TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2026

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Annie Costandi, Water Quality Director; Dennis Lutz, Staff Engineer; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Dan Roy, Finance Director

PUBLIC: Paul Bohne, Clayton Clark, John Egan, Dawn Hill-Fleury, Gina Halpin Barrett, Lisa Helme, Bill Keyser, Robert Lalancette, Anne Miller, Ken Signorello, David Skopin, Margaret Smith, Cheryl Van Epps, Lois Whitmore, Irene Wrenner, Meg Zimmerman, Sharon Zukowski, Adam (screenname), bcurrier (screenname), Tasia's iPad (screenname)

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

1. CALL TO ORDER (00:00:00)
Kendall Chamberlin called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES (00:00:11)
Greg Duggan said that additional materials were added to the agenda packet for Item 6d, "Consider approval of Truck 605 Replacement for fiscal year 2026." He proposed to either move this to a business item discussion or include it on the Consent Agenda for the next meeting. Regarding Item 7d, "Presentation of Green Mountain Transit proposed budget for fiscal year 2027 and discussion of services," a letter regarding dues is now available. Item 8g, "Status of Winter Operations 11/01/2025 through 12/31/202," will be included in the Reading File for the next meeting.

3. APPROVE AGENDA (00:01:15)
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to move Item 6d "Consider approval of Truck 605 Replacement for fiscal year 2026" to be discussed as a Business Item as 7j. Motion passed 4-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD (0:03:26)
a. Comments from the public on Consent items and items not on Agenda
David Skopin spoke of a recent resolution passed by the Town of Williston condemning the actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. He would like this issue to be placed on the next meeting agenda to see if Essex could pass a similar resolution. D. Skopin said that he is happy to provide additional information and do any type of preparation that is necessary for this to be heard. He also encouraged the Selectboard to watch Williston's discussion of this issue. A. Watts said that the Town of Essex has recently passed a Declaration of Inclusion.

Anne Miller expressed concern that a developer and his engineer were recently asked to collaborate with staff on changes to steep slope regulations. She said that developers have financial interest in drafting regulations and that it is a sign of preferential treatment. She said that it is important to ensure that the process is fair to all. A. Miller encouraged the Selectboard to direct the Planning Commission in stating that developers should not be invited to closed working groups.

C. Van Epps indicated her support for A. Miller and D. Skopin's points. She said that she would like the Selectboard to write to the federal government demanding they step up and help members of the community.

I. Wrenner asked if the names of candidates running for Selectboard has been released to the public. G. Duggan said that he is aware of five candidates: Andy Watts, Ken Signorello, Meg Zimmerman, Ethan Lawrence and Noah Detzer. I. Wrenner expressed support for D. Skopin and A. Miller's comments. She said that she would like to see the Declaration of Inclusion strengthened to state that local police would protect citizens from violent federal actors.

5. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. Public hearing on Fiscal Year 2027 Municipal Budget - 6:35 PM (0:24:59)

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to open the Public Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 Municipal Budget. Motion passed 4-0.

G. Duggan said the FY2027 proposed budget is $17,189,166. This represents a $51.80, or 2.54% increase on the average home. These figures do not reflect human services funding, which is an additional 1% increase voted upon by residents separate from the general fund budget. K. Chamberlin requested public input, of which there was none.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to close the Public Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 Municipal Budget. Motion passed 4-0.

b. Public hearing on Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Budget & Five Year Plan - 6:45 PM (0:27:45)

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to open the Public Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Budget & Five Year Plan. Motion passed 4-0.

G. Duggan said that the anticipated effects of the reappraisal are included in this budget. There are no transfers from the operating budget to the Capital Plan this year. In public input, Dawn Hill-Fleury asked for clarification about a truck purchase, which was given.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to close the Public Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 Capital Budget & Five Year Plan. Motion passed 4-0.

6. CONSENT AGENDA (0:35:02)

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to accept the consent agenda, as amended. Motion passed 4-0.

a. Approve minutes: December 15, 2025; January 5, 2026

b. Approve check warrants: # 18312- 01/02/26; # 18313-01/09/26; # 18314-01/16/26

c. Consider approval of 2026 Certificate of Highway Mileage

~~d. Consider approval of Truck 605 Replacement for fiscal year 2026~~

e. Consider approval of contract for electronic document management services with Square-9

7. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Interview and possible appointment of a volunteer to serve on the Police Community Advisory Board - Lisa Helme (0:30:40)

Lisa Helme said that she has worked for the Department of Public Safety in technology and has a background in communications. Answering a question from S. Jackson, L. Helme said that she would like to support local law enforcement agencies and said that she believes that she could help bridge the gap between law enforcement and the public. Answering a question from E. Lawrence, L. Helme said that it would be helpful to learn more about the challenges law enforcement officers face in communication with the community. She believes that the department should work towards being more accessible. Answering a question from A. Watts, L. Helme said that she sees being a public servant as being a sounding board and serving as an easily accessible way for the public to gain knowledge about local law enforcement.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard appoint Lisa Helme to the Police Community Advisory Board for a term ending June 30, 2028. Motion passed 4-0.

b. Consider approval of Wastewater Allocation Request for 1 Kana Lane (0:46:00)
Aaron Martin said that the Selectboard is considering whether to grant a sewer allocation request in the amount of 4 Equivalent Units or 800 gallons per day to Kana Associates LLC for an 8-unit building addition. A site plan amendment was approved by the Development Review Board. Staff recommends approval with conditions. Answering a question from S. Jackson, G. Duggan said all zoning violations have been remediated to the best of his knowledge. K. Chamberlin requested public comment, of which there was none.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, that the Selectboard grant the applicant, Kana Associates LLC, 4 EUs (800 GPD) of additional sewer allocation for the proposed 8-unit building addition at 1 Kana Lane with the following conditions:

1) **The applicant will be required to purchase the approved sewer allocation prior to issuance of the building permit.**
2) **The applicant's engineer shall verify that the existing 6" sewer service line has the capacity to handle the additional 8 units.**

Motion passed 4-0.

c. Presentation of fiscal year 2025 financial audit (0:49:52)
Bill Keyser, Partner at Kittell Branagan & Sargent presented. He said that his firm has issued an unmodified opinion, or a clean audit. He said that it is possible that the Town will not require a single audit in the future due to grant requirement changes. The Town is not considered to be a low-risk single audit because they have not had two consecutive years of clean single audits. Essex did not have a single audit performed in the last fiscal year. The fund balance has decreased by approximately $159,000, with a current unassigned fund balance of $2,454,894. He said that the budgeted items and actual spending align well. Answering a question from A. Watts, B. Keyser said that overspending did not occur, however, that budgeting for a deficit could allow the fund balance to further be reduced. E. Lawrence expressed concern that close to 30% of the total budget is fund balance. A. Watts said that much of this is allocated to capital purposes, and it not "leftover" funds. Anything collected for future use is technically considered to be fund balance. E. Lawrence said that it would be helpful to see a breakdown from the capital tax revenue. B. Keyser said that Essex is fiscally responsible with its debt, and pursues smaller annual rate increases rather than less frequent and more significant increases. In public input, Ken Signorello asked if it was common for a municipality to fund capital through a separate tax. B. Keyser said that it is unusual but not problematic.

d. Presentation of Green Mountain Transit proposed budget for fiscal year 2027 and discussion of services (1:20:00)

Clayton Clark, General Manager of Green Mountain Transit (GMT), and Paul Bohne, Essex's Representative to GMT, presented. In FY 2027, GMT will be an urban-only transportation agency and will be operating with an estimated $840,000 loss. GMT does not know what funding will be received from the state until mid-way through the budget. Essex has a 6.9% proposed increase over the previous year and ADA costs will be higher than the fixed-route costs. Losses of over $2 million are expected in FY 2028 due to issues with the state transportation fund. C. Clark said that the Essex routes are consistently underperforming financially, and GMT is under pressure from the state not to fund underperforming routes. C. Clark said that should some of Essex's service be discontinued, their assessment would be prorated. If fixed route services are discontinued, then ADA services will also be discontinued. C. Clark discussed efforts at the federal level to decrease public transportation funding, but also the potential that smaller public transportation agencies will get a larger source of funds. Answering a question from E. Lawrence, C. Clark assured the Selectboard that Essex would not be held to their assessment should service be discontinued. Should Essex wish to exit their GMT membership, it would have to do so before the start of FY27 to go into effect at the beginning of FY 2028. Answering a question from S. Jackson, C. Clark said that the elimination of the #4 bus is proposed. He said that he would like to see the cost per rider fall below $10 for this route. K. Chamberlin requested public comment, of which there was none.

e. Consider approval of Fiscal Year 2027 municipal operating budget (1:50:05)
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to approve final adoption of the FY27 municipal operating budget.

Discussion: G. Duggan clarified that this is in the amount of $17,189,166 that was approved on January 5th and discussed earlier this evening.

Voting: Motion passed 3-1, with ETHAN LAWRENCE dissenting.

f. Consider approval of Fiscal Year 2027 capital budget and five-year plan (1:51:06)
SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to approve final adoption of the fiscal year 2027 Town capital budget of $2,946,025 and the associated five year capital plan. Motion passed 4-0.

g. Consider approval of Town Meeting ballot question(s) regarding 80 and 90 Upper Main Street (new municipal complex) (01:52:07)
G. Duggan said that the order of the questions have been switched upon the request of the Selectboard at the last meeting. In public comment, R. Lalancette said that the total project cost is estimated to be $88 million, with an estimated $19,000 impact on each home. He said that information regarding the full costs must be communicated to the public prior to Town Meeting Day. Lois Whitmore said that the Town has existing debt that needs to be paid on top of these costs, and that this should be addressed. She said that there are other needs of the town, such as affordable housing and transportation, that would not be able to be funded should this project go forward. John Eagan said that it is helpful to know the total project cost, and to also determine if there are specific parts of the project that could be voted upon separately rather than an all or nothing approach. A. Watts said that this vote does not require any commitment to building the municipal complex, and that additional voter approval would be required. He suggested clarity in outreach and education. E. Lawrence said that this vote would be helpful in determining if work on the municipal complex should continue to be a priority for staff. A. Watts said that it is important to include information stating that this is the next step in progressing this potential development. R. Lalancette said that it would be helpful if everyone in the town received consistent information about the project, and that the project could be reduced in scope.

G. Duggan suggested the following verbiage to capture the Selectboard's comments: "Shall the voters of the Town of Essex advise the Selectboard to complete public infrastructure design as the first step toward potential construction at 80-90 Upper Main Street, which was purchased in 2023 to serve as a new municipal complex, and for which the Selectboard adopted a conceptual Master Plan in March 2025, under the following conditions…" All agreed.

L. Whitmore said that she believes that this question should be phrased to state that choosing to pursue the municipal complex means that additional work in the town would not be completed. E. Lawrence said that the funds requested to be spent is $1.5 million, however the design project is only expected to cost $1 million. He said the extra funds are included due to inflation. J. Egan said that there are many financial demands on the taxpayers and said that the total cost should be included on the ballot. C. Van Epps said that many people in Essex are not educated on this issue and that not including the total cost will mean that many do not have the full context and cannot provide informed consent. In response to a question from A. Miller, E. Lawrence said that the Selectboard has adopted a conceptual master plan and that it is not fair to provide a price figure to go along with this. He said that he believes the question that is being asked is if there is value in having staff continue to work on this project.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, that the Selectboard approve both ballot items on the March 2025 Town Meeting Day ballot, as amended, regarding the new municipal complex at 80 and 90 Upper Main St. Point of clarification by ETHAN LAWRENCE that motion is for the 2026 ballot, not 2025. Clarification accepted by ANDY WATTS. Motion passed 4-0.

h. Consider approval of warnings for the 2026 Town Meeting and Informational Hearing (02:34:06)
G. Duggan said that the ballot will include seven items, including a voter-backed petition regarding the DRB membership. S. Jackson said that he believes that the voter-backed petition should be edited to state that there are currently seven DRB members and that the petition proposes five. G. Duggan said that this is a binding petition and cannot be changed by the Selectboard. A. Watts said that additional clarifying information can be provided by the Town. He also said that the Selectboard has not met to discuss this item and should not assume neutrality without discussion. S. Jackson said that neutrality should be encouraged, and all agreed. K. Signorello, one of the writers of the petition, said that charter change petitions cannot be changed, however non-charter related questions can be edited for clarity. I. Wrenner said that she supported anything that clarified the petition language. C. Van Epps, one of the petitioners, also encouraged clarity.

SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, to change Article 5 to read, "Shall the voters approve setting the number of Essex Development Review Board members from seven (7) to five (5), in accordance with 24 V.S.A. 4460(f)?

Discussion: K. Chamberlin asked if advice from legal counsel was sought. G. Duggan said that the only advice asked of and received from the town attorney is that the petition is valid and can go on the ballot, and would be a binding vote. E. Lawrence clarified that the original question of the petition will still stand should the motion fail.

Vote: Motion failed 2-2, with KENDALL CHAMBERLIN and ANDY WATTS dissenting.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard approve and sign the warning for the 2026 Town Meeting and warn an Informational Hearing to receive

comments on all questions on the 2026 ballot, to be held on March 2, 2026 at 7:00 pm at the Essex Middle School. Motion passed 4-0.

i. Update on Municipal Wastewater Allocation Ordinance (03:04:33)
Aaron Martin and Dennis Lutz presented on this issue. A. Martin said that the staff are proposing significant changes in both the sewer map and the flow values, which results in a change in how allocation is managed. Staff proposes that each zone has a total available flow, based on estimated future need and total remaining sewer capacity. Staff recommends that the changes to the zoning map require an automatic map update. D. Lutz pointed out boundary changes in the sewer map and said that staff designed this to match the exact boundaries of the zoning map. He said that not aligning these two could open the Town to lawsuits. He said that there had been areas that were included in the sewer core but not given capacity in the past. Now, everyone in the core is eligible for sewer. However, the allocation numbers have been edited to ensure that they are reasonable for the number of people that would reasonably connect. The average gallons per day is suggested to be lowered to 150 gallons, from 200 gallons, which could be reflected in billing in the future. A. Martin said that the feedback from this night's meeting will be incorporated, and that changes will be reviewed at a future meeting.

In public comment, K. Signorello asked if the allocation request heard earlier in the meeting could be avoided with changes to the ordinance. D. Lutz said that, in this proposal, the municipal planning schedule will be followed and the Selectboard will approve all allocation requests except for those involving three units or less.

j. Consider approval of Truck 605 Replacement for fiscal year 2026 (03:45:02)
A. Martin said that Truck 605 was last replaced in 2008. Bids came in below what was expected. The only bid with the desired Duramag body was from Nucar, which is what staff if recommending.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to approve the purchase of the replacement maintenance vehicle for truck #605, and to direct staff to sign the purchase and sale agreement. Friendly amendment from SHANNON JACKSON to include "from Nucar" at the end of the sentence. Amendment accepted. Motion passed 4-0.

k. Discussion about updates to Town of Essex Charter (03:30:37)
G. Duggan said that seven changes were approved by voters last year. These potential changes are in the process of moving through the legislature for approval, and both G. Duggan and K. Chamberlin have testified to the House Government Operations and Military Affairs Subcommittee.

l. Discussion and potential action about Town Meeting outreach for Selectboard members (03:51:26)
G. Duggan said that the Selectboard meets with residents in the community to assist with Town Meeting outreach. E. Lawrence said that he does not feel it is appropriate for Selectboard members who are running for re-election to participate. All agreed. Staff will prepare an informational sheet to share. K. Chamberlin requested public input, of which there was none.

m. Discussion about meeting preparation process and semi-weekly meetings with the Chair, Vice Chair, Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager (04:00:27)
G. Duggan said that he would like the Selectboard to consider how they would like to handle this issue going forward. There is currently no written protocol regarding who attends these meetings. E. Lawrence said that this should be unwritten and at the current Board's discretion. A. Watts suggested that K. Chamberlin and S. Jackson continue to attend the meetings together until a new Board is voted upon for

consistency and to ensure that Essex is not in violation of the Open Meeting Law; all agreed. E. Lawrence said that private conversations should not be happening regarding business items between ranked Selectboard members and the manager. K. Chamberlin said that it is the purview of the Town Manager to set the agenda.

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

o. Discussion about pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party
This was discussed during Executive Session.

8. READING FILE (04:09:00)
a. Board member comments: E. Lawrence thanked Public Works for their work on the recent storm. S. Jackson said that he appreciated seeing data on fire calls. K. Chamberlin said that he thinks that the fire service that Essex receives is a tremendous value.
b. Upcoming meeting schedule
c. Investment Update for second quarter of fiscal year 2026
d. General Fund Fiscal Year 2026 budget and spending review - second quarter
e. Essex Fire Department 2025 Year End Call Data
f. Town of Essex Conservation & Trails Committee Comments on Executive Order 06-25, Proposed Wetlands Rule Changes
~~g. Status of Winter Operations 11/01/2025 through 12/31/2025~~
h. 2025 Equalization Study Results
i. Water Service Freezing Prevention Policy

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION (4:13:04)
a. An executive session may be requested to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
Not held.

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. Motion passed 4-0.

To avoid speculation, G. Duggan said that Deputy Town Manager Karen Adams is not at the meeting tonight due to a personal matter.

c. An executive session was held to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, that the Selectboard make the specific finding that general public knowledge of pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party, would place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed 4-0.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to move that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(E), to include the Town Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to extend the meeting by 15 minutes. Motion passed 4-0 at 10:59 p.m.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, to exit Executive Session. Motion passed 4-0 at 11:26 PM.

10. ADJOURN
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0 at 11:10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary