SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
MONDAY, MAY 18, 2026

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Town Manager; Annie Costandi, Water Quality Director; Madison Duffy, Assistant Finance Director, Dennis Lutz, Public Works Staff; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Dan Roy, Finance Director; Harlan Smith, Assistant Director of Parks, Trails & Open Spaces

PUBLIC: Paul Bohne, Clayton Clark, Bino Cummings, Hunter Eddy, Emily Gibbs, Gina Halpin Barrett, Kevin Heffernan, Georgia Lavigne, Carrie MacFarlane, Anne Miller, Reed Nye, Allan Ramsay, Garry Scott, Ken Signorello, Margaret Smith, Cheryl Van Epps, Lorraine Zaloom, Sharon Zukowski, Michael (screenname), m.music (screenname)

Meeting Recording:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmkV7hAldBA&list=PLljLFn4BZd2MX8tMSIwlYGFAQOith-Q_F

Times associated with each agenda item are approximate.

1. CALL TO ORDER (00:00:00)
Shannon Jackson called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES (00:00:09)
Aaron Martin made the Board aware of incorrect information in the Water and Sewer Budget and Rates memo. Andy Watts asked that Item 6c., "Consider approval of proclamation in support of Arbor Day," be removed from the Consent Agenda. It will be discussed as Business Item 7r.

3. APPROVE AGENDA (00:01:13)
KENDAL CHAMBERLIN made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed 5-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD (00:01:36)
Anne Miller said steep slope regulations have been in place for more than fifty years. Answering a question from Lorraine Zaloom regarding when questions from the last Selectboard meeting would be answered, S. Jackson said he would consult with the Town manager and ensure that the questions are answered promptly.

6. CONSENT ITEMS (00:11:29)
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion passed 5-0.
a. Approve minutes: May 4, 2026
b. Approve check warrants: #18338 - 05/01/26; #18339 - 05/08/26
~~**c. Consider approval of proclamation in support of Arbor Day**~~
d. Consider approval of 1st class liquor license application

5. PUBLIC HEARING (00:11:50)
a. Public Hearing on proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Water and Sewer Rates and Capital Plan

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, to open the public hearing. Motion passed 5-0.

Aaron Martin presented the proposed FY27 Water and Sewer operating budget rates and capital plan. The FY27 Water and Sewer budget is composed of three separate accounts: a shared water and sewer account, water only and a sewer only account. The FY27 shared water and sewer budget after revenues is $963,224. He said this budget covers all labor and benefits for the department, training expenses for staff, water meters and a portion going to the separate water and sewer budgets. There will be no change to the minimum water charge for FY27, and it will remain $240/year. Aaron Martin said the FY27 sewer budget reflects a rate increase of 8.9% over the current sewer rate. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin regarding minimum charges, Aaron Martin clarified that the annual minimum charge is for water only and there was no minimum sewer usage.

Aaron Martin presented the proposed FY27 Water and Sewer Capital budget. He said the proposed FY27 Capital budget for FY27 for the Water and Sewer department is $1,068,770, which includes all utility projects and equipment purchases. The budget will also be supported by the current available fund balance of $3,264,196. Annie Costandi reviewed the joint maintenance agreement regarding shared gravity lines and pump stations. She said to ensure equitable cost-sharing, flow meters will be installed to precisely measure usage and allocate expenses accurately between the Town and City. Aaron Martin provided an update on several projects, including the Sand Hill Road/VT Route 15 intersection project, work at Fort Ethan Allen, the Pump Station Control Upgrade Project, and hydrant reconditioning work.

A. Watts asked for clarification on the memo regarding leak monitoring completed in FY25 and why funds were allocated for monitoring at $50,000/year until 2028. Aaron Martin clarified leak detection was completed but that monitoring is an ongoing need, and these funds will go towards equipment used to properly monitor leaks. K. Chamberlin said rates should increase to help cover unexpected expenditure in FY27. Answering a question from L. Zaloom, Aaron Martin said the sewer rate typically increases at a larger rate than the water rate. Answering a question from L. Zaloom about a galvanized metal pipe used on Alder Lane, Aaron Martin said it was what was needed to handle vehicle loads going over it. Cheryl Van Epps asked if there were any visual clues of water leaks above ground. Aaron Martin said standing water is always a good sign of a water leak and he advised residents to call the public works if a leak is suspected. C. Van Epps asked for clarification on how sewer projects are prioritized. Aaron Martin said projects were prioritized by need and cost and must go through an approval process before the project begins. Aaron Martin said the Painesville project has gone unfunded due to lack of buy-ins from the community to put a sewer in as well as lack of state and federal funding. Answering a question from C. Van Epps, Aaron Martin said public works would be applying for a RFQ for a water line and that paving has been delayed due to the water line replacement.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, to close the public hearing. Motion passed 5-0.

7. <u>BUSINESS ITEMS</u>

a. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Conservation & Trails Committee - Carrie Macfarlane (00:53:20:30)

Carrie Macfarlane said she has lived in Essex since last summer. She has been serving a sixth month appointment on the Conservation and Trails Committee (CTC) since January 2026 and is applying to continue her appointment. M. Zimmerman asked what her biggest observation has been and what has been the most rewarding experience while serving on the CTC. C. Macfarlane said the most rewarding part was the connection it has given her to the town and seeing the impact the work has on the community. Answering a question from E. Lawrence regarding what ideas she would bring before the Selectboard, C. Macfarlane said she suggests having a list of guidelines for use when reviewing Development Review Board applications. Answering a question from E. Lawrence about the importance of stipends, C. Macfarlane said the stipend program is a great gesture that has helped more people volunteer their time who may not otherwise be able to.

b. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Conservation & Trails Committee - Bino Cummings (00:59:27)
Bino Cummings said he had been a resident of Essex since 2020. He has served on the CTC for the past three years and has been the Vice Chair for the past year. M. Zimmerman asked what his biggest observation has been and what his most rewarding experience was while serving on the CTC. B. Cummings said the most rewarding is the connection to the community, but the biggest frustration is the timing constraints in government. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin regarding recusing himself from voting, B. Cummings detailed two instances where he recused himself in the past. Answering a question from E. Lawrence about the importance of stipends, B. Cummings said he didn't take the stipend during his first term, but he did find value in the program. Answering a question from E. Lawrence about his skill sets, B. Cummings said his biggest skill is listening and then finding the correct questions to ask.

c. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Planning Commission - Joshua Knox (01:05:20)
Joshua Knox said he has lived in Essex for 20 years. He currently serves on the Planning Commission (PC) because he wants the community to be here for future generations. M. Zimmerman asked what his biggest observation had been and what his most rewarding experience was while serving the PC. J. Knox said the most challenging was when the PC and Development Review Board (DRB) were not separate functions. Answering a question from M. Zimmerman about how this challenge prepared him to better serve on the PC, J. Knox said having experience in development review has helped him understand the DRB process is. Answering a question from E. Lawrence regarding the importance of stipends, J. Knox said he finds value in the stipend program. Answering a question from A. Watts, regarding Tier 1B and if there was anything that the Selectboard could have done to improve between the PC and the DRB, J. Knox said it was simply a matter of different opinions.

d. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Planning Commission - Georgia Lavigne (01:14:15)
Georgia Lavigne said she is the Vice Chair of the PC, has served on the PC for three years and has lived in Essex for 13 years. She has served on the advisory committee for the Keystone Trail Active Transportation Plan and is the liaison of the Housing Commission. M. Zimmerman asked what her biggest observation was and what her most rewarding experience was while serving on the PC. G. Lavigne said the most challenging was development review before it was a separate function and the working on the proposed women's prison development. She said focusing on building regulations so that they fit the town's improvement needs has been the most rewarding part of her experience. Answering a question from E. Lawrence regarding the importance of stipends, G. Lavigne said she values the stipend program. Answering a question from E. Lawrence, regarding what skills or ideas she has brought to the PC, G. Lavine said she has been successful in communicating with other committees. She discussed increasing administrative approvals and allowing for Town, rather than state regulations, to assist with affordability.

e. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees - Emily Gibbs (01:22:21)

A. Watts disclosed that his wife is the Chair of the Library Board of Trustees and said there is no conflict of interest with his participation in the interview; all agreed. A. Watts said he would submit a written report to the Town Clerk within five days stating there is no conflict of interest.

Emily Gibbs said she has lived in Essex since 2019, and she has served as a Library Trustee for the last three years. M. Zimmerman asked what the biggest observation was and what her most rewarding experience was while serving as a Library Trustee. E. Gibbs said the biggest challenge has been attending meetings in person while having a small child at home, although she has been attending via Zoom. She said the most rewarding aspect of her role has been building meaningful connections within the community while actively participating in local governance initiatives. Answering a question from E. Lawrence regarding the importance of the stipends, E. Gibbs said that while she has not yet formally applied for a stipend, she intends to review it further based on positive peer feedback. E. Gibbs discussed implementing a gardening program at the library. Answering a question from A. Watts regarding what community means to her, she said community means working together to make your town better, knowing your neighbors, and offering to help each other in times of need.

f. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees - Allan Ramsay (01:31:00)

Allan Ramsay said he lives on Lost Nation Road and has been a resident of Essex for 44 years and has served as a Library Trustee for three years. He is excited about the strategic plan for 2025-2028 and new programs which could potentially be implemented at a new facility. He cited his professional experiences in healthcare with his work developing a book lending program in conjunction with the Meals on Wheels program. He said there is a need for a new library facility at the new municipal building. Answering a question from E. Lawrence regarding the importance of stipends, A. Ramsay said he was unaware of the existence of such and would rather the money go to the Friends of Essex Free Library.

g. Discussion with Green Mountain Transit and Essex Westford School District about anticipated fiscal year 2027 dues and service, and possible departure from GMT in fiscal year 2028 (01:42:44)

Clayton Clark, General Manager of Green Mountain Transit (GMT), said the decision has been made to end service of the number 4 bus unless a cost-neutral solution is found. He said after a meeting last week with Essex Westford School District (EWSD) there may be potential for federal funding. Around $112,000 in revenue would be required to maintain the same service. Reduction in service also brings forth questions regarding Special Services Transportation Agency (SSTA) services for disabled residents. He explained the process for Essex to leave GMT, should this be something which is desired. Hunter Eddy and Garry Scott, both of EWSD, said this would bring a significant challenge for students. G. Scott said EWSD has worked very hard to reduce truancy, and the GMT bus service assists with working towards this goal. C. Clark said potential changes to state law may allow GMT to enter into service agreements with non-municipal entities. E. Lawrence asked if both fixed route and regular service would be lost. C. Clark confirmed that this is the case. E. Lawrence asked if there was a specific amount that a bus costs to run per school year. G. Scott said it costs approximately $100,000. E. Lawrence asked if it would be possible for EWSD to run the bus. H. Eddy said finding drivers is difficult. E. Lawrence said he would like to see Essex explore the possibility of adding their own bus service. C. Clark suggested that a service agreement might be helpful for Essex. M. Zimmerman asked if a contribution from EWSD is required to obtain grants. C. Clark said it is not necessary, but that a local match is required. P. Bohne, Essex representative on the GMT Board of Commissioners, said Essex can withdraw their membership from GMT and then re-join later. C. Clark said once a route is cut, it is very difficult to get it back as users find other solutions.

In public comment, Kevin Heffernan suggested using a minibus, as he rarely sees riders on the bus. C. Clark said a specific number of buses are permitted by the federal government and that it is important for the buses to be able to operate in a variety of circumstances. Smaller buses also require additional replacement costs. L. Zaloom asked if there was cost savings to have EWSD students use the GMT buses and asked if updated ridership numbers were available. C. Clark said the ridership numbers provided are recent. G. Scott said utilizing GMT buses does not represent savings for EWSD. Cheryl Van Epps said she uses the GMT services and that they are essential for her to meet her basic needs. She asked if there was a possibility of donating to help those who might be affected by this change. C. Clark said donations could be made to the SSTA, as he believes they will absorb much of the ridership. He said bus riders tend to be more vulnerable than the rest of the population. C. Clark will provide an update to the Selectboard at their June 15, 2026, meeting. K. Chamberlin expressed concern about the timing of this and said he does not see any downside to withdrawing from GMT this evening. A. Watts said the Town Plan states that Essex will support GMT.

h. Consider approval of Fiscal Year 2027 Water and Sewer Budget Rates (02:25:26)
K. Chamberlin said he would not support this vote due to the removal of capital funding for pump station work. S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the FY 2027 water and sewer rate and billing structure shall be as follows:

1. Water Rates/Fees:
a. Increase the water rate from $6.67 per 1,000 gallons to $6.96 per 1,000 gallons.
b. The water initiation fee at $1,000 base fee per connection plus $5.90/gpd capacity to remain the same.
c. Set the minimum water charge per year at $240.
d. Interim or Final Billing request at $35.

2. Sewer Rates/Fees:
a. Increase the sewer operating fee from $12 per 1,000 gallons to $13.08 per 1,000 gallons.
b. The sewer initiation fee of $1,000 base fee per connection plus $10.60/gpd of capacity remains the same.
c. Interim or Final Billing request at $35.

3. The rate change and interim/final billing request would go into effect on all water/sewer usage with the billing period starting after the spring 2026 billings.

And that the new rates be reflected in the next full billing period following budget approval.

Motion passed 4-1, with KENDALL CHAMBERLIN dissenting.

i. Consider approval of water / sewer capital budget and plan (02:29:38)
S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, that the Selectboard approves the FY 27 Water/Sewer Capital Budget and planned Capital Revenues and Expenditures for FYE 2028-FYE 2031.

Discussion: E. Lawrence noted that an amount is included in the memo.

The motion passed 3-2, with ETHAN LAWRENCE and KENDALL CHAMBERLIN dissenting.

j. Presentation and discussion about proposed changes to Sewer Use Ordinance 10.16 of the Town Ordinances (02:33:49)
K. Chamberlin asked if there was an opportunity to change sewer overflow regulations. D. Lutz provided a historical overview of changes to this policy. K. Chamberlin asked if an inspection program was in place. Aaron Martin responded this is something that staff regularly check during routine work and that Public Works can request an inspection if necessary. M. Zimmerman asked about a potentially contradictory statement regarding connection fees. Aaron Martin said this can vary based on potential use changes.

In public comment, L. Zaloom asked if there had been a recently completed sewer capacity study. Aaron Martin said Public Works is working to get more realistic data on residential usage for allocation calculations. C. Van Epps said she would like to see a project list for Water/Sewer Capital items and spoke of service disparities. Aaron Martin said the current assessments represent the best assessment of engineering staff. He believes that funding is going towards the right areas. A. Watts noted that all the funding for these projects is from water and sewer user payments. Sharon Zukowski asked if more capacity is available than previously thought. Aaron Martin responded that over time, usage has changed and D. Lutz detailed capacity usage. S. Zukowski expressed concern that an excess of capacity would be directed to the Town Center, and capacity would not be available should additional neighborhoods wish to purchase sewer access. D. Lutz said the Selectboard can allocate additional capacity if necessary. L. Zaloom discussed the impact of low-flow plumbing products on usage. D. Lutz said connection fees and minimums will need to be revisited in the future. K. Chamberlin discussed the surcharge system for hazardous waste, with Aaron Martin stating he believes that this discussion needs to occur at the Tri-Town level. K. Chamberlin suggested that excess funds be designated for capital projects.

k. Consider acceptance of Recreation Trails Program grant and authorization of the Town Manager to execute project contracts (03:05:18)
Adriane Martin said the department has been awarded a Recreation Trails Program grant to improve accessibility and sustainability on the White Trail at Indian Brook. This will also allow for the Trail to be used year-round. K. Chamberlin asked for details on the additional costs required. Adriane Marin said permitting and assessment work will need to be completed. A. Watts asked what the surface of the trail would be, Adriane Martin said crushed stone. The current White Trail will be re-naturalized, and education will encourage users to stay on the current trails. S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none.

MEG ZIMMERMAN made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, to accept the $50,000 grant on behalf of the Town, and approve the Town Manager to sign necessary contracts to complete this project. Motion passed 5-0.

l. Consider approval of the Recreation Program Fund Fiscal Year 2027 budget (03:13:27)
Adriane Martin said Essex Parks and Recreation (EPR) works towards 100% cost recovery in the Program Fund. The FY27 Program Fund is forecasted to have a $17,016 shortfall, to be offset by the accumulated Program Fund balance (currently projected to be $100,518 at the end of the fiscal year). While still negative, this is nearly a two-third reduction from the FY26 forecasted shortfall and reflects a positive trajectory for the department and the Program Fund. M. Zimmerman said a two-thirds reduction in the shortfall is positive, and asked Adriane Martin what has been successful in getting there. Adriane Martin said having a full-time

staff member dedicated to programming has been helpful. She said EPR has a lease to use Memorial Hall at specific times which has helped with programming planning and said the Farmer's Market has been quite successful. K. Chamberlin asked if there is a target for fund balance, Adriane Martin said this will be considered more in the future and balanced with stability and growth. S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, that the Selectboard adopt the FY27 Parks & Recreation Program Fund budget. Motion passed 5-0.

m. Consider approval to initiate Tax Sale procedures (03:21:44)
D. Roy said the delinquent tax numbers are reviewed every May, with a focus on properties which are more than one year delinquent. He said this number has been reduced by more than 100 properties in the last year. Notices are sent out monthly and staff work to reach out to property owners frequently. He recommends that staff continue with existing internal processes and delay formal tax sales until later this summer. M. Zimmerman asked for clarification on cited City of Essex Junction properties. D. Roy said some of the delinquencies go back to when the City – then the Village of Essex Junction – and Town were collecting taxes together. S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard authorize staff to move forward with tax sale procedures as described in the steps above in accordance with the Tax Sale Policy. Motion passed 5-0.

n. Consider final adoption of Fundraising and Donations Policy (03:27:15)
K. Adams said preliminary adoption of this policy occurred at the April 6, 2026, meeting. S. Jackson requested public input, of where there was none.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard approve final adoption of the Fundraising and Donations Policy. Motion passed 5-0.

o. Consider approval to authorize a sole source contract for the construction of salt shed (03:29:10)
K. Adams said the salt shed project has been in design for several years. This project will add an additional bay for salt storage at the Public Works Garage. The estimated construction cost is higher than expected ($947,735 as opposed to the previous estimate of $912,600). This is mostly due to the amount of concrete required. Staff have reached out to several contractors to receive several informal quotes. S.D Ireland provided a competitive price and is willing to agree to the town's substantial completion date. K. Chamberlin asked what would happen if the contractor could not meet the completion date. K. Adams said staff is looking to have liquidated damages of $1,000 per day be put in place. S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard authorize the Town Manager to enter into a sole source contract with S.D. Ireland for a new salt shed.

Discussion: K. Chamberlin said the Town will save money by getting salt earlier in the year.

The motion passed 5-0.

p. Discussion and debrief about Town Meeting and Town Showcase (03:33:56)

G. Duggan presented exit surveys and said changes to state law have made the timing of the event more flexible, in that the informational hearing could happen up to 30 days before Town Meeting. M. Zimmerman suggested additional marketing for the event and asked if moving the event earlier in the year would put more pressure on staff. G. Duggan said the turnaround is manageable. E. Lawrence said he believes that the current format is working well. He lauded the high response rate on the surveys. A. Watts suggested soliciting comments from those who voted yes, rather than just those who voted no. He also suggested including additional information regarding the town's financial status. All agreed that moving the date may reduce the amount of communication possible for the event. K. Chamberlin noted that many people did not receive the annual report until after the meeting. A. Watts discussed concerns related to audio accessibility.

In public input, S. Zukowski discussed best practices for talking into a microphone.

q. Discussion about strategic planning and Selectboard work plan ideas for fiscal year 2027 (03:51:17)
A. Watts said many good ideas are presented; however, a shorter list will be more practical. He also suggested including more contact with state officials as a goal. M. Zimmerman said updating the MOU with Colchester regarding the Fort Ethan Allen sewers, a review of the possibility of a Local Options Tax, and expanding internship opportunities and pool updates (including a possible dome) should be included as priorities. E. Lawrence suggested including the creation of community gardens, an agricultural feasibility study and creating agricultural overlays in the planning process. S. Jackson suggested updating dog ordinances and looking into plowing all sidewalks. K. Chamberlin suggested investigating cost differences between internal v. contracted services.

In public comment, Ken Signorello suggested including work on reducing abandoned homes and better coordination with committees. L. Zaloom suggested allowing residents to opt-out of receiving the town report via the mail and expressed support for the idea of a dome over the Sand Hill Pool and building out the pool house. C. Van Epps suggested prioritizing the needs of Essex residents over wants and encouraged Selectboard members not to consider the personal benefits of these projects.

r. Consider approval of proclamation in support of Arbor Day (04:09:39)
A. Watts expressed concern that this resolution is requesting that a past date be designated as Arbor Day, and the Selectboard are thus being asked to request people celebrate in the past. He suggested that the date be changed to sometime in early June. G. Duggan said staff will improve the timing next year and discussed the Arbor Day events which occurred on May 1st, 2026. K. Chamberlin suggested changing the language to past tense, and all agreed. K. Signorello, Chair of the CTC, said he is not sure why the memo is late, and that the resolution must be approved to receive Tree City USA designation. The Board will also edit a typo changing "1nd" to 1st. E. Lawrence said Arbor Day was dedicated to Chuck Vile and that this was not noted. In public comment, K. Signorello encouraged the Board to pass the proclamation. L. Zaloom encouraged the Board to take trees and Arbor Day more seriously. C. Van Epps concurred.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard proclaim Arbor Day on May 1st, 2026, and to change the date to reflect May 1st, 2026, on the proclamation.

Discussion: E. Lawrence said the second statement of the motion is to clear up a typo on the document.

The motion passed 5-0.

7. <u>READING FILE</u> (04:21:05)
a. Board member comments: None.

b. Upcoming meeting schedule
c. Draft of Traffic Calming Manual
d. Update on transition of restorative justice services from Essex Community Justice Center to City of Burlington
e. Memo re: Coffee with Committees
f. Updated Water Use Ordinance 10.12 of the Town Ordinances
g. May 6 Reappraisal Forum materials & Mailed Brochure

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION (04:21:15)
a. An executive session may be requested to discuss the appointment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
Not required.

b. An executive session may be requested to discuss contracts
Not required.

9. ADJOURN
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 10:41 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville & Jamie Harrison
Recording Secretaries