

**SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2025**

SELECTBOARD: Tracey Delphia, Chair; Andy Watts, Vice-Chair; Shannon Jackson, Clerk; Kendall Chamberlin; Ethan Lawrence

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Manager; Jenn Booker, Interim Clerk; Charlie Cole, Fire Chief; Cathy Conrad, HR Director; Caitlin Corless, Library Director; Madison Duffy, Assistant Finance Director; Jill Evans, Community Justice Center Director; Ron Hoague, Police Chief; Kate Larose, Administrative Assistant; Karen Lemnah, Assessor; Shannon Lunderville, GIS Coordinator; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Adriane Martin, Parks & Recreation Director; Shawn McNamara, Buildings Manager; Daniel Roy, Finance Director; Harlan Smith, Assistant Director of Parks, Trails and Open Spaces; Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; Stephen Trenholm, Deputy Fire Chief

PUBLIC: Simran Chhetri

1. CALL TO ORDER

Tracey Delphia called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

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

None.

5. CONSENT AGENDA

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

a. Approve minutes: December 1, 2025

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Work Session on Fiscal Year 2027 Budget

Town Manager Introduction

T. Delphia provided an overview of the day's schedule. Greg Duggan said that this is the time of year that the Selectboard takes ownership of the budget from the manager. The budget presented includes a 2.59% increase from the previous year. Essex has achieved a predictable and stable tax increase since the separation of Essex Junction. The transfers from the operating budget to the capital budget has been eliminated, due to the establishment of the capital tax. The police vacancy allowance is up to 12%. The town has negotiated a 50/50 split with Essex Junction regarding assessment services. The use of fund balance to artificially lower the tax rate has been eliminated.

Fire

Stephen Trenholm and Charlie Cole presented on behalf of the department. The department has a new software program for records management and needs to spend additional funds on training. No new

programs are proposed. Dan Roy explained how fuel budgeting is allocated and said that this is an area which has been overbudgeted in the past. Some of the costs of mobile radios have been moved to capital so that they can be spread over multiple years. Part-time salaries have been increasing in recent months due to new membership and additional firefighters responding to calls. 62% of calls are EMS-related, and 38% are fire-related. Kendall Chamberlin suggested reducing part-time salaries to \$500,000 to better match actual spending. Karen Adams said that a vacancy allowance is built into the budget.

Community/Economic Development

Katherine Sonnick said that the Community Development department's goal is to help developers implement the vision of the community. This is done through planning initiatives and enforcing the zoning regulations. The Department also supports several committees. The cost of Town Meeting TV has increased as they will be filming all DRB meetings and larger Planning Commission meetings. E. Lawrence noted that the development fees received in 2025 seemed much higher than normal; D. Roy said that this is most likely from the development fees from the Amazon application. The department has had discussions regarding evaluating the fee schedule to better match surrounding communities. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin, K. Sonnick said that trainings on AI were a great idea. T. Delphia said that it would be interesting to see if any AI-modeling software is available for visualizing planning regulations.

Regarding Economic Development, K. Sonnick said that this budget supports the work of a part-time Economic Development Coordinator and the Economic Development Commission. G. Duggan said that salary line items may be different than in previous years due to staffing changes. S. Jackson expressed concern about decreasing spending on advertising in Economic Development. K. Sonnick said that this can be adjusted if needed but that more online strategies will be utilized.

Recreation

Adriane Martin provided a departmental staffing overview. The Essex Parks & Recreation (EPR) would like to implement an app to store passes, send time-sensitive notifications and make purchases. Adriane Martin said that EPR would like to bring back mailing a brochure, and she hopes that the funding for this can be absorbed by the program fund in the future. Credit card fees will now be the responsibility of the user. EPR will continue to fund and plan Community Day. K. Chamberlin said that he does not agree with funding the brochure, especially when the Town Report is no longer mailed out. He suggested printing out the brochure in-house to save money. Adriane Martin said that she believes that printed brochures would increase revenue. G. Duggan said that mailing brochures may help to promote the department, as Essex Junction Recreation & Parks continues to mail their brochures to Town residents. Adriane Martin said that, with a new Recreation Program Specialist, she believes that the departmental programming will be stronger. E. Lawrence corrected K. Chamberlin's statement, noting that Town Report's are still being mailed to all residents.

Regarding the pool, Adriane Martin said that revenue has increased significantly. A new structure at the pool is available to be rented. Pool employee pay has been increased to be more competitive with surrounding communities. Natural gas budgeting is being adjusted to reflect actual numbers. EPR has three certified pool operators on staff. Regarding Parks & Facilities, the Essex Community Players have a formal lease for the use of Memorial Hall for the first time. Spending on professional training has increased as the staff has grown. Adriane Martin said that Comcast internet service is now available at the Indian Brook gatehouse. Regarding senior services, senior van usage is experiencing a slight increase. E. Lawrence said that he would like to see the senior van can offer additional service in the future and would like to see a cost estimate on its hourly cost.

Assessing

Karen Lemnah said that Essex will be contracting with the City of Essex Junction for assessing going forward. The department is hiring an Assistant Assessor. She does not believe that the re-appraisal will result in additional funds for Planning & Zoning.

T. Delphia requested public input, of which there was none. The Selectboard took a break and re-convened at 10:50 AM.

Information Technology

Shannon Lunderville discussed changes to cloud software and phone systems. G. Duggan said that the phone system is end-of-life and the Town of Essex is evaluating their needs going forward. The Selectboard discussed different types of phone technology options. G. Duggan said that the police department agreement with the City of Essex Junction may need to be updated to reflect accurate IT costs.

Library

A. Watts disclosed that his wife is a library Trustee but that he believes that he can be objective on this issue. Caitlin Corless said that the library is hoping to get a larger building in the future, which will come with larger expenses as well. She hopes that Essex can take small steps to be prepared for this over the years. Essex has comparatively less staff than similarly sized communities and has had issues in maintaining safe staffing levels. The library does outreach to preschools and senior living facilities. The library is requesting funding for an additional 9.5 hours per week in staffing, for both increased hours for a part-time staffer and increased sub hours. The library would like to increase the collection of both books and the library of things. C. Corless discussed the recent accessibility study for the library and regional offerings for AI training.

Administration

K. Adams reviewed the various line items, noting that software costs have increased. The allocation for expenses on events was discussed, with K. Adams stating that donation money follows the expenses it is allocated for. She said that one of the possible uses for events funds was to hire speakers. E. Lawrence questioned if these events would in fact happen, as he stated that previous events have not been implemented. K. Chamberlin asked if \$200 was too low for the training budget, and K. Adams said that much of staff training is done via offerings from membership organizations.

Legislative

K. Adams said fund balance is proposed to offset the cost of a salary study that is required by a union contract. Board member payments have been increased to represent actual spending, and to accommodate for the additional board meetings that would be required for reassessment. E. Lawrence said that he believes that the Town should not spend any money on Front Porch Forum, since they have banned several community members. G. Duggan said that this is one of the most cited sources for community members receiving information.

County & Regional

K. Adams said that county tax is estimated since it runs on a different tax cycle. Dues to the regional planning commission have increased due to incorrect billing in the past. K. Chamberlin said that he is concerned that Essex supports the Winooski Valley Parks District when they are not inclusive towards all types of recreation.

Health & Human Services

K. Adams said that the only major change is the way that the town pays the Health Officer, treating this position like an outside contractor. Essex Rescue's dues have been reduced. S. Jackson said that the 1% for Human Services should be included as a part of the budget, rather than requiring a separate vote. A. Watts said that this was done to be in compliance with recent court cases. G. Duggan will send additional information to S. Jackson regarding this court decision.

The Selectboard took a lunch break and returned at 12:40 PM.

Police & CJC

R. Hoague said that Essex has 25 police officers and is budgetarily allocated 31. Many operational line items have been level-funded or reduced to be in line with current estimates. Professional services are reduced due to the ending of the contract with the Howard Center. There is ambiguity for statewide funding with the Community Justice Center (CJC), however it has been level-funded. G. Duggan said that the state had recently passed a law redirecting pre-charge diversion work to Burlington, however this has not been solidified yet. The funding for staffing for the CJC will be provided by Burlington. R. Hoague described the crime mapping and reporting system. D. Roy explained how all line items are funded between both the City of Essex Junction and Town of Essex. No funding is requested for drones, however an additional one may be purchased from asset forfeiture funds. 25% of the time for the IT director has been shifted to the police department. R. Hoague said that the dispatch overtime pay has been increased to represent actual spending. He said that the department has implemented a Dispatch 3 position, which is a supervisory position which does evaluations and scheduling. There are increases in animal control and humane society funding, as the previously used kennel is no longer in business.

Finance

D. Roy said that there is a new line item in revenue to represent additional CD interest. Salaries and benefits are not increased as much as other departments due to a staff member's retirement and the intention to hire a less experienced replacement. The Town of Essex is continuing their relationship with their existing auditing firm, KGS. T. Delphia commented on the quantity of copier leases that Essex has. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin, D. Roy said that it could be possible to send a reminder letter regarding the second tax bill payment. The delinquency rate remains low.

PW Buildings

Aaron Martin said that the total departmental increase requested is approx. \$178, 000, or 4.8%. Regarding buildings, Aaron Martin said that the department is requesting a 20.9% increase. Much of this is due to contractor costs. The department continues to assess and prioritize issues throughout each building that the town owns. They have also worked to better categorize costs between the capital and operating budgets. S. Jackson said that the electrical rates appear to be increasing more than is typical. Aaron Martin said that this is his best guess based on usage over time. E. Lawrence said that this represents a shift to actual spending, as he said that electricity costs were cut dramatically last year. This was a result of staff changing the methodology of billing upon the request of the Selectboard. E. Lawrence expressed concern that the electricity bill was funded at a shortage intentionally to fund the budget. T. Delphia said that no malintent was intended.

A. Martin discussed each building individually. The Police Department needs an increase in contracted services due to HVAC issues. S. Jackson asked about increases in electricity at the police station. A. Martin said that the department is still working on establishing the best way to accurately forecast usage. Madison Duff said that the utility bills were reviewed by finance and are based off correct numbers. Shawn McNamara detailed the issues with HVAC in Memorial Hall. Significant improvements have been made

to the Tree Farm building, and Aaron Martin said that he would like to get away from storing files in this location. Staff will research how much of the town's electricity use is from solar.

PW-Admin

Aaron Martin said that this primarily covers wages and benefits. The requested increase is 7.13% due to labor and benefit increases.

PW-Highway

Aaron Martin said that a 3.71% increase is requested, much of which is due to labor and benefit costs. A vacancy allowance has been included in the budget. It is difficult to predict salt costs and weather events far in advance; however these numbers represent a best guess. Aaron Martin discussed efforts to remove snow in an equitable fashion on cul-de-sacs. E. Lawrence discussed equipment rental across departments, with Aaron Martin stating that a woodchipper and excavator is the most used rental equipment. E. Lawrence encouraged the consideration of the purchase of an excavator, Aaron Martin said that renting is used to guarantee safety and to make sure that a machine does not have multiple operators. E. Lawrence said that equipment should either be rented at longer terms or purchased to save money. T. Delphia asked if the highway mechanic position will remain unfilled, Aaron Martin said that he does not believe that the town will get any applicants considering the pay. The town is considering going through the union process to formally eliminate the position.

PW-Stormwater

A. Martin said that this decreased by 7.8% due to cost shifts in how stormwater construction is funded. Labor and benefits costs are 75% of the stormwater budget. Essex meets the requirements for their flow restoration plan and are working on meeting the targets of the phosphorus control plan. Additional treatment is being installed when roadway improvements are implemented. K. Chamberlin said that there is no new revenue coming in for stormwater. He encouraged staff to continue to monitor statewide changes in stormwater and consider the implementation of a stormwater utility.

The Selectboard took a break.

Clerk

Jenn Booker said that the department has not been fully staffed in the past but hopes to be able to attend additional trainings in the next fiscal year. She reviewed efforts to ensure that dogs are registered on time.

Debt Services & General Revenue

D. Roy said that the Town of Essex is continuing to make payments for the police station, which is cost shared with the City of Essex Junction. The electric car charging station at the town hall has seen increased use. He reviewed the revenue line items compared to charges. K. Chamberlin suggested reducing the interest income line item and applying it towards capital if a significant decline was seen.

7. READING FILE

a. Board member comments: S. Jackson thanked the staff for their hard work preparing the budget.

b. Upcoming meeting schedule

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Not held.

9. ADJOURN

**SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)**

DECEMBER 5, 2025

242 **SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, for the Selectboard to adjourn.**
243 **Motion passed 4-0 at 3:35 PM.**
244

245 Respectfully Submitted,
246 Darby Mayville
247 Recording Secretary
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