

**SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 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; Joe Atherton, Interim IT Director; Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Hans Nedde, Trails Coordinator; Harlan Smith, Assistant Director of Parks, Trails and Open Spaces

OTHERS PRESENT: Kaitrin Arnot, Gina Halpin Barrett, Lauren Chicote, Bino Cummings, Adrian Dewinter, Steve Dowd, Tyler Durden, Marie Froeschl, Scott Hendrix, Ian Singleton, Margaret Smith, Jeff Theis, Janet Watts, Nick Warner, Jonathan Villeneuve, Irene Wrenner, Sharon Zukowski, Alex S. (screenname), Duke (screenname), Eliana (screenname)

Meeting Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kxnXgUo_FI

Times associated with each agenda item are approximate.

1. CALL TO ORDER (0:03)

Tracey Delphia called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES (0:18)

Greg Duggan requested that Item 6g, "Consider approval of contract for electronic document management," be removed from the agenda.

3. APPROVE AGENDA (0:46)

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to remove Item 6g from the agenda. Motion passed 5-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD (1:07)

a. Comments from the Public on Consent Items and Items Not on Agenda

Irene Wrenner said that she is concerned that seventy-nine e-mail addresses are publicly displayed in the packet.

5. CONSENT ITEMS (3:21)

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to accept the consent agenda, as presented. Motion passed 5-0.

a. Approve minutes: November 10, 2025

b. Approve check warrants: #_18306 - 11/07/25

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Consider approval of a cannabis drive-through on Center Road (3:51)

Kaitrin Arnot, of Gaston Weed Company, said that her company is requesting to utilize an existing drive-thru for their cannabis dispensary. Karen Adams said that this would be the first cannabis drive-thru in Vermont and said that staff and the applicant recently met with the general counsel for the Cannabis Control Board, who expressed support for this application. Andy Watts asked staff to confirm that the application meets all development standards, K. Adams answered affirmatively. Jonathan Villeneuve spoke in support of this application. Ken Signroello asked if the existing bank drive-thru would be utilized, K. Arnot answered affirmatively. Ron Hoague said that he met with the applicant and said that they are prepared to handle impaired drivers as best as they are able. He hopes that the applicant continues to be vigilant on this

issue. Betsy Dunn asked for information on ID verification and K. Arnot said that they would refuse service to anyone with a minor in the car. Answering a question from S. Jackson, K. Arnot said that customers will place an order online for pickup at the drive-thru and further explained the security and verification features of the drive-thru.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard approve the application for a cannabis drive through at 100 Center Road. Motion passed 5-0.

b. Discussion with the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees (15:07)

Janet Watts and Marie Froeschl of the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees presented. A. Watts disclosed that J. Watts is his wife. J. Watts discussed the Board's work plan for the next year, which involves reviewing and updating policies, budgeting and planning for a new library space. The library recently had an accessibility audit and found that all tables are inaccessible to wheelchair users. The Friends of the Essex Free Library raise between \$6,000-\$7,000 for community activities each year. E. Lawrence encouraged the library to continue to make the building more accessible for all users. K. Adams said that the library received a grant from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns to hire a consultant to make suggestions on accessibility. Library staff will provide further information at a future meeting. Answering a question from S. Jackson, J. Watts said that membership and use of the library remains high. Regarding building improvements, J. Watts discussed a desire for adding private workspaces, additional space for book donations, a larger staff area, additional outreach, expanding the library of things, sufficient space for book storage and additional programming space. Lorraine Zaloom asked if Memorial Hall could be used by the library and J. Watts said that this space is sometimes used for programming. Jeff Theis asked if building accessibility has been discussed in other public spaces. T. Delphia said that the Selectboard will follow up on this.

c. Discussion with the Economic Development Commission (35:16)

K. Signorello and I. Wrenner presented. They discussed the work plan for next year, which includes revising the mission statement and work on a lawn sign ordinance. I. Wrenner said that the business outreach meetings have been very successful in engaging local businesses. She said that additional lead time for large projects, like the Local Options Tax, would have been helpful. She said that it is frustrating to provide input but not have it acknowledged by the Selectboard. She discussed the tension between committee autonomy and staff workloads. K. Signorello discussed website concerns, and I. Wrenner questioned the success of the Farmer's Market and a desire for the Economic Development Commission (EDC) to have more decision-making autonomy. She discussed concerns about a hired consultant not performing as desired and not attending meetings. Answering a question from E. Lawrence, I. Wrenner detailed agricultural business outreach. Answering a question from S. Jackson, I. Wrenner discussed how the EDC takes public feedback into consideration. K. Signorello discussed the EDC's involvement in the development review process. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin, K. Signorello said that consistent themes in business outreach involve seasonal sign issues, a lack of understanding of the local options tax and employee housing. Answering a question from A. Watts, I. Wrenner said that the EDC would enjoy the opportunity to discuss Tier 1b status. B. Dunn suggested reaching out to local businesses who incorrectly place their mailing address as Essex Junction.

d. Discussion with the Conservation & Trails Committee (59:41)

K. Signorello, Steve Dowd and Bino Cummings presented. The Conservation and Trails Committee (CTC) currently has one opening. The CTC would like to donate to Bee the Change and purchase a tent for outdoor events in the next fiscal year. K. Signorello lauded the town for its recent hires of H. Neede and H. Smith and said that he would like to see the CTC maintain their section of the website. He believes that the Town

of Essex should purchase additional Zoom accounts for meeting scheduling purposes. S. Dowd discussed the CTC's efforts to set up a tree nursery and detailed why the previous site was no longer a good location. He discussed how a tree nursery may be able to assist with replacement of trees afflicted with Emerald Ash Borer. S. Dowd encouraged the Town to continue working for boat access to the Winooski River.

In the past year, the CTC has completed the Conservation Fund survey, held an Arbor Day celebration, completed two Indian Brook work days and continued to advise the Recreation Department on Forest Management Plans and trail easements and mapping. The CTC hopes to reestablish the trail caretaker program and plans to continue to work on developing a tree nursery. Answering a question from E. Lawrence, K. Signorello said that the CTC plans to work on an inventory of town-owned land. E. Lawrence encouraged allowing for the public use of town-owned land off West Sleepy Hollow Road. Answering a question from S. Jackson, K. Signorello said that the CTC is relying on staff to advertise the committee vacancy. Answering a question from S. Jackson, K. Signorello discussed improving accessibility at Indian Brook. S. Dowd discussed the CTC's relationship with the Center for Technology-Essex, and their ability to assist with a future tree nursery. B. Cummings expressed a desire to have projects move forward at a quicker pace. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin, B. Cummings said that fat biking trails are maintained in Saxon Hill Road through the winter. L. Zaloom suggested that the CTC partner with UVM for a tree nursery.

e. Discussion with the Winooski Valley Park District (1:25)

Nick Warner, Executive Director of the Winooski Valley Park District (WPD), Operations Director Lauren Chiote, and Trustee Jeff Thesis presented. N. Warner discussed a .27% difference in fee calculation which was corrected. He said that he had drafted a report regarding the canoe launch on the Winooski River in Essex, however it is not available for public review at this time. The WPD has a new report format this year and is engaged in a strategic planning process. N. Warner said that he would like to see more planning unity between Colchester Pond and Indian Brook. The WPD has become more adept in responding to flooding on the Woodside property. The proposed budget is level-funded, however, it is requesting additional funds this year from member municipalities. N. Warner said that the WPD had been able to get grant funding in previous years, and L. Chiote said that most grants are project-specific and that she has not seen a decrease in federal funding. N. Warner said that the WPD is a fiscal agent for other non-profits and hopes to continue with this. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin, N. Warner said that the WPD is planning on pursuing grant opportunities to better understand how the parks are being used. Answering a question from S. Jackson, N. Warner discussed web outreach and communications. N. Warner said that there are parts of the parks which are not actively maintained to assist with species and environmental protections.

f. Discussion and potential acceptance of official Town trails (1:52)

H. Smith and H. Neede presented. H. Neede said that the Town is hoping to adopt additional trails as town trails which would allow the Town to budget for and maintain them. Twelve trails are proposed to be adopted this evening. Answering a question from S. Jackson, H. Neede discussed a potential trail naming processes. H. Smith discussed the creation of an official town trails map, which can be helpful in emergency situations. He discussed efforts to block off and revegetate unofficial trails. Trail widening can occur as trails get wet from excess rain. Some trails may be closed during the springtime for maintenance. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin, H. Smith said that all trails have formal easements if they are not owned by the municipality. L. Zaloom asked if trail naming could be a fundraising opportunity and suggested the inclusion of a QR code on trail markers for donation purposes. H. Smith lauded the work of all Parks & Recreation staff, and said that these initiatives have been discussed. S. Zukowski said that responsible hikers should hike in the middle of the trail to assist with preservation. L. Zaloom discussed incorporating public art into the trails.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to approve the adoption of these 12 trails listed in this memo as official Town of Essex trails. Motion passed 5-0.

~~g. Consider approval of contract for electronic document management~~

h. Consider preliminary approval of Computer Use and Artificial Intelligence Policy (2:08)

G. Duggan said that this policy has not been updated since 2001, and that the draft has been vetted by the Town Attorney. The policy can receive preliminary approval this evening, with final approval at a future meeting. J. Atherton said that human intervention with AI is essential, and that this is reflected in the policy. Answering a question from S. Jackson, G. Duggan said that progressive discipline will likely be used for a violation of this policy. The policy would also apply to board members with town e-mail addresses. K. Chamberlin questioned if this policy was general enough to keep up with advancing technology. T. Delphia encouraged clarification of terms such as “inappropriate” or “offensive.” She also suggested that AI be addressed in other policies. J. Atherton said that he believes that the addition of a single policy helps to be more comprehensive and hold users to a higher standard.

SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, that the Selectboard give preliminary approval to the Computer Use and Artificial Intelligence Policy, with tracked changes, for final approval at a later date. Motion passed 5-0.

i. Consider approval of Resolution of Appreciation for Robert Paluba (2:23)

G. Duggan said that Rob Paluba’s last day was on Friday, and he worked for the Town of Essex for twelve years. G. Duggan discussed R. Paluba’s achievements throughout his tenure. A. Watts said that, in addition to R. Paluba’s technical skills, he was also very kind and a great person to work with.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard adopt a Resolution of Appreciation for Robert Paluba. Motion passed 5-0.

S. Jackson read the Resolution of Appreciation of Robert Paluba:

WHEREAS, Robert Paluba was hired as Network Administrator for the Town of Essex on March 24, 2014, and was promoted to Information Technology Director on January 13, 2018; and,

WHEREAS, Rob has resigned as IT Director with his last day on November 14, 2025; and,

WHEREAS, Rob was instrumental in building and maintaining the Town’s IT network at the police station, Town offices, and other municipal locations; and

WHEREAS, Rob served two municipalities and more than 100 employees through a period of shared services for the Town of Essex and the Village / City of Essex Junction; and

WHEREAS, Rob mentored and trained IT staff to help them grow professionally and personally; and,

WHEREAS, Rob worked continuously to keep the Town’s IT network safe and secure; now, therefore be it,

RESOLVED, that on the occasion of Rob’s departure from the Town of Essex that the Selectboard, on behalf of the staff, residents, and employees of the Town of Essex, hereby extend our most sincere appreciation to Robert Paluba for more than 11 years of service in protecting the Town of Essex from threats seen and unseen to ensure a safe environment for all that participate in Town operations.

Adopted this 17th day of November, 2025 by the Essex Selectboard and Town Manager

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

This was discussed during Executive Session.

7. READING FILE (2:28)

a. Board member comments: S. Jackson said that he is looking forward to a larger discussion on the Keystone Planning Project.

b. Upcoming meeting schedule

c. Draft Keystone Planning Project Report

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION (2:29)

a. An Executive Session was held to Discuss the Negotiating or Securing of Real Estate Purchase or Lease Options

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by **ETHAN LAWRENCE**, that the Selectboard enter executive session to discuss the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options in accordance with 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(2) and 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 at 10:01 PM. Motion passed 5-0.

9. ADJOURN

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by **KENDALL CHAMBERLIN**, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 10:02 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary