

Town of Essex Selectboard
Draft Regular Meeting Minutes
Monday, February 23, 2026

A video recording of the meeting is available on the Town of Essex YouTube Channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/@essexvt>.

Direct link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oclf-gyRFk>

Selectboard Members:

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

Administration and Staff: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Town Manager; Annie Costandi, Water Quality Director; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Dan Roberge, Highway Superintendent

Others Present: At Meeting – Melinda Antonucci, Tatsiana Bussiere, Sean Neely, Ken Signorello, Reed Nye, Irene Wrenner.

On Zoom – Eleni Churchill, Gina Halpin Barrett, Sharon Illenye, Anne Miller, Tim Miller, Dianne Percy, Lois Whitmore, Megan Zimmerman, Sharon Zukowski, Aleo, John S

1. Call to Order 00:00 in video

Kendall Chamberlin called the Essex Selectboard meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. Agenda Changes/Additions

No changes or additions to the agenda.

3. Approve agenda

No changes were needed.

4. Public To Be Heard 00:41 in video

Sharon Illenye spoke about the dog bite incident on Brigham Hill Road and said that if this happens again, neighbors should be informed, and that the sign on premise is not sufficient. She asked what will the follow up be to make sure requirements are met. Kendall Chamberlin said this is still a work in progress. Greg Duggan said the dog owner has ordered “beware of dog” signs to install and the Town is doing check ins with the police and animal control to make sure the conditions imposed by the Selectboard are being met.

Ken Signorello said the Town’s Tree Warden, Chuck Vile, has passed and the Conservation and Trails Committee will hold a memorial service on Arbor Day in May, to include planting a tree and with other plans still in the works. In regards to the Trail Caretakers Program, which is a Parks and Recreation program, Mr. Signorello said the Conservation and Trails Committee is involved with interviewing the 25 applicants and may have to do some special meetings to expedite this. Also, in review of the comments in the annual report about the items on the ballot and Article V, that the Selectboard chose seven members for the Development Review Board based on the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment recommendations, Mr. Signorello said he found no vote or motion in a review of minutes

and only discussion that was inconclusive. He said hopefully at the Informational Meeting this will be clarified.

5. Consent Items (06:51 in video)

- a. Approve minutes: February 2, 2026
- b. Approve check warrants: #18316 - 02/01/26; 18317 - 02/06/26; #18323 - 02-13-26
- c. Consider approval of Form PVR-4155 Certificate of No Appeal or Suit Pending to Grand List

Ethan Lawrence made a motion, seconded by Shannon Jackson, to approve the consent agenda. Motion passed 4-0.

6. Business Items (07:12 in video)

a. Consider approval of liquor license applications and renewals

Mr. Duggan said the applications that have come forward so far have been reviewed. Liquor licenses are reviewed annually. There are no concerns with the new application or renewals and they are presented for the Selectboard to consider. For the one new application, Melinda Antonucci of Vermont Event and Wedding Rentals spoke about her business. Mr. Jackson read her the liquor license admonition.

Andy Watts made a motion, seconded by Shannon Jackson, to approve the liquor license applications for businesses located in the Town of Essex listed in February 20, 2026, memorandum liquor license applications. Motion passed 4-0.

b. * Consider approval of Town Manager's appointment of Town Clerk & Treasurer

Mr. Duggan introduced Tatsiana Bussiere, who he appointed as the Town Clerk and Treasurer pending Selectboard approval. Ms. Bussiere introduced herself and provided background information on her qualifications.

Andy Watts made a motion, seconded by Ethan Lawrence, that the Selectboard approve the Town Manager's appointment of Tatsiana Bussiere as the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer. Motion passed 4-0.

c. Presentation and discussion about Town Meeting preview - What's on the Ballot?

Kendall Chamberlin presented the items that are on the 2026 ballot. He said the Town of Essex won its category for the annual town report this year (from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns). The presentation included information about the fiscal year 2027 proposed budget, an overview of the 2026 Town Meeting ballot items, and the seats open for election. Mr. Chamberlin said the Selectboard's budget goals were to limit the tax increase to 2-3.5%, to eliminate operating transfers to capital, and to ensure cost effective and efficient operations. He then reviewed details of the various service and expenses. The ballot item of Human Services Funding was then reviewed, where the voters will be asked whether to dedicate an amount equal to 1% of the proposed FY27 general fund budget to this item. There was also information on reappraisal, the objective of which is to revalue all properties at the same time. The ballot contains a question from a voter-backed petition asking if the number of Development Review Board members should be set at 5. Other ballot questions include Article III, an advisory question that asks if the Town shall continue making progress toward the new municipal complex at 80 and 90 Upper Main Street, and Article IV, and advisory question about whether to complete infrastructure design on the

Upper Main Street property. Finally, the ballot has three Selectboard seats up for election – two for three-year seats and one one-year seat – and a Town Moderator seat.

Following the presentation, Mr. Chamberlin opened the meeting up for questions. Lois Whitmore asked what the human services budget funds. Mr. Duggan said the program supports social service agencies that serve and support Essex, such as STEPS to End Domestic Violence, Spectrum Youth Services, Aunt Dot's Food Shelf, and many more. More information is available on the Town's website. Ms. Whitmore asked if the Human Services Funding supports Green Mountain Transit or the senior bus. Mr. Duggan said it has not done so in the past, because the Town pays dues to Green Mountain Transit and runs the Senior Bus through Parks and Recreation as a partnership with GMT. He said GMT is having financial difficulties, so other organizations could step up to provide senior transportation and they might be eligible for Human Services Funding. He said the application period typically opens in November and runs through mid-February.

Ethan Lawrence had two comments about the presentation. First, on slide 9, it reads prior year fund balance of \$78,498, and he believes that is misleading because that is not the total fund balance amount and he would like to see the entire fund balance listed. Second, slide 20, regarding the 80 and 90 Upper Main Street grant application, he asked for clarity about the grant application and how information could be presented. Karen Adams answered that the original grant application can be provided, but the grant has been approved for an amendment. She said the Town has not yet accepted the grant. She said the Selectboard is awaiting voter feedback at Town Meeting before determining whether to move ahead with the grant.

Mr. Jackson said the reason for the presentation is so early voters do not have to wait until Monday night to get information. Plus, the FAQs are available online and there is a coffee chat this Wednesday at 8:30 a.m. at Uncommon Coffee.

d. Lower Sand Hill Road Truck Traffic Study Project Summary Presentation

The study has analyzed large truck traffic in the survey area. Work started over a year ago with Sean Neely from Stantec. This is the third public presentation of this project, with the past two presentations happening at Planning Commission meetings. Mr. Neely reviewed a map of the area and stated the goals are to integrate public input and identify safety issues and roadway deficiencies. He then went over the network conditions and the data collected and reviewed the AM and PM volumes. Mr. Watts asked what the balanced existing network means. Mr. Neely explained it means collecting data at different intersections and bringing it together to create a network to determine if the numbers balance out. Mr. Chamberlin asked how to read the traffic numbers shown on one of the diagrams, and Mr. Neely explained the number of trucks going through the intersections. Mr. Lawrence said an important statistic is that a right-hand turn onto Sand Hill resulted in zero left hand turns and these can be Public Works trucks, which are not violating code.

Mr. Neely reviewed specific locations in the presentation. He then went over short-term and medium-term recommendations at 55:30 in video. There was also discussion about the bike lanes at 57:00 in video. Mr. Jackson asked about dates for proposed State work and Mr. Neely said he is not aware of any specific date put out by the State for work in the area of the study. He then discussed long-term recommendations including the connection of

Thompson Drive and Kimo Drive, at 1:00:27 in video. Additional recommendations are to monitor conditions and conduct a traffic study in 2035 and compare volumes to forecasts to determine if additional mitigation measures should be considered at that time.

Mr. Watts and Mr. Lawrence were pleased that there is an actionable plan with real numbers. Mr. Jackson asked about the intersection analysis, with Mr. Neely explaining the slides and scoring used at 1:03:39 in video. Mr. Chamberlin asked if the truck trip distribution study was done only during the day or are there night numbers, and Mr. Neely confirmed the numbers were only collected from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mr. Watts asked if the numbers were only for turning vehicles and not ones that are going straight on VT Route 15. Mr. Neely said the numbers include straight and turning vehicles.

Anne Miller asked about the intersection grades shown on slide 25 and whether it would be safe to assume the intersections are now running in F, due to when the study was conducted. Mr. Neely said the F grades are referring to the most restrictive turning movement. Ms. Miller asked what the target grade should be. Mr. Neely said it depends on the context, such as whether an intersection is signalized and the overall level of service in the area. He said VTRANS finds D as an acceptable level of service in an urban area. Ms. Miller asked if any of the intersections in Essex are considered urbanized. Mr. Neely replied that VT Route 15 might be considered urbanized. Ms. Miller asked about the survey recommended for 2035 and what additional mitigations might be. Mr. Neely replied that recommendations could be similar or adjusted to phasing or timing of signals or dedicated turn lanes based on results. Ms. Miller asked about pedestrians and bicyclists being “uncomfortable” with lack of buffers, and how much input was received by pedestrians and bicyclists. Mr. Neely said pedestrians and bicycles were considered in the study, and “discomfort” is the term used when there are no reported crashes.

Mr. Signorello asked if there was any effort to get a sense of whether overweight trucks are transporting on lower Sand Hill Road. Mr. Neely said the study did not do that.

Gina Barrett asked when a traffic light signal would be installed at the corner of Sand Hill and Jericho Road. She also said Sand Hill is the main road to Essex’s schools, and residents’ mailboxes are on the other side of the road, making it unsafe to cross. She said she would appreciate any mitigation. Mr. Neely said he would appreciate any input for the ongoing transportation study.

Lois Whitmore asked, in regards to the plans that depend on the development of Kimo Drive, if the option of eminent domain would enable that to happen more quickly than waiting for a developer. She also asked if the traffic study had been run by the Town’s Health Officer. Mr. Neeley said the people doing the study did not connect with the Health Officer. As for Kimo Drive, he said the study did not make recommendations as to how it should be pursued.

Ms. Barrett said if Thompson Drive connects to Kimo and does come out onto VT Route 117, it is less than 500 feet to the Sand Hill Road traffic light, and that distance would also need to be mitigated.

e. **Consider approval of application for Drinking Water State Revolving Fund funding for Final Engineering for Phase 1 of the Fort Ethan Allen Water Main Replacement Project**

Aaron Martin spoke about the age of the infrastructure at Fort Ethan Allen, with an increasing risk of waterline breaks prompting Public Works to start planning for replacement. No lead has been found in the pipes at the Fort yet. Step one, preliminary engineering, has been completed for the waterline replacement. The project work is broken into three phases, or contracts. Mr. Martin said the goal for the night was to get approval to submit for Contract 1, Step 2, final engineering, through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund process. He outlined the areas involved in this request. Annie Costandi spoke on the total project cost. The Step 2 engineering for contract one will cost an estimated \$84,500. The total cost for all three phases is estimated at \$11,980,000, including design and construction. If the project expands to include Vermont Avenue and Claire Drive, the total cost would rise to an estimated \$15,550,000. Mr. Martin and Ms. Constandi said they are looking for a planning and design loan with 0% interest over 5 years. They are also looking into other options for funding.

Mr. Lawrence said any cost burden would be on water system users and not the General Fund taxpayers. Mr. Jackson asked what portion Colchester would pay. Mr. Martin said the Town of Essex owns the water system, and Colchester property owners connected to the system would pay as users. Mr. Jackson asked about the alternatives on Vermont Avenue and Claire Drive and asked if the Town would want to do the full project. Mr. Martin said those parts of the project would be development driven. Mr. Chamberlin asked for confirmation that the alternative projects are not necessarily critical, which Mr. Martin confirmed. Mr. Chamberlin asked if, because of the history of the Fort being an Air Force base, there would be an opportunity for a Congressional appropriation to support the work. Mr. Martin said it is something he has previously considered. Mr. Chamberlin noted that the actual application does not have any short-term asset replacement tables.

Ethan Lawrence made a motion, seconded by Shannon Jackson, that the Selectboard approve and sign the application for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) for Step 2, Final Engineering, for Phase 1 of the Fort Ethan Allen Waterline Replacement project and authorize Public Works staff to submit the application to the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program. Motion passed 4-0.

f. **Consider approval of award and purchase of Public Works excavator**

Mr. Martin said the equipment in question is up due to the capital equipment replacement plan. Public Works received four quotes, with United providing the lowest quote at \$84,544 to replace the backhoe with an excavator. Mr. Lawrence asked if there is a better quote and Dan Roberge replied that they are comfortable with the quote. Mr. Chamberlin said he has concerns about having an excavator rather than a backhoe, and feels that a plan for both should have been submitted. Mr. Martin said the existing backhoe has about 5 years left of service life.

Ethan Lawrence made a motion, seconded by Shannon Jackson, that the Selectboard approve the quote submitted by United Construction and Forestry for the new John Deere 50P Excavator and direct the Town Manager to sign the purchase agreement. Motion passed 4-0.

g. **Discussion about Coffee with Committees**

Ms. Adams spoke about the specifics of when the Coffee with Committee meetings should occur and or gauge the current value of the current structure. Currently, one or two Selectboard members meet with the Town's volunteer board and committee members one Saturday each month. Mr. Jackson said Coffees with Committees have been well received and there is nothing negative that comes away from it and they provide great value. Mr. Chamberlin said the discussion that takes place has been interesting and illuminating. Mr. Watts also spoke about the breakfast for the chairs of the committees and asked whether both types of events should continue. Mr. Duggan suggested polling the committee members to see what they think.

Mr. Watts asked what happens with the information collected from these events. Mr. Jackson said there is no report, but it could be discussed.

Mr. Signorello said he has been at most of the coffee chats, and he finds it valuable to speak to the Selectboard in a candid, informal fashion as well as speaking to other chairs. He said consistency is critical in these things and to continue if possible. The Board asked to get feedback from the committees and keep the Coffee chats going. Mr. Lawrence agreed to do the next one.

h. *** Consider appointment of Alternate to Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission**

Mr. Duggan said that with Tracey Delphia no longer serving on the Selectboard and having stepped down from the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, there is a vacancy on the CCRPC. He said the CCRPC prefers members to be current or former Selectboard members. He said if a current Selectboard member wants to step up, staff can notify the RPC. Alternatively, the position could be advertised before the next CCRPC meeting on March 18. Mr. Lawrence volunteered to be the alternate.

Shannon Jackson made a motion, seconded by Andy Watts, to appoint current member Ethan Lawrence as an alternate to the CCRPC to fill the remainder of the open alternate term. Motion passed 4-0.

i. **** Potential action and potential public hearing to consider a disciplinary or dismissal action of a member of Economic Development Commission**

Discussion happened later in executive session.

j. ***** Discussion and potential action regarding the purchase a parcel of land to create a public small boat access point along the Winooski River**

Mr. Watts said there might be some Act 250 stipulations about the development of that property. Ms. Adams said her understanding is that through the Winooski Valley Park District and their conversations with Act 250, it was confirmed that Act 250 had no objection to the sale of the property. They did share that developing the property would likely require an Act 250 permit or amendment. VTRANS did not have a concern about accessing the parcel, but the entrance should be placed accordingly.

Mr. Signorello said he hopes the question about a purchase could be resolved that night and it would be great to see this project come true. Ms. Miller said it would be great to have a primitive access to the river.

- k. **** Discussion about pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party

Discussion happened later in executive session.

- l. * Discussion about Town Manager evaluation

Discussion happened later in executive session.

7. Reading File (02:12:56 in video)

- a. Board Member Comments: Mr. Watts brought attention to the Chittenden County Municipal Elected Official Forum, which is a Selectboard meetup organized by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) and the CCRPC, being held on March 30, 2026. Mr. Lawrence pointed out the Town policy on campaign signs and signs at the polling place and said it should be read and understood. Mr. Jackson gave a reminder about the Town Showcase event on Monday, March 2. Mr. Watts said VLCT released a new model for fund balance policy that might be useful and as of July 1, 2025, the Selectboard can decide where fund balance goes. Mr. Chamberlin noted that the Public Works Department has been doing a great job and was curious if residents have noticed a difference as they have reduced salt use.
- b. Upcoming meeting schedule
- c. Informational postcard mailing about Essex Westford School District's Annual Meeting
- d. Save the Date + RSVP: Chittenden County Municipal Elected Official Forum - March 30
- e. Status of Winter Operations 01/01/2026 through 01/31/2026
- f. Restorative Justice in Essex, July to December 2025
- g. Draft Active Transportation Plan for review
- h. Report on Opioid Settlement Funds for 2025
- i. Vermont League of Cities and Towns February 2026 Article on Fund Balance/Reserves
- j. Letter to Rep. Lori Houghton re: funding for Howard Center's Community Outreach Team
- k. Town Showcase criteria for tables

8. Executive Session (02:17:51 in video)

- a. *An executive session may be requested to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee

Shannon Jackson made a motion, seconded by Ethan Lawrence, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(3) to include the Town Manager, Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

- b. ** Discussion about a disciplinary or dismissal action against a public officer or employee

Shannon Jackson made a motion, seconded by Ethan Lawrence, to enter executive session to discuss a disciplinary or dismissal action against a public officer or employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(4) to include the Town Manager, Deputy Town Manager and the public officer under review. Motion passed 4-0.

- c. *** Discussion about the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options

Ethan Lawrence made a motion, seconded by Shannon Jackson, to discuss the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options in accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(2) to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

- d. **** Discussion about 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 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 Ethan Lawrence, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or prosecution to which the public body is or may be a body pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a)(1)(e) to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

Shannon Jackson made a motion, seconded by Ethan Lawrence, to exit executive session. The motion passed 4-0 at 10:13 p.m.

Shannon Jackson made a motion, seconded by Kendall Chamberlin, to dismiss Igor Polenov from the Economic Development Commission, effective immediately. The motion passed 4-0.

Andy Watts made a motion, seconded by Shannon Jackson, to authorize the Town Manager to negotiate a purchase price for the parcel at 152 River Road. The motion passed 4-0.

9. Adjourn (01:21:10 in video)

Andy Watts made a motion, seconded by Ethan Lawrence, to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0. Meeting adjourned at 10:17 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kariella Audrey Tabone
Secretary

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2026.
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)

Signed by Name, Title