SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY MARCH 3, 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 Manager; Daniel Roy, Finance Director; John Sonnick, Moderator
OTHERS PRESENT: Mike Arthur, Maria Beckett, Maegan Beckage, Rep. Alyssa Black, Anna Brouillette, Grant Corson, Dan Coulter, Annie Davis, Betsy Dunn, Eric Sven Eklof, Gina Halpin Barrett, Kristen Hayden-West, Brian & Jenna Hsiang, Rep. Rey Garofano, Jody Gendron, Anna Gonzolez, Michelle Goodell, Elly Grover, Jerry Himelstein, Linda Himelstein, John Larkin, Suzanne Lawrence, Suzanne Levine, Sara Lott, Shannon Jackson, Andrew & Laura Johnson, Megan Johnson, William Keithcart, Bob Lalancette, Nick Martin, Sebastian McCabe, Martha McLaughlin, Chris Moldovan, Guy Morin, Rebecca Ophardt, April Peteresen, Jeanne & Ronald Piro, Allan Ramsay, Larry Ransom, Lauren Ressue, Ed Sharp, Katerine & Kevin Shattuck, Ken Signorello, Lynn Smith, Margaret Smith, Dick Somerset, Sarah Strauss, Sherry Norton, Francine & Richard Page, Joseph Teegarden, Eve Thorsen Duff, Carl Von Stritzky, Becky Walsh, Kim & Rod Williams, Irene Wrenner, Carolyn, Kristi

Mr. Sonnick, Town Moderator, said that the Scouting America Troop 635 would lead the presentation of the colors, and that Essex High School student Nathan Bates would sing the national anthem. He thanked the Girl Scouts for greeting residents and Essex Middle School staff for their assistance with setup. Mr. Sonnick requested that everyone participating via Zoom use the "raise hand" feature. He introduced the Selectboard, Administration, and local representatives. Ms. Hill-Fleury read the Invocation of Civility.

1. CALL TO ORDER
Ms. Delphia called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 7:30 PM. She said that Mr. Sonnick would be running the remainder of the meeting.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES
None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA
No changes, thus no approval required.

4. PUBLIC HEARING
a. Review and discuss: Article I: Shall the Town adopt a budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026 as recommended by the Selectboard in the amount of $16,365,963?
Ms. Delphia opened the public hearing and requested that the following three articles be discussed together. She discussed the proposed budget, stating that the Selectboard did not set an arbitrary budget increase percentage this year. The proposed budget will keep current municipal services in operation. Capital transfers from the operating budget have been decreased, and $250,000 of fund balance will be used to remediate this. Ms. Delphia discussed potential staffing changes in the budget. Fund balance of $90,000 will also be used for a recreation needs assessment ($40,000), three pedestrian crosswalks on VT Route 15 ($45,000) and the Chittenden Area Transportation Management Association Transportation Study ($5,000). Ms. Delphia highlighted proposed expenditures in the FY26 budget. She said that the human services funding is 1% of the proposed operating budget and will be voted on separately on the ballot this year. This amount has previously been included in the general fund budget. The total proposed budget is $16,365,963, without taking human services funding into consideration. This is a 1.61% increase, or 4.1% increase to the

tax levy. This would be an increase of $65 yearly to the "average" taxpayer. These figures do not include the capital tax rate. Ms. Delphia detailed the municipal services available through taxes. Ms. Delphia discussed focus areas when vetting the human services applications and said that twenty-four organizations received funding last year.

In Article III, an increase in revenue for capital needs would be applied to Public Works/Fire Vehicles and Equipment and the Stormwater fund. All of these are expected to be in the negative by FY30 unless something is done. An increase of 2 cents would raise an additional $324,840 of capital funding in FY26 for a total of $812,100.

Mr. Sonnick requested public comments. Ms. McGlaughlin asked if individuals might be able to donate extra from their taxes to be allocated for human services so that individuals can give based on what they have to give. Mr. Roy said that the human services fund would be a separate accounting fund, which could have a donation element in the future.

b. Review and discuss: Article II: Shall the Town of Essex vote to appropriate an amount equal to 1% of the General Fund Budget, as passed by voters, to the Essex Human Services Contributions Fund to support social service organizations, such amount being reasonably necessary and for the support of programs to benefit Town of Essex residents?
Discussed above.

c. Review and discuss: Article III: Shall the Town of Essex increase the Capital Reserve Fund by adding two cents to the tax rate, in addition to the three cents previously authorized, for the purpose of financing capital projects and equipment?
Discussed above.

d. Review and discuss: Article IV: Shall the Town of Essex amend its charter to provide a clearer description of the role of Town Moderator?
Ms. Delphia said that she will be speaking about all charter changes concurrently. In Article 4, changes are proposed to the role of the Town Moderator considering the changes to the format of Town Meeting. In Article 5, the current charter states that minutes must be approved at the next meeting, and this will be changed to "as soon as reasonably possible." In Article 6, appointment of Cemetery Commissioners will be done by the Selectboard and several outdated elected and appointed positions will be removed. Regarding Article 7, the annual town report will be made available at least 10 days prior to the town meeting. Regarding Article 8, Real Estate Appraisal will be referred to as Assessment. Article 9, "transacting business" will be removed from the description of Town Meeting, as ballot items are voted upon via Australian ballot. Article 10 includes various minor edits.

Mr. Sonnick requested public comment. Mr. Watts clarified that passing Article 7 will mean that the Annual Report is not mailed to all residents, but that a postcard stating that it is available with directions on how to obtain it will be. Ms. Goodell asked if that state legislature would need to approve the charter changes, Ms. Delphia responded affirmatively. Ms. Margaret Smith said that she was on the Charter Committee and felt that she did not understand the amendments as written in the Annual Report. Ms. Delphia said that the charter will be available in full at the polls tomorrow. Mr. Sonnick asked for an estimate on how much money will be saved by not mailing annual reports, Mr. Roy said a little over $10,000.

e. Review and discuss: Article V: Shall the Town of Essex amend its charter to change the timing of approval of Selectboard minutes?
Discussed above.

f. Review and discuss: Article VI: Shall the Town of Essex amend its charter to change the appointments made by the Selectboard and the Town Manager?
Discussed above.

g. Review and discuss: Article VII: Shall the Town of Essex amend its charter to require a mailed notice to residents regarding the availability of the Town Auditor's report and Annual Report?
Discussed above.

h. Review and discuss: Article VIII: Shall the Town of Essex amend its charter to amend Subchapter 10: Department of Real Estate Appraisal?
Discussed above.

i. Review and discuss: Article IX: Shall the Town of Essex amend its charter to remove the description of transacting business for Annual Meeting that is now voted on by Australian ballot?
Discussed above.

j. Review and discuss: Article X: Shall the Town of Essex amend its charter for de minimis changes that include wording, formatting and spelling?
Discussed above.

k. Announcement: Article XI: Election of the following: Moderator, 1 vacancy (1-year term); Selectboard, 2 vacancies (two 3-year terms); Champlain Water District Commissioner, 1 vacancy (3-year term)
Mr. Sonnick explained the elections and their terms. He requested public input, of which there was none.

5. <u>PUBLIC TO BE HEARD</u>
Mr. Sonnick requested public comment, of which there was none.

6. <u>ADJOURN</u>
DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, for the Selectboard to adjourn. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:15 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary