin provided responses. Mr. Robie then provided an overview of the Corridor Conceptual Design, which the Selectboard discussed briefly. Mr. Robie then provided a summary of each of the four alternatives considered for the Kellogg Road intersection. He noted that Alternatives #2 and #3 are the best options for operational improvements at the intersection, and Alternative #2 is the recommended preferred alternative because it has the highest level of safety improvement for the intersection. The Selectboard discussed the alternatives. Mr. Bachiochi provided public comment saying that restricting access to the neighborhood in order to accommodate peak traffic doesn't seem fair and said that alternatives should consider impacts to pedestrian access. He also suggested that a roundabout should be considered. Mr. Robie acknowledged that restricted access is a disadvantage of that alternative, but it remains the preferred alternative for operational and safety improvements at the intersection. He added that if none of the options are ultimately palatable to the Selectboard, they can decide not to build.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard reaffirm the preferred alternatives for the Susie Wilson Road (SWR) and VT Route 15 intersection and that the Selectboard change the preferred alternative for the Susie Wilson Road and Kellogg Road intersection to Alternative #3 Cluster Intersection, and the Susie Wilson corridor realignment. The motion passed 5-0.

e. Consider approval of charter amendment articles for submission to the Town Clerk

Ms. Delphia began by noting that these relate to the seven articles discussed at the Selectboard's November 4, 2024 meeting, and that two public hearings were warned for December 16, 2024 and January 6, 2025. Ms. Hill-Fleury noted that requests have come from the Energy Committee and the Conservation & Trails Committee that they would both like to become commissions and asked whether that needs to be effected through a charter change or just an article on the ballot. Ms. Delphia replied that if it is allowable via the charter, the Selectboard could vote to make that occur, or they could put an article on the ballot for the voters to decide.

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, that the Selectboard approve the final versions of the Town of Essex charter amendment articles for official filing with the Town Clerk. The motion passed 5-0.

f. Discussion about 2025 Town Meeting preparation

Town Manager Duggan said this item pertains to an annual discussion about plans for Town Meeting Day 2025, including whether the Selectboard would like to hold an information meeting the Monday prior to Town Meeting Day and hold the Town Showcase, as well as whether to preview articles on the ballot for early voters. Ms. Hill-Fleury suggested that whoever caters the meal should also be in charge of clean-up. Ms. Delphia asked whether the estimate of 150 people at the community meal is high, given that attendance last year was slightly lower than 100 people. Ms. Hill-Fleury also noted that the Selectboard hasn't decided on whether it will mail ballots, and also noted that the round tables are difficult to sit at for people with limited mobility. She expressed support for the showcase event. Mr. Chamberlin asked if there is more of an opportunity for surveys, and Ms. Delphia suggested having an electronic tablet with a survey available to fill out at the event, rather than paper copies. Selectboard members expressed support for the middle school location and asked if it is possible to have better audio/visual systems in place in time for Town Meeting Day.

g. Work session on Fiscal Year 2026 budget

Town Manager Duggan noted that this item relates to soliciting input from the Selectboard on overall budget goals for FY26 and whether they would like to make any initial adjustments to the budget. Finance Director Roy began by noting minor changes in the FY26 budget since last week's all-day budget workshop, which represent a combined increase of $46,133 from the original presentation and brings the total tax increase to 8.13% (from 7.85% in the original presentation). The Selectboard discussed the increase in the Community Outreach line of the Police budget, which went from $58,250 to $88,000, due to a cut to the Howard Center in State funding that has placed the cost burden on several municipalities that use the Center's street outreach services. Director Roy also spoke about several debt items that they were not able to discuss at the all-day budget workshop, which include the $345,000 in the Police budget for a police facility, and moving a line item for a police vehicle to reside solely within the Police operating budget. He then spoke about revenue items, include property tax revenue, interest income of $350,000, the use of $250,000 in fund balance, PILOT revenue of $12,800, Act 60 revenue of $4,500, Act 68 revenue of $58,000 (but this could increase), and revenue received from tax penalties and sales. Ms. Hill-Fleury asked where funds received from tax sales are allocated, and Director Roy replied that all interest revenue from tax sales is already accounted for in budget assumptions, and that the funds go into the General Fund.

Ms. Hill-Fleury asked whether the Town has to honor Green Mountain Transit's budget ask, if GMT cannot guarantee bus service. Mr. Watts replied that the Town must give a year's notice to GMT of any changes in membership, so the Town is obligated to pay them for FY26, but that

GMT would lower their fees if they cut service. Ms. Hill-Fleury noted that Essex Rescue continues to ask for more funding and doesn't show outward signs of attempts at fundraising, nor have they added representative seats on their board. She expressed concern about having no say in their spending. Town Manager Duggan said he is more comfortable with a modest increase (like what is being proposed) than a number of years of no increases and then very sudden and significant increases. He suggested the possibility of drafting a memorandum of understanding to set expectations with Essex Rescue. Ms. Hill-Fleury also suggested that the Selectboard discuss ending the stipend program.

Mr. Lawrence spoke about Essex Rescue (as the Essex representative on their board), noting that they continue to struggle with workforce challenges and that there may be a time where they aren't viable as a small corporation and EMS services will need to be taken in-house by the Town. He also asked about police salaries and the allowance for vacancies, and Town Manager Duggan replied that it is only in patrol, and is 10%. Mr. Lawrence suggested allowing for a higher percentage of vacancies, rather than underspending in line items and banking excess revenue in the fund balance. Mr. Watts noted that beginning this year with the police agreement, fund balances associated with the police department had to be refunded to the City. Town Manager Duggan said that staff would put together an analysis of the historical average of funding and vacancies for the Police Department budget to inform future budget discussions with the Selectboard. He also clarified that the Town attempts to budget as closely as possible to actuals and does not intentionally increase taxes to grow the fund balance.

Mr. Chamberlin echoed Mr. Lawrence's sentiments, noting that the Town often budgets for positions but struggles to fill them across a number of departments. He also spoke about increased capital transfers but a reluctance to increase the capital tax rate, noting that the tax covers half of capital costs. Ms. Delphia said that the updated tax rates will depend partly on the results of the reassessment, so it may be prudent to wait until after the reassessment to determine what the capital tax rate should be.

Mr. Lawrence spoke about the Fire Department budget, recommending reducing the $7,500 line item for professional services to $2,500 and reduced the proposed 61% increase in part-time salaries to 39%, for a savings of around $55,000. Town Manager Duggan said that part of the part-time salary increase is due to a lack of interest in volunteer services and lackluster call response and trying to incentivize a higher call response.

h. *Discussion about contracts

See item #8a below.

7. <u>READING FILE</u>

a. Board member comments: Ms. Delphia thanked Deb Flannery for her service on the Housing Commission and thanked Ian Carroll for his thoughts on the DRB and Planning Commission overlap.
b. Upcoming meeting schedule
c. Email from Ian Carroll re: Planning Commission and Development Review Board crossover
d. Fire Department impact fee study
e. Housing Commission Resignation – Deb Flannery

8. <u>EXECUTIVE SESSION</u>

a. *An executive session is anticipated to discuss contracts

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard make the specific finding that general public knowledge of contracts would place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. The motion passed 5-0.

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss contracts, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(A) to include the Town Manager, Deputy Town Manager, and Assessor. The motion passed 5-0 at 120:03 P.M.

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to exit executive session. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:46 P.M.

9. <u>ADJOURN</u>

DAWN HILL-FLURY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:46 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt,
Recording Secretary

Approved this __2nd____ day of _December___, 2024
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)

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Kendall Chamberlin, Selectboard Clerk