

**SELECTBOARD  
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, AUGUST 4, 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; Tammy Getchell, Public Information Officer/Assistant to the Town Manager; Dan Roy, Finance Director; Harlan Smith, Assistant Director of Parks, Trails and Open Spaces; Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Walter Adams, Maya Balassa, Natalee Braun, Patty Davis, Betsy Dunn, Wafic Faour, Gina Halpin Barrett, Georgia Lavigne, Allison Levy, Sarah (Sally) Lincoln, Anne Miller, Bruce Post, Anita Rapone, Darren Schibler, Ken Signorello, David Skopin, Su Ughetti, Cheryl Van Epps, Lois Whitmore, Irene Wrenner, Lorraine Zaloom, Sharon Zukowski, Julian Ughetti, Laurel

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Tracey 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 Consent Items and Items Not on Agenda**

David Skopin expressed support for the Development Review Board's (DRB) decision on the Amazon warehouse and questioned communication between Amazon and the Selectboard. Walter Adams discussed the current fee structure, especially related to the new fire fees. Betsy Dunn said that the town of Essex should create a building inspector position and said that a second access is necessary for Birchwood Manor. Cheryl Van Epps expressed concern that zoning ordinances are not being appropriately followed. Lorraine Zaloom said that boards and commissions do not follow the existing regulations and said that there should not be crossover between the Planning Commission (PC) and DRB. Patty Davis discussed the legal penalties for boards which do not enforce local legislation.

**5. CONSENT ITEMS**

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to accept the consent agenda. Motion passed 5-0.**

**a. Approve minutes: July 14, 2025**

**b. Approve check warrants: #\_18285- 7/11/25; #\_ 18286- 7/18/25; # 18287- 7/25/25**

**c. Consider approval of Town Manager's appointment of Deputy Health Officer**

**6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Consider approval of fiscal year 2026 tax rates**

Dan Roy said that voters approved the raising of twelve million in revenue in March. The grand list has come in a little lower than expected, and the tax rate increase is 4.76%. The combined general, capital and local agreement rate is \$.7919 for all Town taxpayers. Selectboard approval is necessary to generate tax bills.

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS that the Selectboard set the tax rates for fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, as follows:**

**-General Fund Tax Rate: 0.07397**

**-Local Agreement Rate: 0.0022**

**-Capital Tax: 0.0500**

**Total Municipal Rate Paid by Taxpayers: 0.7919**

**Motion amended by ETHAN LAWRENCE to correct stated tax rate figures. Motion passed 5-0.**

**b. Consider opting into Act 181 Tier 1B status for recommended areas of Essex**

Georgia Lavigne, Vice-Chair of the PC and Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director, presented. K. Sonnick said that the PC has decided to request Act 181 Tier 1B status for Essex West and the Essex Town Center. These areas were chosen because they were previously allocated for development and due to high potential for pedestrian connectivity. Ethan Lawrence said that he does not agree with the restriction on commercial properties. G. Lavigne said that the town does not have the power to remove restrictions on commercial development, and that the PC aims to encourage residential development in these areas. Maya Balassa, Planner at the CCRPC said that this could possibly be changed in the future.

E. Lawrence expressed concern that this process has been rushed and that not enough public input has occurred. Darren Schibler, Senior Planner and Project Manager at the CCRPC, discussed the public engagement process. E. Lawrence said that he is concerned about the equity of this proposal and said that zoning designations should be sufficient. Answering a question from Shannon Jackson, D. Schibler said that this will help applicants to save on Act 250 fees and as well as expedite project timelines. Building codes and other local zoning will still be enforced even with this exemption. E. Lawrence said that the Act 250 process provides additional protection for residents, and that complaints can be better addressed than through the local review process. Sharon Zukowski said that Act 250 provides an essential independent review for projects. She said that many regulations are waived by the DRB. Accelerating housing does not make rents or home prices cheaper. L. Zaloom said that growth and transportation systems have not been aligned. Bruce Post said that he does not believe that this will assist with the creation of affordable housing and said that infrastructure concerns in existing neighborhoods should be addressed prior to building more homes. C. Van Epps spoke of wetland and natural resources destruction and said that the homes constructed through this method should be required to be affordable.

**ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by TRACEY DELPHIA, that the Selectboard sign the attached resolution requesting Tier 1B status for the areas recommended by the Planning Commission as shown in the attached maps. Motion failed 2-3, with SHANNON JACKSON, ETHAN LAWRENCE and KENDALL CHAMBERLIN voting in opposition.**

**c. Consider approval of Saxon Hill Forest Management Plan**

Harlan Smith, Assistant Director of Parks, Trails and Open Spaces presented the draft Saxon Hill Forest Management Plan. Answering a question from E. Lawrence, H. Smith detailed harvesting intervals and said that this will be overseen by the Trails Coordinator and state forester. The program will be cost neutral or slightly revenue-generating by the sale of firewood. In public comment, Ken Signorello, Chair of the Conservation and Trails Committee, recommended approval.

**SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, that the Selectboard adopt approve the Saxon Hill Forest Management Plan.**

**SHANNON JACKSON made an amendment to strike the word adopt and include the word approve. Motion passed 5-0.**

**d. Consider preliminary approval of Handbook for Boards, Committees and Commissions and their Staff Representatives**

Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Town Manager/Public Information Officer, presented. She said that changes discussed at previous meetings and changes to the Vermont Public Meeting regulations have been incorporated into this document. S. Jackson suggested that definitions and guidelines for ex-officio and non-voting members be included, E. Lawrence agreed. He also suggested that language be included stating that an individual chair cannot chair two committees. A. Watts said that he would vote against the handbook should this be included.

**SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, to add the language back in to state that one person cannot be the chair of two boards in our town.**

E. Lawrence asked for clarification that this would be compatible with state law. Greg Duggan said that he would like to get a legal opinion on the issue.

In public comment, Lois Whitmore said that allowing Selectboard members to join a committee could give the appearance of undue influence on what should be an advisory board. S. Zukowski said that making stricter rules is not overriding state law. She does not believe that the same person should be allowed to chair both the PC and DRB. K. Signorello said that he believes that this should be applicable for some committees but not all.

**Voting: Motion failed 2-3, with TRACEY DELPHIA, ANDY WATTS and KENDALL CHAMBERLIN in opposition.**

S. Jackson said that it would be helpful to allow volunteer minute-takers to post the minutes without going through staff. G. Duggan said that a skeleton version of the minutes can be posted if necessary to meet the deadlines. In public comment, K. Signorello pointed out inconsistencies between state law and common practice. He expressed concerns about the current staffing structure and the ability of staff to manage meetings. Anne Miller pointed out inconsistencies between the document and state law, and inconsistencies in the document itself. Irene Wrenner said that several committees and commissions have not had the opportunity to review this document. She felt that Selectboard members should not be able to influence advisory board votes and said that it is important to allow all committees to review this document prior to approval. All agreed. E. Lawrence suggested that a list of items that have been suggested to be changed at this evening be compiled and brought to the Selectboard later.

**e. Discussion about resolution proposed by resident**

T. Delphia said that both a formal draft resolution and other documentation has been submitted to the Selectboard. A. Watts clarified that Selectboard members are asked to swear allegiance to the state of Vermont constitution, but not the United States constitution. The Selectboard is prohibited from telling town employees, including police officers, how to do their job, as this is under the manager's purview. S. Jackson said that he wants to ensure that every member of the community feels safe and that their rights are protected. He is in support of working towards a resolution stating that Essex respects and protects the rights of all. E. Lawrence said that it is not the job of the Selectboard to circumvent the judicial process. He does not believe that this should be a Selectboard priority. K. Chamberlain said that this would be a good venue for a citizen's resolution at Town Meeting. He said that it is important for residents to be aware

of Essex's Declaration of Inclusion. T. Delphia and S. Jackson will work on drafting a document for future review. In public comment, Su Ughetti said that she is an immigrant is very concerned about federal overreach. Wafic Faour said that he is a Palestinian refugee and spoke in support of protecting the First Amendment and of fear in the immigrant community. Sarah (Sally) Lincoln said she is in support of this document as written. L. Zaloom spoke of the importance of public safety for all and better representation. Julian Ughetti said that the document as submitted contains specific examples and is not partisan.

**f. Discussion and consider preliminary approval of proposed Capital Projects Policy**

Karen Adams said that this document is an attempt to codify current practices and previously approved documents. She noted that this draft allows for capital item approval be carried over for one year. She discussed specific instances which would require managerial or Selectboard approval or notice. E. Lawrence said that he believes that the administrative and minor amendments need to be removed. He is concerned that this gives the town manager too much power and possibly the ability to purchase land without Selectboard approval. K. Adams said that the only projects the manager could elevate towards funding are projects that have already been included on the capital project list as approved by the Selectboard. E. Lawrence said that two people reached out to him with concerns about the manager's ability to reassign funding. T. Delphia said that this policy could help with taking the Selectboard out of minutiae and assist with moving already approved prioritized projects ahead. K. Adams said that projects are often estimated 18 months prior to construction and that this policy can assist with adjusting estimates. K. Chamberlin said that the manager should not have the authority to make changes to capital projects without collaboration with the Selectboard. It is important that capital projects not fall to one person. G. Duggan detailed the current policy for making changes to capital projects. K. Chamberlin spoke of the need for a short-term reserve for smaller replacements.

**g. Discussion and potential action on Selectboard "parking lot" work items for fiscal year 2026**

A. Watts said that he supports all the staff recommendations.

**ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion to add #14 as a medium priority. Not seconded; no vote .**

E. Lawrence questioned what type of action could be taken this evening, and how this issue was warned on the agenda. In public comment, K. Signorello suggested that Item #17 be addressed by the Conservation and Trails Committee. All agreed that this would be a good idea.

**h. Discussion about labor relations agreements with employees**

This was discussed during Executive Session.

**i. Discussion about pending or probable civil litigation**

This was discussed during Executive Session.

**7. READING FILE**

**a. Board Member Comments:** S. Jackson congratulated the Town of Essex Little League All-Stars on their recent regional win. K. Chamberlin commended the Fire Department and Public Works Department on their recent work and achievements.

**b. Upcoming Meeting Schedule**

**c. Finalized fiscal year 2026 Selectboard Work Plan**

**d. Memo re: Selectboard budget goals for fiscal year 2027**

**e. Police Community Survey Opportunity**

**f. Letter from Sharon Zukowski re: Approval of Tier 1B designation**

- 194 g. Letter from Essex Junction City Council re: support from Essex Fire Department  
195 h. River Road Forcemain Leak and Air Pocket Detection Project  
196 i. Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission Draft Future Land Use Map Version 2.0  
197 Available  
198 j. Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission July newsletter  
199

200 **8. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

201 a. An executive session is anticipated to discuss labor relations with employees  
202 ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard make the  
203 specific finding that general public knowledge of labor relations agreements with employees would  
204 place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed 5-0.  
205

206 ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard enter into  
207 executive session to discuss labor relations agreements with employees, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §  
208 313(a)(1)(B), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.  
209

210 b. An executive session is anticipated to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution,  
211 to which the public body is or may be a party  
212 ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, that the Selectboard make  
213 the specific finding that general public knowledge of pending or probable civil litigation or a  
214 prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party, would place the Town at a substantial  
215 disadvantage. Motion passed 5-0.  
216

217 ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard enter into  
218 executive session to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public  
219 body is or may be a party, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(E), to include the Town Manager and  
220 Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.  
221

222 ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to exit executive session. Motion  
223 passed 5-0 at 11:29 PM.  
224

225 **9. ADJOURN**

226 ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, for the Selectboard to adjourn.  
227 Motion passed 5-0 at 11:30 PM.  
228

229 Respectfully Submitted,  
230 Darby Mayville  
231 Recording Secretary  
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