

**SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
PUBLIC HEARING MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2026**

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Town Manager; Charlie Cole, Fire Chief; Dan Roy, Finance Director; John Sonnick, Moderator

PUBLIC: Leslie Ballantyne-Fox, Alyssa Black, Susan Brown, Lucas Buckler-Jamison, Ryan Carroll, Ian Carroll, Steve Cluett, Mary T. Dean, Noah Detzer, Jeff Diedrichson, Kathryn Diedrichson, Phil Diesing, Roger Dodge, Will Dodge, Betsy Dunn, Jerry Fox, Rey Garofano, David Goodrich, Lisa Goodrich, Susan Goodrich, Dawn Hill-Fleury, Margaret Hjort, Dan Holland, Deb Holland, Brad Jackson, Michelle Jackson, Don Kent, RJ Lalancette, Mary McGinn, Martha McLaghlin, Johnny Mendez, Craig Metz, Janet Metz, Christine Moldovan, Gary Moreau, Darrell Murphy, Hubie Norton, Dean Picher, Rebeca Picher, Jeanne Prio, Ron Piro, Ken Signorello, Lawrence Smith, Lynn Smith, Kirk Smith, Margaret Smith, Eric Stewart, Joe Teegarden, Marie Tiemann, Tegen Pellate, Joe Valenti, Cheryl Van Epps, David White, Jean White, Irene Wrenner, Meg Zimmerman, Sharon Zukowski, Chelsea (screenname), Elly (screenname), Genie & Niel (screenname), James (screenname), Krista (screenname), Nicole (screenname), Steven P. (screenname)

Meeting Recording:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAvL4xT1ecE&list=PLljLFn4BZd2MX8tMSIwIYGFAQOith-Q_F&index=2

Times associated with each agenda item are approximate.

1. CALL TO ORDER (00:00:00)

Prior to the Call to Order, the Scout Troop 635 presented the colors and Gary Moreau sung the National Anthem. John Sonnick thanked the Girl Scouts, members of the Essex High School student government, Essex Middle School staff and Town Meeting TV for their assistance with this meeting. He introduced the Selectboard, town staff and local representatives. Shannon Jackson read the Invocation of Civility.

Kendall Chamberlin called the Town of Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES (00:06:58)

None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA (00:06:59)

No changes, thus no approval required.

4. PUBLIC HEARING (0:07:54)

SHANNON JACKSON made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to open the public hearing. Motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Chamberlin discussed what the town “general fund” supports and Selectboard goals for the FY27 budget. He said that Essex has a fully staffed public works department and discussed cost-sharing with the City of Essex Junction. He reviewed staffing changes, including three part-time positions shifting to full-time. \$78,498 of the prior year fund balance is proposed to offset several one-time costs. Voters in Essex

will again be asked whether or not to dedicate 1% of the proposed FY27 budget to human services. The total proposed budget (without human services) is \$17,189,166. This is a 5.03% increase from FY 26. \$12,240,965 is proposed to be raised through property taxes. He discussed the town's sources of revenue. He discussed reappraisal and said that this will not change the budget. K. Chamberlin reviewed the other ballot items.

a. Review and discuss: Article I: Shall the Town adopt a budget for the fiscal year July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027 as recommended by the Selectboard in the amount of \$17,189,166? (00:24:54)

Ken Signorello asked if there are any general fund transfers to capital this year. Greg Duggan said that none are proposed this year, however this has been done in the past.

b. Review and discuss: Article II: Shall the Town of Essex vote to appropriate an amount equal to 1% of the General Fund Budget, as passed by voters, to the Essex Human Services Contributions Fund to support social service organizations, such amount being reasonably necessary and for the support of programs to benefit Town of Essex residents? (00:28:30)

Lynn Smith said that she does not agree with tax payments going to human services funding as taxpayers do not have control over where it goes. Margaret Smith asked if there was a list of human services recipients which was provided. Mary McGann asked who is responsible for selecting human services recipients, and how this group feels about managing this process. Andy Watts said that there is a committee with a minimum of one Selectboard member, and that the ultimate decision is up to the Selectboard. Cheryl Van Epps asked for information on how many residents utilize the services of each non-profit. E. Lawrence said that this is measured in the application process. Betsy Dunn discussed cuts to community justice at the statewide level and suggested that additional funds be allocated for this purpose. A. Watts said that funding has gone to the Howard Center in the past, who provides these types of services. Jerry Fox said that he would like to know why human services was removed from the general fund budget. G. Duggan said that this was done at the request of Selectboard members and was reviewed by legal counsel who determined that this method was more defensible in court.

c. Review and discuss: Article III: Shall the voters of the Town of Essex advise the Selectboard to continue overall progress on implementing the new municipal complex at 80-90 Upper Main Street, for which the Selectboard adopted a conceptual Master Plan in March 2025? (Advisory) (00:38:35)

Dean Picher asked what a "no" vote would result in. J. Sonnick said that it is advisory but will give the Selectboard a sense of how to move forward on the issue. Eric Stewart asked why this was put on the ballot. E. Lawrence said that this question is intended to get a sense of whether or not the public approves on spending Selectboard and staff time on this issue. Town residents will continue to be engaged throughout the process and will be voting on major changes. L. Smith said that she feels that many residents who voted on purchasing this property would not agree with the total cost. Sharon Zukowski said that this was never voted upon previously. K. Chamberlin said that there was a significant amount of public engagement with this process, however it has not been voted upon. B. Dunn encouraged the town to work towards getting a full cost estimate of the proposed municipal complex and think of spending priorities. Charles Cole said that the question is asking for the advice of the public and does not allow for the spending of any funds.

E. Lawrence said that that question was put on the ballot to determine if the town should continue to expand staff resources working on this project. Hubie Norton said that the town offices are in the City of Essex Junction and said that there are some essential space needs within the town. He said that the town is growing and that the cost will not get any cheaper. E. Lawrence said that the Public Works facility is the only facility that is not included in the conceptual master plan, and that they would take over the fire department building. S. Zukowski said that yes vote would mean proceeding as planned and said that the Town is still paying the

bond on the police station renovation. Roger Dodge asked for clarification on the project cost, which was given. J. Fox said that there is never a good time to spend money and said that this is an important project for the town. E. Stewart concurred. Will Dodge said that this is an opportunity to reinvent the town and generate revenue along the way.

d. Review and discuss: Article IV: 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 a new municipal complex, and for which the Selectboard adopted a conceptual Master Plan in March 2025, under the following conditions (Advisory): (01:04:00)

1. Only the following funding sources are eligible to cover Town costs: capital funds, impact fees, \$500,000 in eligible grant funding and any other grant awards, donations, Reserve funds, approved fund balance assignments, and/or Local Option Tax revenue, should any local option taxes be approved by voters.

2. Construction of any portion of the new municipal complex project shall not occur without future voter input.

3. Costs for this infrastructure design phase of work, currently estimated at \$1.5 million, do not exceed \$2 million to come from the sources listed above.

Martha McGlaughin asked for clarification that this was just for planning, not construction. This is correct.

e. Review and discuss: Article V: Shall the voters approve setting the number of Essex Development Review Board members to five (5), in accordance with 24 V.S.A. 4460(f)? (01:06:53)

Lisa Goodrich said that it is important to have more voices, rather than less. Betsy Dunn said that she is concerned about the overlap between Planning Commission (PC) and Development Review Board (DRB) members. She said that it can be difficult to have so many people on a committee, as volunteerism is down. K. Chamberlin said that this is a citizen-led initiative that the Selectboard, PC, and DRB has no opinion on. Margaret Smith said that she was on the original charter change committee and that five members were recommended to serve on the PC and DRB, respectfully. She does not feel that there should be overlap between the two committees. C. Van Epps said that she would like to know more about the recommendations that were made about the PC and DRB. A. Watts said that state statute allows overlap between the two boards, and the town cannot specifically prohibit this. S. Zukowski said that neither board had made a decision on the issue and said that she believes that the town can prohibit overlap. K. Signorello said that, for a committee to speak as a committee, it must vote. There were discussions had by the PC and DRB but no recommendations made.

f. Announcement: Article VI: Election of the following: Moderator, 1 vacancy (1-year term) Selectboard, 3 vacancies (two 3-year terms, one 1-year term) (01:20:23)

J. Sonnick said that this will be voted upon tomorrow.

5. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD (01:20:33)

S. Zukowski thanked Selectboard members for their hard work. Kurt Smith asked for clarification as to overtime and bonus accounting. Lynn Smith asked for clarification on spending on parks and recreation consulting services. G. Duggan said that staff will follow up on this issue. K. Chamberlin thanked all residents for their support of the town of Essex, and town staff for their hard work.

6. ADJOURN

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by SHANNON JACKSON, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0 at 8:41 PM.

**SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)**

MARCH 2, 2026

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147 Respectfully Submitted,

148 Darby Mayville

149 Recording Secretary

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