TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
MONDAY, JUNE 15, 2026

SELECTBOARD: Shannon Jackson, Chair; Meg Zimmerman, Clerk; Kendall Chamberlin, Andy Watts

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Greg Duggan, Town Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Town Manager; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Brittany McGregor, Planning Technician; Lea Sanguinetti, Associate Engineer

PUBLIC: Caroline Ashley, Trina Barnard, Gina Halpin Barrett, Barton Bechard, Paul Bohne, Ashley Brown, Clayton Clark, Amy Demetrowitz, Andrew Gonyea, Stephanie Mack, Anne Miller, Michael Miller, Nick Miserendini, Reed Nye, Jonathan Schumacher, Ken Signorello, Heidi Swevens, Courtney Thomas, Cheryl VanEpps, Lois Whitmore, Loranne Zaloom, Sharon Zukowski, m.music (screen name)

Meeting Recording: https://www.youtube.com/live/_bYheXdq76w?si=OGak6Uqu4uXKPuud

Times associated with each agenda item are approximate.

1. <u>CALL TO ORDER</u> (00:00:07)
Shannon Jackson called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. <u>AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES</u> (00:00:29)
Greg Dugan asked for agenda item 7b., "Interview a volunteer to serve on the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees - Jane Dunn" to be removed from the agenda and reassigned to the June 29, 2026 Selectboard meeting. He also asked for agenda item 7l, "Discussion about pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution," to be changed to a discussion and potential action item. He made the Selectboard aware of an application form that accompanies agenda item 7e., f. Interview and possibly appoint a volunteer to serve as the Green Mountain Transit representative for Essex - Paul Bohne."

3. <u>APPROVE AGENDA</u> (00:01:20)
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, to approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed 4-0.

4. <u>PUBLIC TO BE HEARD</u> (00:01:49)
Heidi Swevens, a resident of Essex Junction who sublets office space in Essex Center, shared concerns about #4 bus service being eliminated.

5. <u>PUBLIC HEARING</u> (00:05:15)
a. Public hearing to close out Vermont Community Development Program grant for recovery housing at Fort Ethan Allen
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN to open a public hearing to close out Vermont Community Development Program grant for recovery housing at Fort Ethan Allan. Motion Passed. 4-0

Amy Demetrowitz, Chief Operation Office at Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), said the grant is supported by the Vermont Community Development Program. The project is located at Fort Ethan Allan and provides recovery housing. She said CHT, with the help of the Vermont Foundation of Recovery (VCDP) purchased the buildings and converted them into 4, 6-bedroom recovery homes as well as 4 transitional 2-bedroom apartments. She discussed improvements that have been made to the buildings. Andrew Gonyea with VFOR said recovery housing is important to the recovery process. The program has served 200 people since 2021 and reports a 77% success rate. He said there is support staff that oversees both the structured recovery housing and transitional living apartments. Meg Zimmerman asked how they would increase the utilization of recovery housing. A. Gonyea said the goal is to work towards permanent housing with that it is available as soon as the individual is ready to leave the facility. Answering a question from Kendall Chamberlin about if there is opportunity for a project like this in the future, he said the VFOR would like to continue to grow and serve as many people as possible. A. Demetrowitz said there are ongoing projects in St. Albans and Addison County.

Ashley Brown, a former resident of recovery housing, said she struggled with addiction for 17 years prior to receiving help from VFOR. She said with the help of VFOR she now has a career and is studying to be an electrician. She thanked the town of Essex and VFOR for helping her get to where she is today. Nick Miserendini, a current transitional apartment resident, said with the help of VFOR he was able to reunite with his children and be a productive member of the community.

KENDALL CHAMBERLIN made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN to close the public hearing. Motion passed 4-0.

6. <u>CONSENT ITEMS</u> (00:19:00)
MEG ZIMMERMAN made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion passed 4-0.
a. Approve minutes: June 1, 2026
b. Approve check warrants: #18341 - 05/29/26; # 18342 - 06/05/26
c. Consider approval of updates to Personnel Guidelines
d. Consider approval of the purchase of truck replacements for trucks #26 and #102
e. Consider appointments of representative and alternate to Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission's Planning Advisory Committee

7. <u>BUSINESS ITEMS</u>
a. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees - Caroline Ashley (00:19:35)
Caroline Ashley said she serves on the Cemetery Commission and volunteers for the Memorial Day parade. She said the library is an important part of the community and wants to help keep it vibrant. Answering a question from M. Zimmerman about what programs she is looking forward to working on, she said she is excited for the children’s summer programs. Andy Watts asked C. Ashley if she was aware of the Friends of the Free Library. She said she was not fully aware of the difference between the Friends and the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees. Answering a question from Kendall Chamberlin about what the most valuable skill she has learned from serving on the Cemetery Commission, is and how she would apply that to being a Trustee, she said understanding municipal budgeting. In response to a question from K. Chamberlin about how she would handle conflicts of opinion, she said she respects and welcomes others’ opinions. Answering a question from Shannon Jackson about whether she feels that she has time to serve on the Essex Library Board of Trustees, she said she feels she is efficient enough with her time to serve on the Library Board of Trustees as well as handle her current obligations. C. Ashley asked the Selectboard if they had any concerns they felt need to be addressed by the Library Board of Trustees. A. Watts said the biggest concern was that the Trustees run the library and the Selectboard only sets the budget.

~~**b. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Essex Free Library Board of Trustees - Jane Dunn**~~

c. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Planning Commission - Johnathan Schumacher (00:30:26)
Jonathan Schumacher said he has served on the Planning Commission (PC) since 2011. Answering a question from M. Zimmerman in regard to what the most rewarding and challenging part of being on the PC has been, he said working on the Town Plan has been the most rewarding. He said transitioning from a popularity-driven mindset to an objective decision-making one has been his greatest challenge on the PC. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin about how he handles conflict, he said has learned to prioritize organizational purpose over trying to please all parties. He said the most rewarding thing he has done while serving on the PC is knowing that he has done the right thing. Answering a question from S. Jackson about why he chose to serve on the PC after the split with the DRB, he said he felt there was more of a positive impact for him to make on the PC.

d. Interview a volunteer to serve on the Conservation & Trails Committee - Bart Bechard (00:37:32)
Bart Bechard said he is a resident of Essex and a trails steward. Answering a question from M. Zimmerman about what he is most looking forward to while serving on the Conservation & Trails Committee (CTC), he said his vision is to bring more people into contact with the natural resources of Essex. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin about his approach to conflict resolution during his tenure on a local HOA, he highlighted his experience managing disputes during the procurement of a new landscape and maintenance vendor, noting that the process provided valuable professional insights. In response to a question from A. Watts about what community means to him, B. Bechard defined community as the mutual support of neighbors during natural disasters and the prioritization of independent, local businesses over large chain operations. Answering a question from S. Jackson about how he plans to help with conservation, he highlighted the priority of conserving local natural resources, specifically Indian Brook, via forest maintenance and erosion control.

e. Consider approval to enter into a contract for permitting software (00:47:29)
Brittany McGregor said the Selectboard approved $75,000 for permitting software. Staff engaged with 5 companies for product demonstrations. Based on alignment with community development needs, staff recommends offering the contract to GovWell. She said set-up costs would be $13,000 and the annual subscription fee is $27,000, with a 2-year contract. GovWell is offering a $5,000 discount on the initial set up fee if the decision is made in the next two weeks to enter a 2-year contract. M. Zimmerman asked if the software license is for unlimited users, B. McGregor answered affirmatively. Answering a question from M. Zimmerman about the cost of animal licensing, B. McGregor clarified that the cost covers all modules including: building permits, planning and zoning, animal licensing and AI. A. Watts asked whether the costs associated with the animal module could be offset by adjusting dog license fees. G. Duggan said these costs could potentially be allocated directly to the Clerk's Office. Karen Adams said the software will eliminate numerous manual processes for staff. Answering a question from K. Chamberlin about cost distribution, G. Duggan clarified that most of the expenses will be assigned to the Community Development department and animal licensing costs may be allocated to the Clerk’s Office.

M. Zimmerman asked if the GovWell software will integrate with the current DRB agenda software, B. McGregor said the software would be separate from the current agenda DRB software. Answering a question from Sharon Zukowski about if IT was consulted during the processes of deciding which permitting software would be best suited, B. McGregor answered affirmatively. She said the software will save the DRB and staff time by eliminating incomplete applications from being submitted. Answering a question from S. Zukowski as to why the software does not include a code enforcement module, K. Adams said the Town is not resourced to need that level of permitting support. In response to a question from Lois Whitmore about the review of conceptual items submitted to the DRB, B. McGregor said the software will facilitate departmental discussion but will not support full staff reports for conceptual reviews.

MEG ZIMMERMAN made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS that the Selectboard authorize the Town Manager to execute a two-year contract with GovWell for permitting software. Motion passed 4-0.

f. Interview and possibly appoint a volunteer to serve as the Green Mountain Transit representative for Essex - Paul Bohne (01:08:26)
Paul Bohne said he has served on the Board of Commissioners for Green Mountain Transit (GMT) for 10 years and is the retired manager of the Town of Shelburne. Answering a question from M. Zimmerman as to what the most challenging part of has been serving on the GMT Board, he said looking at future budgets and trying to determine funding sources. K. Chamberlin asked what the most rewarding part of serving on the GMT Board has been. P. Bohne said knowing that the transit operates efficiently while offering excellent services to the community. K. Chamberlin asked for P. Bohne's suggestions on how Essex should work with GMT should they withdraw from their contract. P. Bohne suggested utilizing senior buses and continually working with GMT to keep some services in Essex. This term will be for 3 years unless the Town withdraws from their contract with GMT.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard appoint Paul Bohne as Representative to Green Mountain Transit.

Discussion: K. Chamberlin said he greatly respects P. Bohne but has not voted for him in the past as he is not an Essex resident. However, he believes that now is not the time to switch representatives and said he will be voting for P. Bohne this evening.

The motion passed 4-0.

g. Interview and possibly appoint a volunteer to serve as the Winooski Valley Park District representative for Essex – Jeffrey Theis (01:19:40)
As Jeffrey Theis was not present, this item was skipped.

h. Consider approval of Traffic Calming Manual (01:19:55)
A. Martin and L. Sanguinetti presented an updated draft which incorporates comments from the Board and the public. The Board lauded staff for their efficient work incorporating comments into the document. K. Chamberlin said speed limit signage must be compatible with speed bumps. S. Jackson expressed surprise that one resident could trigger an appeal process, A. Martin said this is done to ensure that all have a voice in the process. In public comment, Courtney Thomas asked how unique circumstances would be taken into consideration. A. Martin described this document as a roadmap, with every situation being different.

MEG ZIMMERMAN made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, that the Selectboard adopt the Traffic Calming Manual. Motion passed 4-0.

i. Consider approval of resolution to withdraw from membership in Green Mountain Transit (01:29:13)
G. Duggan said this discussion is about whether Essex should continue to be a member of GMT, considering major service cuts and a rise in dues. Notice must be given one fiscal year prior to withdrawing. Giving the indication that Essex would like to withdraw does not mean that they are required to do so, and the GMT

Board would always welcome Essex back. Contracting for service with GMT is another option. GMT also provides Special Services Transportation Agency (SSTA) transit as well, which will be eliminated if bus service is cut, regardless of Essex's membership status.

K. Chamberlin asked for ridership numbers for the #2 bus, which was provided by G. Duggan. Clayton Clark, General Manager of GMT, said he will be recommending phasing out the #4 bus, with service reduced in August of 2026 and winter of 2027. He hopes that federal assistance may allow this to continue. He said there is interest in extending the #2 bus to the Essex Experience, which is being investigated. A. Watts asked what the cost would look like for contracting services and C. Clark said Colchester has negotiated the same rate as member communities. C. Clark detailed some of the items which are potentially open to negotiation, such as SSTA services. C. Clark said expending the #2 bus to the Essex Experience could allow it to continue to Essex Center area on some, but not all of its runs. S. Jackson asked if Essex would pay a reduced rate is the #4 service is eliminated. C. Clark said it would reduce very significantly. S. Jackson asked for confirmation that Essex would be welcomed back to GMT if desired. C. Clark said the GMT Board will see the value of Essex's continued membership. P. Bohne said a straw poll of the GMT Board could be taken tomorrow at their next meeting. In public comment, L. Whitmore expressed concern that some seniors, but not all, are able to have SSTA transportation. Cheryl Van Epps asked if data is available on where the users of SSTA services reside. C. Clark said all live within ¾ of a mile of the #4 route.

KENDALL CHAMBERLIN made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTs, that the Selectboard adopt a Resolution to withdraw from Green Mountain Transit Authority in fiscal year 2028 and authorize staff to send the resolution to the GMT Board of Directors.

Discussion: A. Watts said he is voting in favor of leaving GMT despite the Town Plan's support for public transportation. K. Chamberlin and M. Zimmerman said they appreciated C. Clark's recommendation and willingness to work with Essex. S. Jackson said public transportation is essential, however he views this as an opportunity to create a new solution.

The motion passed 4-0.

j. Consider approval of Selectboard work plan for fiscal year 2027 (01:57:51)
G. Duggan presented a draft of the edited Selectboard work plan for fiscal year 2027. He suggested assigning priorities to the existing tasks. The goal "Conduct agricultural feasibility study to support the population of Essex," was defined by K. Adams as determining what Essex's food needs are, if they can support these, and if not what would be required to do so. A. Watts suggested changing this item to, "Explore options to support local agriculture." All agreed and it was assigned as low priority.

The goal to "Continue to pursue property acquisition for public water access along the Winooski River through potential use of the Conservation Reserve Fund" is listed as a medium priority. The goal, "develop a plan to plow all sidewalks in Essex over time" was discussed. A. Watts said he believes that only necessary sidewalks should be plowed. K. Chamberlin said Essex should have a plan to maintain most sidewalks, based on overall population, not just student population. S. Jackson suggested that Essex move towards expanding sidewalk plowing over time. M. Zimmerman suggested mapping the current plowing routes and evaluating if some routes can be removed. G. Duggan said this can be reviewed in the Winter Operations Plan which is approved each year. The edited version reads, "Review gaps between active transportation plan user data and winter maintenance program, consider updates to sidewalk snow removal." This will be a medium priority.

The goal, "draft and adopt updates to Animal Control Ordinance, possible public vote," was discussed. A. Watts expressed concern about exposing the town to any additional liability. The Board changes "draft" to "review." The priority level is high. The item, "look into costs/benefits of doing work internally vs. through contracts," was listed as a medium priority. The item, "potentially pursue an MOU with the City of Essex Junction about Main Street path project," was listed as low priority. This is dependent on receiving grant funds. The item, "Pursue purchase of Saxon Hill School District parcel" was listed as a low priority. The item, "Revisit a potential Local Option Tax ballot item for November, and propose how LOT funding would be used" was listed as a high priority. The item, "Review board/commission/committee mission statements for clarity of expectations" was included as a medium priority. The item, "Evaluate town transit offerings in light of changes to Green Mountain Transit (GMT) services, including senior van usage and future GMT membership. Present options and costs and decide whether to renew/rejoin/withdrawal from/contract with GMT" is a high priority.

The Selectboard reviewed the previous year's list and determined that all items have been assigned or completed, except for work on the fund balance policy. K. Chamberlin suggested requesting regular updates on parking lot items. In public input, Stephanie Mack asked that the burden of taxes be taken into consideration with the planning process. [inaudible] K. Adams said the town's budget will not change with reappraisal. S. Mack asked why the town wishes to purchase the Saxon Hill property. A. Watts said it is desired to turn the area into a park, and possibly charge fees for usage. The town currently leases the land. Ken Signorello said the Economic Development Commission has provided a recommendation on the LOT. He is surprised to hear continuing conversations on this subject. He said the revised CTC mission statement has not been responded to yet by the Selectboard. L. Zaloom said the LOT is a regressive tax which has been previously voted on and explored. She also spoke of a desire for better maintained sidewalks in the winter. This document will be edited by staff and brought back to the Selectboard for Consent Agenda approval at the next meeting.

k. Consider appointments to Town of Essex boards, committees and commissions
This was discussed during Executive Session.

l. Discussion about pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution
This was discussed during Executive Session.

m. Discussion about contracts
This was discussed during Executive Session.

8. <u>READING FILE</u> (03:19:57)
a. a. Board member comments: K. Chamberlin thanked staff for their work on the water ordinance. S. Jackson thanked Karielle Tabone and Anna Brouillette for their service. K. Chamberlin suggested including levels of dog bites in the ordinance. A. Watts said the Municipal Elected Official Forum conflicts with the next meeting.
b. Upcoming meeting schedule
c. Letter to Federal Emergency Management Agency re: Hazard Mitigation Grant Program
d. Letter from Cheryl Van Epps re: Near Miss Reporting
e. Draft dog ordinance changes for initial review
f. Vermont Electric Co-op Drone Inspection Flights Notification
g. Resignation from Cemetery Commission - Kariella Tabone
h. Resignation from Housing Commission - Anna Brouillette

i. Suggestion for 80 & 90 Upper Main Street municipal complex: Johnson Library move
j. Proposed Changes to the Updated Water Use Ordinance 10.12 of the Town Ordinance
k. Chittenden County Municipal Elected Official Forum - June 29
l. Needs Assessment Study ahead of planned July 13, 2026 presentation

9. <u>EXECUTIVE SESSION</u> (03:21:50)
a. An executive session may be requested to discuss the appointment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss the proposed public official appointment in accordance with 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3) and to include Manager and Deputy Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

b. An executive session was held to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, 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 MEG ZIMMERMAN, 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 and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

c. An executive session was held to discuss contracts
ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard make the specific finding that general public knowledge of contracts would place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed 4-0.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss contracts, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 4-0.

KENDALL CHAMBERLIN made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, to exit executive session. Motion passed 4-0 at 10:39 PM.

MEG ZIMMERMAN made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, to authorize the Town Manager to finalize and execute the settlement in the matter of Emma Quaranta v. Town of Essex, including payment by the Town of $1,000.00 deductible. Motion passed 4-0.

Shannon Jackson said additional applicants for the CTC, Housing Commission, and Essex Free Library Board would be interviewed June 29 and appointments to those boards would be made at that meeting.

MEG ZIMMERMAN made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to appoint Alistair Deacon and Alex Solverson to the Economic Development Commission for three-year terms; Natalee Braun and Rod Williams to the Energy Committee for three-year terms; Josh Knox, Georgia Lavigne, and John Schumacher to the Planning Commission for four-year terms, and Eric Stewart to the Planning Commission for a one-year term. Motion passed 4-0.

10. <u>ADJOURN</u>

KENDALL CHAMBERLIN made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0 at 10:42 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville & Jamie Harrison
Recording Secretaries