



Town of Essex

Selectboard

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Regular Meeting AGENDA

Monday, January 6, 2025 – 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. **PUBLIC HEARING - 6:35 PM**
 - a. Second of two public hearings on proposed amendments to the Town of Essex Charter
6. **CONSENT ITEMS**
 - a. Approve minutes: December 16, 2024
 - b. Approve check warrants: # 18248- 12/13/24; #_ 18250- 12/20/24
 - c. Consider approval of proclamation in support of Arbor Day
 - d. Consider approval of purchase of replacement vehicle for Parks and Recreation Truck 34
7. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Consider adopting amendments to the Town of Essex Charter
 - b. Discussion with Green Mountain Transit about fiscal year 2026 dues and anticipated service levels
 - c. Consider approval of Fiscal Year 2024 fund balance assignments
 - d. Discussion of Fiscal Year 2026 capital budget and five-year plan
 - e. Discussion of Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget adjustments since December 16, 2024 Meeting
 - f. Consider adopting Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget and warning public hearing
 - g. Consider adopting Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Budget and warning public hearing
 - h. Consider appointing two Selectboard members to meet with two Essex Junction City Councilors about the future management of the Tree Farm Recreational Facility
 - i. * Discussion and potential action about evaluation of the Town Manager
8. **READING FILE**
 - a. Board member comments
 - b. Upcoming meeting schedule
 - c. Act 68 of 2023 Legislative Report on Vermont Reappraisals
 - d. Letter to Vermont Department of Taxes re: Local Option Tax Follow-up and Action Requested
 - e. Email re: Tree Farm Management Group 501(c)(3) Status Update
 - f. 2024 Equalization Study Results
9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
 - a. * An executive session may be requested to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public employee
10. **ADJOURN**

Certification:  1/3/25

SELECTBOARD

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TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF MEETING January 6, 2025

SELECTBOARD: Tracey Delphia, Chair; Andy Watts, Vice Chair; Kendall Chamberlin, Clerk; Dawn Hill-Fleury, Ethan Lawrence.

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Town Manager; Charles Cole, Fire Chief; Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Manager; Aaron Martin, Director of Public Works; Thomas Richards, Deputy Fire Chief; Daniel Roy, Finance Director; Stephen Trenholm, Assistant Fire Chief.

OTHERS PRESENT: Paul Bohne, Clayton Clark (GMT), Ken Signorello, Irene Wrenner.

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

Mr. Chamberlin requested moving item #6d from the consent agenda to the deliberative agenda. Mr. Watts requested reordering the agenda so that the consent agenda is voted on prior to the public hearings.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to amend the agenda to move Consent Items to be #5 and move the Public Hearing to be #6 and move Consent Item #6d to be Business Item #7i. The motion passed 5-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items not on Deliberative Agenda

Ken Signorello requested that the Selectboard and staff set a goal to provide better training to Town staff and committee chairs for Town-related technology and software, citing a recent issue a committee was having with Zoom and holding its publicly warned meeting. Town Manager Duggan noted that this could be included in the staff and representative training handbook that is being developed.

5. CONSENT ITEMS

a. Approve minutes: December 16, 2024

b. Approve heck warrants: #18248 – 12/13/2024; #18250 – 12/20/2024

c. Consider approval of proclamation in support of Arbor Day

d. Consider approval of purchase of replacement vehicle for Parks and Recreation Truck 34
now Business Item #7i

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion passed 5-0.

6. PUBLIC HEARING – 6:35 P.M.

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a. Second of two public hearings on proposed amendments to the Town of Essex Charter
Ms. Delphia opened the second public hearing on the seven proposed charter amendments.

There was no public comment.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to close the public hearing. The motion passed 5-0.

7. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Consider adopting amendments to the Town of Essex Charter

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard adopt the amendments as presented to be voted on Town Meeting Day. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Discussion with Green Mountain Transit about Fiscal Year 2026 dues and anticipated service levels

Clayton Clark, General Manager of Green Mountain Transit (GMT), and Paul Bohne, Essex representative and Treasurer on the GMT Board, spoke to this item, which relates to GMT assessments and service levels for Fiscal Year 2026. Mr. Clark began by speaking about the FY26 assessment for the Town of Essex, which is increasing by 29% (or approximately \$20,000) over Fiscal Year 2025's assessment amount. He said that this is being driven by a 4% increase in fixed route costs, a 2% increase in capital costs, an increase for Essex of 67% in paratransit costs, and a GMT special assessment. He said that they are devoting the special assessment funds on initiatives to address and improve GMT's fiscal health. He noted that the special assessment requires all municipalities' legislative bodies to unanimously approve it prior to the assessment taking place. He also spoke about service, noting that he anticipates the #10 route surviving FY26 reductions but that its existence in FY27 and FY28 is less likely if GMT's fiscal situation does not improve. He said that he does not anticipate the legislature acting to create a dedicated funding source for GMT during this legislative session, which means that funding levels will be determined by how much VTrans will distribute to GMT and other public transit entities. Mr. Watts noted that the Town is required to fund GMT's budget request due to the requirements of the Town's membership in GMT. Mr. Lawrence asked if Essex can condition future year membership in GMT on whether the #10 bus route still exists in future years, and Mr. Clark replied that he would need to check with GMT's legal team prior to responding. Mr. Clark noted that GMT staff will be providing its recommendations to its board for further reductions, which the board will vote on in February. Ms. Delphia asked about the timeline for holding a vote on the special assessment, and Mr. Clark replied that it would be good for the vote to occur sooner rather than later.

c. Consider approval of Fiscal Year 2024 fund balance assignments

Finance Director Roy began by noting the total General Fund balance for Fiscal Year 2024 of \$6,188,017 across the nonspendable, restricted, assigned, and unassigned fund balances. He said the Selectboard's discussion and deliberation tonight will focus on the assignment of funds within the assigned fund balance and determining the amount of the unassigned fund balance, which is currently 15% of FY25's operating budget, or \$2,415,963. He said that within the \$2.54 million in assigned funds, there are a number of previously committed one-time funding line items that total

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approximately \$1.8 million. He noted that staff are proposing to use \$250,000 of funds committed to future tax reduction to instead cover a reduction in capital transfers from the FY26 operating budget. He said that \$647,352 of the \$2.4 million in assigned fund balance still needs to be committed and presented management's recommendations for potential commitments. These include funds for a CATMA transportation study, 3 pedestrian crossings, a recreation needs assessment, a Landfill Fund replenishment, health & wellness, and transfers to the capital fund for public works equipment, fire vehicles, and road reconstruction. Mr. Lawrence expressed concern with using fund balance to cover a reduction in capital transfers, given that a proposed increased capital tax failure in future could lead to a shortage of \$250,000 that would need to be found elsewhere. He said he would be more comfortable using one-time funding for one-time purchases. Ms. Delphia said that the Town is much less reliant on using one-time funds for ongoing expenses than it had been in the past. Ms. Hill-Fleury and Mr. Chamberlin expressed concern with the high proposed amount for the Recreation Needs Assessment. Finance Director Roy said his strong recommendation would be to move away from funding capital through operating transfers but fund it more through capital tax revenue. Mr. Chamberlin agreed. Mr. Watts said he agrees with staff's proposed assignments.

The following public comments were received:

- Ken Signorello said that some of the proposed assignments do not seem to be one-time funding needs, which is concerning. He also noted that the surplus to be assigned represents approximately 4% of the budget, and asked why the voters don't weigh in on this even though they weigh in on the overall budget. He asked that the surplus be incorporated into the FY26 budget as surpluses and proposed assignments. Ms. Delphia said that they are listed in the budget and that based on statutory authority and Selectboard deliberation, the public has the ability to provide input and feedback on funding allocations. She added that the Selectboard will take this feedback into consideration when making changes to the fund balance policy.

Mr. Chamberlin noted that a number of constituents have requested that the Town stop using fund balance to artificially lower the tax rate, and to put the fund balance into capital or to fund one-time costs. Ms. Delphia said she would rather see fund balance go toward capital than to artificially decrease the tax rate.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard approve new fund balance assignments totaling \$647,352 as recommended by staff. The motion passed 4-1 (Mr. Lawrence dissenting).

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, that the Selectboard reassign \$250,000 of funds previously assigned for future tax reduction to the FY26 capital budget. The motion passed 4-1 (Mr. Lawrence dissenting).

d. Discussion of Fiscal Year 2026 capital budget and five-year plan

Finance Director Roy provided an overview of the FY26 capital budget. He began by noting the beginning FY26 capital budget revenue fund balance of \$3.07 million, and that after applying capital tax funding, operating and fund balance transfers, and adding in other funding sources, the capital budget funding total approximately \$5.825 million. He then spoke about the main

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categories of FY26 expenditures (buildings, municipal complex, highways, capital equipment, parks, sidewalks/paths/trails, stormwater, IT, natural resource management, and undesignated funds), totaling approximately \$2.79 million for the full fiscal year. He noted the highest needs in capital equipment, buildings (salt shed) and stormwater. He noted the projected expenses for Fiscal Years 26-30 for each of the main categories of expenditures and spoke briefly about each area. Mr. Chamberlin recommended eliminating the replacement of the sidewalk plow and that the Town should look into contracting out its sidewalk maintenance and reassigning personnel to the highway department. Town Manager Duggan noted that the sidewalk maintenance is done by personnel without CDLs, which are required for more of the highway positions, so a reassignment may not be easy in some instances. Finance Director Roy then noted that over the course of five years, the capital budget is anticipated to receive \$11.8 million in revenues and incur \$13.8 million in expenditures, and that the expected overall capital fund balance at the end of FY30 is projected at \$1.09 million. Mr. Chamberlin said he would like to see what capital tax rate is required to fund this capital plan and said that the projected ending capital fund balance of \$1.09 million is too low. Deputy Town Manager Adams noted that this capital plan assumes a capital tax rate of 3 cents (current tax rate) and assumes incorporated changes from the reappraisal. Mr. Chamberlin asked if the Town has the ability to project capital replacements out further than five years in the capital plan, and Finance Director Roy noted that the vehicle replacement schedule is projected out to 2041 and noted that this model assumes a 3% annual inflationary factor and a 10% assumption for trade-in values.

e. Discussion of Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget adjustments since December 16, 2024 Meeting

Deputy Town Manager Adams reviewed the changes in the FY26 municipal budget since the Selectboard's December 16, 2024, meeting, which include reductions in Library Department line items related to technology subscriptions, adult collection, and technology supplies, and reductions in Fire Department line items related to part times salaries (and corresponding Social Security costs). She noted that these reductions total \$34,729, and when taken into account, lead to an overall increase on the tax rate from FY25 to FY26 of 4.76%. Ms. Hill-Fleury thanked staff for their work to reduce the overall increase, and said she is more supportive of this version of the budget. Mr. Lawrence continued to express concern about the use of fund balance to reduce capital transfers, and said there are other small items that can be reduced in the budget that would add up to a meaningful amount and yield less of a tax increase. Town Manager Duggan noted that the actuals came in at 98.5% of the budget, which is very close, from his perspective. Mr. Chamberlin expressed concern about reductions to the Library Department, given that the Town has one of the lowest-funded libraries in the county. He also asked that the Fire Department and EMTs think about future state, given escalating costs. Fire Chief Cole replied that nationwide, fire services have had to become geared toward all-hazard services, not just fire-related services. He spoke about the high call volumes and strained resources of the Fire Department and noted that the majority of staff costs for the Fire Department are stipends because they are volunteers. He noted that the State is contemplating EMS coverage at the statewide level.

f. Consider adopting Fiscal Year 2026 Municipal Budget and warning public hearing

DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard adopt the Fiscal Year 2026 General Fund budget and warn a public hearing for Fiscal Year

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2026 General Fund budget in the amount of \$16,531,276 to be held January 27, 2025. The motion passed 3-2 (Mr. Chamberlin and Mr. Lawrence dissenting).

g. Consider adopting Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Budget and warning public hearing

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard adopt the Fiscal Year 2026-2030 Capital Budget Five-Year Plan and warn a public hearing for January 27, 2025. The motion passed 3-2 (Mr. Chamberlin and Mr. Lawrence dissenting).

h. Consider appointing two Selectboard members to meet with two Essex Junction City Councilors about the future management of the Tree Farm Recreational Facility
Town Manager Duggan said the Essex Junction City Council is also interested in extending the lease to the Tree Farm Management Group, and they have nominated City Councilors Raj Chawla and Marcus Certa to work with two Selectboard members to establish goals for the renewed lease. Ms. Hill-Fleury and Mr. Lawrence volunteered to meet with the two City Councilors on this topic. Other Selectboard members supported this decision. Ms. Delphia requested that the two Selectboard members report back to the full Selectboard to keep them informed on progress and status.

i. Consider approval of purchase of replacement vehicle for Parks and Recreation Truck 34
was Consent Item #6d

Mr. Chamberlin noted that given the cost of this vehicle, it warrants its own discussion at the Selectboard. He asked if there was any analysis conducted about departmental needs and whether this vehicle purchase best meets the needs of the department. Town Manager Duggan replied that it would be replacing the same type of vehicle that is currently in use. Deputy Town Manager Adams noted that this vehicle is shared between Public Work and Parks & Recreation and said that perhaps there could be some cost-sharing across departments. Mr. Lawrence pointed out that Parks & Recreation helps Public Works frequently in the winter related to snow removal and asked for more information about the current vehicle and purchase vehicle. Public Work Director Martin spoke about how Parks & Recreation has augmented Public Works for many years with plowing activities and that the truck in question is used for that purpose in the winter but is used for parks maintenance in other seasons.

KENDALL CHAMBERLIN made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard approve the purchase of a replacement for Parks and Recreation vehicle Truck 34. The motion passed 5-0.

j. *Discussion and potential action about evaluation of the Town Manager

Ms. Delphia said this item pertains to the standards that are used in the evaluation of the Town Manager. She noted that Town Manager Duggan has requested changing the scoring format to allow for scoring on quarter-point increments, which aligns with the scoring format used for other Town Employees.

The following public comments were received:

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- Ken Signorello suggested that the evaluation also include feedback from appointed committees and commissions on Town Manager performance.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard approve the Evaluation standards for the Town Manager (with changes to modify the scoring format), and direct staff to begin the evaluation process for the Manager. The motion passed 5-0.

8. READING FILE

- a. Board member comments: Mr. Chamberlin congratulated the Tree Farm Management Group for achieving their 501(c)(3) status. Dawn Hill-Fleury congratulated Ian Carroll and Sharon Zukowski on being the new chair and vice-chair (respectively) of the Development Review Board. Ms. Delphia noted that there will be a Coffee With Committees event this coming Saturday from 10:00-12:00 at Uncommon Coffee.
- b. Upcoming meeting schedule
- c. Act 68 of 2023 Legislative Report on Vermont Reappraisals
- d. Letter to Vermont Department of Taxes re: Local Option Tax Follow-up and Action Requested
- e. Email re: Tree Farm Management Group 501(c)(3) Status Update
- f. 2024 Equalization Study Results

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION

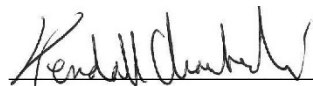
- a. *An executive session may be requested to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public employee
None held.

10. ADJOURN

DAWN HILL-FLURY made a motion to adjourn, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE. The motion passed 5-0 at 9:35 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt,
Recording Secretary

Approved this __27th__ day of __January__, 2025
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)



Kendall Chamberlin, Selectboard Clerk