TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 2026

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; Charles Cole, Fire Chief; Madison Duffy, Assistant Finance Director; Jean O'Sullivan, Economic Development Coordinator; Dan Roy, Finance Director
PUBLIC: Emily Adams, Paul Bohne, Clayton Clark, Gina Halpin Barrett, Dawn Hill-Fleury, Peter Koerlla, Anne Miller, Tim Miller, David Skopin, Ken Signorello, Lynn Smith, Margaret Smith, Sandy Thibault, Irene Wrenner, Cheryl Van Epps, Reed Von Gal, Lorraine Zaloom, Deb H. (screenname), Lois (screenname), C. (screenname), J. Percy (screenname)

Meeting Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko2Twdp2SMM
Times associated with each agenda item are approximate.

1. <u>CALL TO ORDER</u> (0:00:30)
Tracey Delphia called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. <u>AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES</u> (0:00:49)
Greg Duggan requested that Item 5a, "Approve minutes: December 15, 2025," be removed from the Consent Agenda. He also said that additional materials have been added to Item 6a, "Presentation and discussion of Saxon Hill District Transportation Demand Management Study by Chittenden Area Transportation Management Association (CATMA)." T. Delphia suggested that the minutes of December 15, 2025 be discussed as a Business Item.

3. <u>APPROVE AGENDA</u> (0:02:21)
SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, to pull the minutes from the Consent Agenda.

T. Delphia said that she will interpret this motion as meaning to remove Consent Item 5a, include it as Business Item 6p, and renumber the rest of the following items. All agreed.

Motion passed 5-0.

4. <u>PUBLIC TO BE HEARD</u> (0:06:23)
a. Comments from the public on Consent items and items not on Agenda
T. Delphia announced that she will be stepping down from the Selectboard due to residency changes, effective January 19th. She thanked engaged residents, town staff and all who have made the experience meaningful. The Selectboard gave T. Delphia a standing ovation. David Skopin expressed concern about the Development Review Board (DRB) appeal process. He asked if the Selectboard would have the power to remove a member of the DRB. T. Delphia said that this could be reviewed in accordance with state statue. Peter Koerlla said that it is very difficult to access after-school care in Essex, and that this has had a serious economic impact on his family. Lynn Smith asked that the human services funding be removed from the budget, as it takes away personal choice and the ability to receive tax benefits from personal donations. Reed von Gal said that he has appealed the August 18th decision of the Selectboard. He discussed his past volunteer work and feelings that the town has a personal issue with him. He requested that his e-mail address be included in the minutes so that members of the public can contact him

(vongal.reed@gmail.com). He said that he has proven that the points that Public Works made about him being untrustworthy were untrue. He said that he is not happy that he is suing the town that he has raised his family in and questioned why the town would be doing this. He expressed concern that this may get his case thrown out in court on a technicality. T. Delphia encouraged R. Von Gal to contact the town attorney about this issue. Lorraine Zaloom provided additional information about DRB appeals. Irene Wrenner thanked T. Delphia for her service to the community.

5. CONSENT AGENDA (0:30:00)
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to accept the consent agenda. Motion passed 5-0.
~~**a. Approve minutes: December 15, 2025**~~
b. Approve check warrants: # 18310 - 12/12/25; # 18311- 12/19/25
c. Consider approval of contract for cleaning of municipal buildings

6. BUSINESS ITEMS (0:30:40)
a. Presentation and discussion of Saxon Hill District Transportation Demand Management Study by Chittenden Area Transportation Management Association (CATMA)
Sandy Thibault, Executive Director and Emily Adams, Program Analyst, both of CATMA, presented. S. Thibault provided an organizational review of CATMA. CATMA has worked with several major employers in the Saxon Hill area to conduct a transportation demand management study. E. Adams reviewed the study tasks and discussed existing conditions. She noted that the survey had a higher-than-average response rate. The current mass transit options are not working for most employees and the vast majority drive to work alone. S. Thibault said that she believes that there are a lot of opportunities for car and vanpools and adding on-site amenities to reduce the need to leave the workplace during the day. Answering a question from S. Jackson, S. Thibault clarified the differences between car and vanpooling. Jean O'Sullivan said that this transportation study covers 14% of commuters to Essex and spoke of the possibility of having food trucks near major employers to reduce the need for lunchtime trips. She said that her last day working for the Town of Essex will be January 16th and thanked the Selectboard and staff for their support over the last four years.

b. Consider approval of Green Mountain Transit's assessments for Americans with Disability Act (ADA) services (0:58:46)
Clayton Clark, Executive Director at Green Mountain Transit (GMT) and Paul Bohne, Essex Representative to the GMT Board of Commissioners, presented. C. Clark said that member communities have expressed concern about the volatility in ADA service funding. GMT has worked to change this formula to consider both the origin and destination towns, splitting the cost between the two. Essex has seen a significant decrease because of this change. The savings will only be continued if Essex stays a member municipality. Financial figures will be presented shortly, however it is estimated to reflect about a $23,000 savings. This is a retroactive change, and the town of Essex would need to pay back previously given funds if not approved. Essex and Essex Junction data is currently combined and work will be done to ensure that the boundaries between the two are correct. T. Delphia requested public comment, of which there was none.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to retroactively approve the amendment to Section 1c of the formula for appointment in regard to ADA paratransit services, effective July 1st, 2024.

E. Lawrence said that there is not a corresponding memo from staff to go along with this item, T. Delphia said that the motion was included was in the memo from GMT.

Vote: Motion passed 5-0.

P. Bohne said that, with T. Delphia's departure, a new alternate to the GMT Board will be needed.

c. Work session and potential preliminary adoption of fiscal year 2027 operating budget (01:15:17)
K. Adams said that the budget numbers are lower than was previously discussed. D. Roy highlighted changes that have been made since the last meeting, noting a slight reduction in property tax revenue, an adjustment to the assistant to the assessor position, a reduction in taser expenses and insurance and benefits changes. The budget represents a 2.54% increase from the previous year. An additional meeting can be held on January 12th if necessary to further discuss the budget. E. Lawrence expressed concern about paying town employees for private cell phones and said that he would like additional information about phone stipends. K. Chamberlin said that private contractors could be utilized for public works services at a lower cost. In public comment, Anne Miller asked for clarification on the median home value estimate. Charles Cole clarified that he does not receive a stipend for his personal cell phone.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to reduce the part-time salaries line item in the Fire Department by $60,980 to make it $450,000 and he would like to see the $60,980 reflected in the different model for allowances for vacancies.

Discussion: E. Lawrence explained that he is suggesting this change to ensure that less money will be allocated to the fund balance at the end of the fiscal year. A. Watts said that the Town has been working to increase fire volunteering, and he feels that this takes away from this priority. C. Cole said that the department's numbers are up, and that he is hesitant to intentionally underfund the salaries budget. K. Chamberlin said that he believes that this should be maintained, as fund balance is not guaranteed. T. Delphia requested public comment, of which there was none. E. Lawrence clarified that he does not wish to remove the funds, but that he is requesting to move them so that they are outside of the manager's ability to transfer between line items.

Vote: Motion fails 2-3, with ANDY WATTS, KENDALL CHAMBERLIN and TRACEY DELPHIA voting in opposition.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, that the Selectboard approve preliminary adoption of the fiscal year 2027 Town operating budget at $17,207,277.

T. Delphia requested public comment, of which there was none. K. Chamberlin said that he believes that the budget for the fire and police departments are very well-managed. E. Lawrence said that he believes that it is important that the town maintain at least $600,000 in fund balance each year.

Vote: Motion passed 4-1, with ETHAN LAWRENCE in opposition.

d. Consider approval of public hearing warning for fiscal year 2027 Operating Budget (01:52:08)
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard warn a public hearing for the fiscal year 2027 operating budget for January 26, 2026. Motion passed 4-1, with ETHAN LAWRENCE in opposition.

e. Discussion and potential preliminary adoption of fiscal year 2027 Capital Budget and Five-Year Plan (01:53:00)
K. Adams provided a budgetary overview and a summary table of proposed projects. D. Roy said that the purchase of an ariel fire truck is included in FY 30. C. Cole said that it is the department's intention to take delivery in FY30 and begin making payments at this point. Answering a question from S. Jackson, C. Cole said that he does not believe that used ariel trucks are cost-effective. K. Chamberlin said that he would like to see more information on how the capital budget can be funded in the longer term. A. Watts said that Public Works has a twenty-year vehicle replacement plan, and that this is publicly available. E. Lawrence suggested moving up the purchase of plow trucks due to backups in production. G. Duggan said that he would discuss this issue with Public Works staff, but that it sounded like a good idea. K. Adams said that this could be further discussed as a part of updates to the purchasing plan. Funding for planting was clarified. In public comment, K. Signorello requested clarification on the purchase of the ariel truck. He said that he was concerned with the amount of interest payments which could be required said that the approximate cost is $500,000 per year. He suggested a reciprocal agreement with surrounding municipalities. C. Cole said that, according to Insurance Standard Office (ISO) Fire score, communities with buildings over three stories tall should have an ariel truck. Essex is not credited for this with the ISO as they do not own their own ariel truck. Larger apartment buildings could require several ladder trucks to rescue individuals. C. Cole detailed sprinkler requirements.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard approve preliminary adoption of the fiscal year 2027 Town capital budget at $2,946,025 and the five-year plan. Motion passed 5-0.

f. Consider approval of public hearing warning for fiscal year 2027 Capital Budget and Five-Year Plan (02:30:00)
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard warn a public hearing for the fiscal year 2027 Capital Budget and Five-Year Plan for January 26, 2026. Motion passed 5-0.

g. Discussion of possible Housing Fund (02:31:02)
T. Delphia said that the following four items are potential fund balance items. K. Adams said that planning staff are requesting $35,000 to run and research a pilot round for a housing fund. No additional action could be taken without Selectboard approval. A. Watts said that the Selectboard has voted not to lower the barriers to housing development (Tier 1b) and said that he believes that taxpayer dollars should not be put into something that the Selectboard has already turned down. S. Jackson said that he does not believe that voting down Tier 1b means that the Selectboard is opposed to reducing housing costs. K. Adams said that a housing fund could possibly run similarly to the human services funding, where the Selectboard would set goals and establish a committee to implement these goals. A. Miller said that the aims of the Housing Commission are not related to Essex's Tier 1b status.

h. Discussion of proposed Economic Development grant program (02:44:59)
G. Duggan said that a local economic development association disbanded and the funds were given to the town. This was used as seed money for various events and businesses. The fund currently has around $9,000. E. Lawrence suggested that the Selectboard come up with an annual funding mechanism. He said that he understands the needs for all these projects, however he does not agree with giving projects the "leftovers" from the fund balance. In public comment, K. Signorello said that the Economic Development Commission would like to develop a program prior to any additional funds being spent.

i. Discussion of possible Stormwater Utility Feasibility Study (02:54:06)
K. Adams said Essex has several actions that need to be completed to comply with state standards. The goal of this project would be to determine if a stormwater utility would be effective in managing these standards and capital replacements for Essex. T. Delphia requested public comment, of which there was none.

j. Discussion of proposed beautification project(s) (03:00:21)
K. Adams said that this could allow Essex to implement the town plan vision in an artistic manner. There is a lot of verbiage in the town plan regarding a vibrant, visually pleasing, engaged community. E. Lawrence said that the historical society building has a leaky roof and suggested that these funds be used to repair this. K. Adams said that this project will be funded through capital. T. Delphia requested public input, of which there was none.

k. Discussion and potential approval of fiscal year 2025 fund balance assignments (03:03:54)
D. Roy discussed minor changes that have occurred since the last meeting. S. Jackson and E. Lawrence expressed concern that not all of the project details may be recorded in this document. K. Signorello spoke against the reallocation of taxpayer funds to projects that had not been approved by the voters. T. Delphia clarified that the voters do not approve specific projects or line items, just the overall budget.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN that the Selectboard approve fund balance assignments for the Fiscal Year 2025 General Fund as recommended by staff. Motion passed 4-1, with ETHAN LAWRENCE dissenting.

l. Continued discussion and potential approval of March 2026 Town Meeting ballot language regarding 80-90 Upper Main St. (new municipal complex) (03:11:11)
K. Adams discussed the budgetary estimates and proposed grant eligibility. G. Duggan said that the total design project cost is estimated to be around $1,500,000, however the ballot question states $2,000,000. The vote is advisory however the increased amount provides some flexibility. The ballot question passing does not give staff the authority to spend $2,000,000. A. Watts expressed concern that this may be confusing to voters. T. Delphia said that she does not feel that this would be the case as it is simply an advisory vote. S. Jackson said that he found the two questions to be repetitive. E. Lawrence said that it is important to know if the residents of Essex are interested in moving forward with this project, as this will dictate whether additional funding should be spent. He feels that both questions are important. In public comment, A. Miller suggested that the questions be rearranged for clarity and suggested including language to clarify that these funds would be for design of the project. The Selectboard requested that this be amended and brought back on January 26th. A current estimate of cost, the switching of the order of the questions, and clarification that these funds are for design will be included at this time.

m. Continued discussion and potential approval of language on the March 2026 Town Meeting ballot on Local Option Tax (03:33:18)
G. Duggan said that staff recommends putting three questions on the ballot, one for each of the local options tax (LOT) proposals. The Economic Development Commission (EDC) opposes all the ballot items. A. Watts said that the approved budget and Capital Plan do not reflect including local options tax revenue. He suggests a November vote. A. Watts said that he cannot support an increase to the Capital Plan for a third year in a row, however he believes that additional time needs to be spent discussing the issue. E. Lawrence, S. Jackson and K. Chamberlin concurred. T. Delphia said that there are numerous other important issues

being voted upon in March and suggested that this be included. In public comment, I. Wrenner spoke of the regressive nature of a LOT, zip code issues between Essex and Essex Junction and the fact that a large portion of these taxes go to the state. K. Signorello said that a quorum of the EDC is present at this meeting. He said that utilities are charged local options taxes, which will affect residents financially. K. Adams said that this could show up as higher in Colchester since the main office of Green Mountain Power is in Colchester. K. Signorello said that he did not believe that this is applicable. Margaret Smith spoke of issues with zip code accuracy. L. Zaloom encouraged the board to study this further. K. Signorello questioned how much Essex would make from a LOT.

KENDALL CHAMBERLIN made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard approve the language that staff has selected and put it on the Town Meeting ballot for 2026. Motion failed, with ETHAN LAWRENCE, SHANNON JACKSON and ANDY WATTS voting in opposition.

n. Discussion and potential action to advertise an open Selectboard seat and hold a reorganization at a future meeting (04:03:39)
T. Delphia said that the Selectboard could appoint a candidate as early as January 26th. This would need to be a unanimous vote. A vote could also be held on Town Meeting Day in March. S. Jackson expressed concern that the Selectboard could end up in another tie as happened earlier in the year. He said that some candidates could both apply for appointment and run for the open seats in March. A. Watts suggested that K. Chamberlin serve as Chair, and that positions do not need to be reorganized until after Town Meeting Day. In public input, I. Wrenner said that former Selectboard members may be willing to fill in until Town Meeting.

o. Consider approval of Resolution in Appreciation of Shirley FitzGerald (04:21:18)
G. Duggan said that Shirley FitzGerald has worked for the Town of Essex for almost 35 years in the finance department and is retiring.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard adopt a Resolution of Appreciation for Shirley FitzGerald. Motion passed 5-0.

S. Jackson read the resolution into the record:

WHEREAS, Shirley FitzGerald was hired by the Town of Essex on August 26, 1991, and,
WHEREAS, Shirley has resigned as Water/Sewer Clerk II / Accounts Payable with her last day on January 2, 2026; and,
WHEREAS, Shirley has maintained the utility billing function for the Town and coordinated with all Town departments and locations to execute the accounts payable function for the Town; and,
WHEREAS, Shirley 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, Shirley has built incredible relationships with residents and customers, epitomizing the standards that the Town strives for in regard to service and excellence; and,
WHEREAS, Shirley has worked continuously to keep the Town's assets safe and secure;

now, therefore be it, RESOLVED, that on the occasion of Shirley'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 Shirley FitzGerald for more than 34 years of exemplary service with diligence, care and grace.

Adopted this 5th day of January 2026 by the Essex Selectboard and Town Manager.
p. Approve minutes: December 15, 2025 (04:23:20)
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by TRACEY DELPHIA, to approve the minutes of December 15, 2025. No vote, motion failed.

SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, to table the minutes until January 26, 2026. Motion passed 5-0.

q. Discussion and potential action about the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
This was discussed during Executive Session.

r. Discussion and potential action about a disciplinary or dismissal action against a public officer or employee
This was discussed during Executive Session.

7. READING FILE (04:24:00)
a. Board member comments: None.
b. Upcoming meeting schedule
c. Green Mountain Transit update - 12/22/25
d. Updated Sewer Allocation Study and Proposed Changes to Wastewater Allocation, Sewer Use, and Water Use
Ordinances
e. Public Works fiscal year 2026 Annual Work Plan, Quarter 2 Update
f. Invitation for Essex CHIPS Open House

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION (4:24:21)
a. An executive session was held to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to extend the meeting to 11:30 PM. Motion passed 5-0.

TRACEY DELPHIA made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.

b. An executive session was held to discuss a disciplinary or dismissal action against a public officer or employee
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss a disciplinary or dismissal action against a public officer or employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(4), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to exit Executive Session. Motion passed 5-0 at 11:26 PM.

9. ADJOURN

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 11:28 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary