SELECTBOARD
(DRAFT)

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 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; Steven Roque, IT Director

PUBLIC: Stephanie Mack, Michael Miller, Reed Nye, Ken Signorello, Cheryl Van Epps, Lois Whitmore, Sharon Zukowski, m.music (screenname)

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

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES (00:00:10)
None.

3. APPROVE AGENDA
No changes, thus no approval required.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD (00:00:50)
None.

5. CONSENT ITEMS (00:01:49)
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion passed 5-0.
a. Approve minutes: August 3, 2026
b. Approve check warrants: #18348 - 08/07/26; #18349 - 08/14/26

6. BUSINESS ITEMS
a. Interview and possibly appoint a volunteer to serve on the Housing Commission and/or Economic Development Commission - Stephanie Mack (00:02:07)
Stephanie Mack said she is a small business owner who understands the need to expand the business tax base in Essex. M. Zimmerman asked about S. Mack's interest in housing. S. Mack described her professional experience in renovation, property management and short-term rentals. She discussed the Double Up Vermont Program that she began, which works to house necessary workers. M. Zimmerman asked S. Mack what she sees as the top priorities and challenges for each commission for which she is applying. S. Mack said it is important to consider the work which has already been done by each commission and take time to learn and ask questions. E. Lawrence asked S. Mack if she had attended either commission's meetings. S. Mack said she has attended an Economic Development Commission meeting but not a Housing Commission meeting. E. Lawrence asked if housing or economic development is more important to her. S. Mack said both are vital issues. S. Mack discussed her husband's professional interest in constructing a mixed-use development in Essex containing a variety of housing types. Andy Watts asked S. Mack to define community. She said community is getting involved and taking a multi-faceted approach to different parts of the town. S. Jackson said the Selectboard will discuss her applications, and staff will be in touch after this meeting.

b. Consider approval to authorize Town Manager to execute contract for engineering services for infrastructure of new municipal complex at 80 & 90 Upper Main St. (00:13:53)
Greg Duggan said the Town of Essex received a Northern Borders Regional Commission grant for the public infrastructure design work on the proposed municipal complex. The price for this is capped $1.5 million or less. Staff prepared a Request for Qualifications. Six firms responded and staff is recommending moving forward with Stantec. K. Chamberlin said there should be an opportunity to make future changes to the final conceptual plan. G. Duggan said he does not anticipate changes to the lot sizes and location and said the infrastructure design will follow. E. Lawrence requested that the money taken from the water/sewer reserve fund be returned once grant funds are received. K. Adams said replacing these funds could be prioritized rather than split. K. Chamberlin discussed the water/sewer rate study and said he believes this will assist with increasing the water/sewer reserve fund to a more sustainable level. In public comment, S. Mack asked what the revenue sources are for the project. G. Duggan said the land was purchased with COVID relief funds, which also allowed for the hiring of a consultant to complete the conceptual plan. A $500,000 grant was received; however additional funding sources will be required to continue the project. A bond vote is likely to be requested. Karen Adams said some lots are intended to be used for housing, which could provide funding. The town also plans to sell the existing Town Office space at 81 Main Street.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by ETHAN LAWRENCE, that the Selectboard authorize the Town Manager to finalize and execute a contract with Stantec Consulting Services, Inc. for public infrastructure design at 80 & 90 Upper Main Street, not to exceed $1.5 million, with a priority to use reimbursement funds to refill the Water/Sewer reserve fund. Motion passed 5-0.

c. Discussion about Selectboard budget goals for fiscal year 2028 (00:26:58)
G. Duggan asked if the Selectboard has any high-level goals that they wish staff to consider as they prepare the budget. E. Lawrence said he would like to see a projected tax rate and budget increase under 5%. He also cited public works and public safety as major spending priorities. M. Zimmerman expressed a desire to evaluate the potential of a dome over the Sand Hill Pool and keeping rate increases under inflation. S. Jackson said he hoped to see an increase under 4%. He discussed the possibility of creative solutions to share public safety resources. K. Chamberlin recommended an increase of 3%-4% and encouraged the use of contracting in public works. S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none. G. Duggan reviewed the budget schedule, noting that the all-day budget meeting will be in early December.

d. Discussion and possible action about process for extending a Selectboard meeting past 11 p.m. (00:34:29)
G. Duggan initiated a discussion regarding Selectboard rules and regulations to address the protocols for extending meetings past 11:00 p.m. A. Watts clarified if a board member must leave during a meeting while a quorum is still present, the board member may request that a specific business item not proceed to a vote. G. Duggan clarified that if a meeting ended at 11 p.m. due to a board member's request, anything left on the agenda would be moved to the following Selectboard meeting unless it was an emergent or pressing agenda item.

A. Watts noted that a special meeting may be scheduled if needed to address remaining agenda items. E. Lawrence recommended placing high-priority items at the start of the meeting to make the best use of the Selectboard's time. In response to a question from K. Chamberlin about earlier Selectboard meeting times, G. Duggan clarified that the board may adjust the schedule to 6:00 p.m. pending room availability. S. Jackson said although important, public comment periods can cause meetings to extend beyond 11 p.m. M. Zimmerman proposed streamlining public comment by grouping all agenda-related remarks at the start of the meeting rather than allocating comment periods per individual item.

In public comment, S. Mack said she likes the ability to comment on individual agenda items and suggested that the Selectboard place a time limit on public comments. K. Adams said members of the public have to have an opportunity to express their opinion post board deliberation, but not after every agenda item. Ken Signorello said that discussions without subsequent decisions are unproductive and he recommended that Selectboard members introduce motions to ensure discussions conclude with actionable outcomes. Cheryl Van Epps said she valued the opportunity for public engagement after discussion from the Selectboard. Sharon Zukowski recommended establishing a specific time limit for individual public comments.

e. Discussion about the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
This was discussed during Executive Session.

f. Consider approval of bonus for Town Manager for achievement of fiscal year 2026 goals and objectives (00:56:12)
This was discussed in Executive Session and open session.

G. Duggan said, as a part of his contract, he may request a bonus for achieving agreed-upon goals. He has requested the consideration of a bonus from the Selectboard. S. Jackson requested public comment, of which there was none.

g. Consider approval to authorize Town Manager to execute sole source contract for IT infrastructure upgrade (00:57:11)
G. Duggan said Steven Roque, IT Director, is recommending an infrastructure update. Only one company can provide all the services in one package. Additional details will be provided in Executive Session. S. Jackson requested public input, of which there was none.

7. <u>READING FILE</u> (00:58:13)
a. Board member comments: K. Chamberlin thanked Dustin Bruso for his years of service, A. Watts concurred. S. Jackson thanked D. Bruso and Dan Maguire for their service and said a process is being developed to ensure that all exiting board members are properly thanked. K. Chamberlin suggested conducting exit interviews for volunteer board members. G. Duggan said staff are working to restart this process.
b. Upcoming meeting schedule
c. Police Community Advisory Board Resignation - Dan Maguire
d. Planning Commission Resignation - Dustin Bruso
e. A Conversation with Public Banking Economists
f. Human Services Funding Thank You - Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity
g. Human Services Funding Thank You - Steps to End Domestic Violence

8. <u>EXECUTIVE SESSION</u>
a. An executive session was held to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, to enter into executive session to discuss the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee in accordance with 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3), to include the Town Manager and Deputy Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.

b. An executive session was held to discuss contracts

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard make the specific finding that general public knowledge of contracts would place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed 5-0.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss contracts, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(A), and the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3), to include the Town Manager. Motion passed 5-0.

c. An executive session was held to discuss contracts and security, cybersecurity, or emergency response measures, the disclosure of which could jeopardize public safety
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, that the Selectboard enter into executive session to discuss contracts, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. §313(a)(1)(A), and security, cybersecurity, or emergency response measures, pursuant to 1 V.S.A. Section 313(a)(10), to include the Town Manager, Deputy Town Manager and IT Director. Motion passed 5-0.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, to exit Executive Session. Motion passed 5-0 at 9:03 PM. (02:36:00)

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard give the Town Manager a $5,000 bonus. Motion passed 5-0.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion seconded by KENDALL CHAMBERLIN, that the Selectboard appoint Stephanie Mack to a one-year term on the Economic Development Commission for a one-year term ending June 30, 2027. Motion passed 5-0.

ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by MEG ZIMMERMAN, that the Selectboard authorize the Town Manager to execute a sole-source contract for the replacement and modernization of the Town's critical IT infrastructure with SymQuest. Motion passed 5-0.

9. <u>ADJOURN</u>
ETHAN LAWRENCE made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, for the Selectboard to adjourn. Motion passed 5-0 at 9:07 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville & Jamie Harrison
Recording Secretaries