# TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
# REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
# MONDAY, MAY 5, 2025

**SELECTBOARD:** Tracey Delphia, Chair; Kendall Chamberlin, Vice-Chair; Shannon Jackson, Clerk; Ethan Lawrence; Andy Watts
**ADMINISTRATION and STAFF**: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Town Manager; Annie Costandi, Water Quality Director; Tammy Getchell, Public Information Officer/Assistant to the Manager; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Adriane Martin, Parks & Recreation Director; Dan Roy, Finance Director; Harlan Smith, Parks Superintendent
**OTHERS PRESENT**: Gina Halpin Barrett, Paul Bohne, Clayton Clark, Betsy Dunn, Hunter Eddy, William Keithcart, Robert Lalamette, Anne Miller, Garry Scott, Ken Signorello, David Skopin, Margaret Smith, Cheryl Van Epps, Chuck Vile, Doug Wilson, Michelle (online username)

## 1. CALL TO ORDER
Ms. Delphia called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

## 2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES
None.

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

## 4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD
### a. Comments from the Public on Items Not on Agenda
Mr. Skopin asked if the Selectboard can remove Development Review Board (DRB) members. Ms. Delphia said that a rationale from community members could be heard by the Selectboard if they have a concern about a member of any committee, and that removal is possible with cause. She suggested that Mr. Skopin first contact the chair of the DRB with his concerns. The Selectboard does not have the ability to appeal DRB decisions, and the DRB operates independently of the Selectboard. Ms. Dunn asked about recall, which Ms. Delphia said was only applicable to Selectboard members. Mr. Lalamette expressed traffic concerns about the proposed Amazon development. Ms. Delphia discussed the process of requesting a traffic study from the state and said that the Selectboard cannot weigh in on current development applications. Ms. Van Epps expressed concern about spongy moth invasives in her neighborhood, as well as the lack of attention that this has had on the local and state level. She also discussed bears and unfinished construction in Pinewood.

## 5. CONSENT ITEMS
**ETHAN LAWNRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to accept the consent agenda as presented. Motion passed 5-0.**

**a. Approve minutes: April 21, 2025**
**b. Approve check warrants: # 18272 - 4/18/25; # 18273 - 04/25/2**

## 6. BUSINESS ITEMS
### a. Interview of a volunteer to serve on the Conservation & Trails Committee - Betsy Dunn
Ms. Dunn said that she is a nurse and previous state legislator who has enjoyed serving on the Conservation and Trails Committee (CTC). Answering a question from Mr. Jackson, Ms. Dunn detailed the different projects that she has worked on during her tenure on the committee. Mr. Lawrence said that some projects

need to be reviewed by the manager prior to implementation, and asked Ms. Dunn if she was aware of what needs staff review. Ms. Dunn and Mr. Watts discussed the memorial bench program. Appointments will be made at the second meeting in June.

**b. Interview of a volunteer to serve on the Conservation & Trails Committee - Ken Signorello**
Mr. Signorello provided an overview of his work on the CTC, and said that he has served as Chair for the last two years. He has served for almost four years on the CTC. Mr. Signorello said that the CTC would like to provide advisement to the Selectboard in more situations. Answering a question from Mr. Lawrence, Mr. Signorello said that the CTC is working on editing the Indian Brook, Saxon Hill, and Tree Farm Forest Management Plans, as well as developing plans for other town-owned properties. He feels that his greatest accomplishment is enabling his members to work on their projects. He discussed his definition of service to the public. Appointments will be made during the second meeting in June.

**c. Consider reappointment of Tree Warden - Chuck Vile**
Mr. Vile is a retired state forester and said that he enjoys his position as a Tree Warden. He said that he handles public complaints quickly. He has been serving as Tree Warden since 1980. The Tree Warden is responsible for trees within the right-of-way and on public land.

**SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to reappoint Chuck Vile as Tree Warden for the Town of Essex.**

Mr. Lawrence said that he would like to hear from the member of the public who made a complaint prior to voting. Ms. Van Epps said that she gave Mr. Vile a tour of the affected area and he connected her with state resources.

**Motion passed 5-0.**

**d. Consider approval of 1st and 3rd class liquor license renewal application**
Mr. Duggan said that the taxes for some of the properties remain delinquent. Mr. Jackson said that it would be helpful to look at the applicant's taxes, rather than the landowner. Mr. Duggan discussed the ownership complications between property and business ownership. Mr. Jackson said that he would like to see a clear process for handling these issues. Staff have been researching this issue and the goal is to have a clear and defined process by next spring.

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that Selectboard approve the liquor license renewal applications for businesses located in the Town of Essex listed in the May 1, 2025 memorandum re: "Liquor License Applications. Motion passed 4-1 with KENDALL CHAMBERLIN dissenting.**

**e. Discussion about Green Mountain Transit membership for Fiscal Year 2027**
Mr. Clark, General Manager at Green Mountain Transit (GMT), and Mr. Bohne, Essex representative to GMT presented. Mr. Clark said that GMT has reduced operations by about a million dollars a year. He said that the cost per ride for the #10 bus, which runs through Essex, is the highest in the system. Essex will need to provide GMT with a year's notice should they wish to stop being a GMT member. Essex would be able to rejoin GMT without a community vote if they change their mind during this year. Mr. Lawrence discussed this as a preventative step in case GMT is not able to get additional funds from the state to maintain Essex's bus service. Mr. Clark discussed options, other than membership, which could allow Essex to receive GMT services. The #10 bus had 100,000 rides last year. The #10 bus currently serves some students

at the Essex Westford School District, and this may be funded through the school district if town service is eliminated. Mr. Clark said that he hopes that improvements to the circulation on the #10 bus can increase student ridership. Mr. Scott, Interim Director of Operations for EWSD, said that around 1,100 student riders per month utilize GMT buses. He said that buses have been helpful in mitigating chronic absenteeism. The GMT buses are also helpful for getting students to and from extracurricular activities. Ms. Delphia requested public comment. Ms. Halpin Barrett expressed support for the GMT buses for student transport. Staff will research funding options that other municipalities utilize to continue to receive GMT services should Essex decide to discontinue their membership.

**f. Consider approval of Human Services Funding recommendations for fiscal year 2025 and focus areas for fiscal year 2026**

Ms. Getchell said that $161,064 has been approved for human services. She discussed scoring components, noting that those organizations which demonstrated a need for funding and who directly benefit Essex residents are weighted higher. The Human Services Committee has recommended fully funding eleven out of the twenty-two applications. Mr. Jackson asked why COTS and the Howard Center were not funded. Ms. Getchell said that the Howard Center is funded in another part of the budget. Ms. Adams said that COTS requires that potential clients travel to Burlington to receive services, which makes it more difficult for Essex residents to access these. Mr. Watts said that the Heavenly Pantry utilizes the Rotary Club as a pass-through organization and asked if all members are comfortable with this. Ms. Getchell provided some historical background and said that legal review has been carried out. Organizations were required to describe how funding was used in the previous year. This information can also be posted on the web for public review. Ms. Delphia requested public comment. Mr. Signorello suggested that each organization and their funding request be listed on the ballot. Ms. Miller said that fiscal sponsors are very common and that she does not believe that this should be a concern.

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to approve contributions to the human services agencies as presented on the attached list. Motion passed 5-0.**

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to approve the proposed focus areas for the FY26 funding cycle.**

Mr. Chamberlin requested that the phrase, “to equity” be removed from the Child and Family Support for Healthy Relationships section. Mr. Lawrence said that he wished to keep the word in to be in line with other town goals. Ms. Delphia requested public input, of which there was none.

**Motion passed 5-0.**

**g. Discussion and potential adoption of Fiscal Year 2026 goals and priorities for the Essex Parks & Recreation Program Fund**

Ms. Martin, Parks and Recreation Director, presented. She said that the program fund is an enterprise fund funded by users. She discussed the upcoming farmers market, and the balance the departments works to strike between free and paid events. She detailed the goals for the program fund, which involve multi-age programing, increasing participation, offering new opportunities, increasing revenue by 10% and maintaining popular events. Mr. Lawrence said that supporting recreation is very important. He suggested that credit card fees be discussed further at a future date. Answering a question from Mr. Jackson, Ms. Martin discussed efforts to hold a community survey and focus groups. Mr. Jackson encouraged Essex Parks & Recreation to enhance their non-sport offerings. Ms. Martin discussed Indian Brook accessibility and unofficial entrances. Mr. Watts asked about coordination with the library. Mr. Chamberlin discussed the complexities of the budget, and how the department does more than programs. Mr. Lawrence discussed funding allocation between the general fund and program fund. Ms. Delphia requested public input. Mr. Signorello expressed a desire for community gardens and charging fees for users on the Saxon Hill bike trails.

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to adopt FY26 goals and priorities for the EPR Program Fund as presented.**

Mr. Chamberlin said that he agreed that Mr. Signorello's points should be integrated into this document. Ms. Delphia said that she feels that those are work items, and that they fit into the broader goals.

**Motion passed 5-0.**

**h. Discussion and potential action to warn public hearing for Fiscal Year 2026 Water/Sewer Operating Budget**

Mr. Martin, Public Works Director, presented. He said that there is a water, sewer and shared account, and shared the proposed figures for each. Costs are estimated for the purchase of water from the Champlain Water District. The proposed water rate is $6.67/1,000 gallons. This is about a 4.8% increase. The proposed sewer rate is $12/1,000 gallons. This is a $3.46/month increase for the average user per month. The minimum charge for water is proposed to be raised from $210 annually to $240 annually. The average user will see a 4.91% increase overall. There is no change anticipated in connection fees. Mr. Martin said that the Capital Plan would be reviewed on May 19th but said that an additional $90,000 is anticipated to go into the reserve fund.

Mr. Chamberlin expressed concern about this year's budget. He is concerned that funds will be spent without a plan to increase revenue. Mr. Roy said that a small surplus has been built into this fund. Mr. Martin said that he believes that the Town has done a good job lining up funding for project needs. He said that he would like to see more money set aside for capital. Ms. Delphia requested public comment, of which there was none.

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard warn a public hearing for the proposed water and sewer budget on May 19, 2025. Motion passed 4-1, with KENDALL CHAMBERLIN dissenting.**

**i. Consider approval of Fund Balance Policy**

Mr. Roy said that staff has reviewed the concerns that the Selectboard brought up in April. No policy changes are proposed at this time. Mr. Lawrence said that he believes that the Selectboard's approval is meaningless because it is not binding. He suggested that this be discussed further, and all agreed to discuss it at a future meeting. Ms. Delphia requested public input. Mr. Signorello said that the school board requires voter approval for fund balance and said that he believes that the town should do the same.

**j. Discussion about confidential attorney-client communications and contracts**

This was discussed during Executive Session.

**k. Discussion about the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options**

This was discussed during Executive Session.

**8. <u>READING FILE</u>**

**a. Board Member Comments**: Mr. Jackson suggested that the minutes from advisory boards be included in the Selectboard packets going forward.

**b. Upcoming meeting schedule**

**c. Public Hearing Notice for Disaster Recovery Funding for FEMA Disaster Declaration 4720 for July 2023 Flooding**

**d. Chittenden Solid Waste District proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget**

**e. Updated Fire Impact Fee Ordinance Language**

**f. Fiscal Year 2026 Water/Sewer Capital Budget Materials**

**9. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**a. An executive session may be requested to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee**

Not discussed.

**b. An executive session occurred to discuss confidential attorney-client communications and contracts**

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard make the specific finding that general public knowledge of confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the body would place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed 5-0.**

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the body, and to discuss contracts, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(F) and 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.**

**c. An executive session occurred to discuss the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options**

**ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard make the specific finding that general public knowledge of the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options would place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed 5-0.**

**ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options, pursuant to 1 V.S.A.§ 313(a)(2), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.**

**ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to exit Executive Session. Motion passed 5-0 at 10:41 PM.**

**10. ADJOURN**

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, for the Selectboard to adjourn. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:41 PM.**

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary