



The Corporation of the Town of Essex
Essex Festival Committee Meeting Minutes

January 22, 2026, 6:00 pm
Barnett Room, Essex Centre Sports Complex, 60 Fairview Ave W, Essex, ON N8M 1B6

Present: Councillor - Garon, Joe, Ward 1
Vice Chair - Tapping, Richard
Member - Atkinson, Nicole
Member, Caitlynn Back
Member - Hellinga, Chris
Member - Verbeek, Kim

Absent: Member - Desjardins, Tiffany
Member - Knapp, Derek
Member - McGuire-Blais, Katie

Also Present: Jake Morassut, Director, Community Services
Donna Pearson

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request. Please contact the Clerk's Office at clerks@essex.ca or 519-776-7336 extension 1100 or 1101.

1. Call to Order

2. Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this land is the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations (comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi Peoples), and of the Huron-Wendat Peoples. We value the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original Peoples of Turtle Island who have been living and working on the land from time immemorial.

3. Declarations of Conflict of Interest

- No conflicts of interest to report

4. Adoption of Published Agenda

4.1 Essex Festival Committee Meeting Agenda for January 22, 2026

Moved By Caitlynn Back
Seconded By Nicole Atkinson

That the published agenda for the January 22, 2026 Essex Festival Committee Meeting be adopted as presented / amended.

Carried

5. Adoption of Minutes

5.1 Essex Festival Committee Minutes for June 26, 2025

Moved By Chris Hellinga
Seconded By Kim Verbeek

That the minutes of the Essex Festival Committee meeting held June 26, 2025 be adopted as circulated.

6. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

6.1 Essex Festival Committee Election of Chair

Moved By Kim Verbeek
Seconded By Chris Hellinga

That Joe Garon be elected as Chair of the Essex Festival Committee for 2026.

Carried

6.2 Essex Festival Committee Election of Vice Chair

Moved By Nicole Atkinson
Seconded By Caitlynn Back

That Richard Tapping be elected as Vice Chair of the Essex Festival Committee for 2026.

Carried

7. Financials

7.1 2025 Profit

- Jake Morassut, Director, Community Services, explains the reserve management policy target of \$150,000 and the Committee has a projected balance of \$191,159.06
- Joe Garon, Chair, emphasizes the importance of spending wisely and planning for potential grant losses and on items that can be used for future events.
- Kim Verbeek, supports spending on tangible items like tents.

7.2 Last 5 year Comparables

Jake Morassut, Director, Community Services, reviews the financial history from 2017 to 2025, highlighting surpluses and deficits, and the impact of the \$55,000 grant received from the Provincial Government.

7.3 Total Amount of Reserve

Jake Morassut, Director, Community Services, provided a financial update, noting a healthy reserve balance of \$191,159.06.

8. 2025 Recap

- Joe Garon discusses the need to listen to attendees, vendors, and supporters to identify areas for improvement at the Fun Fest. Joe proposes a change in the flow of the event to address issues with non-food vendors and the main stage as

well as eliminating the back gate and implementing a donation terminal at the main gate to offset the cost of free admission. Joe read an email citing the total attendance for the weekend was 18,732 people without local area firework attendees, the parade and the car show included in these numbers.

9. 2026 Strategy

- Joe Garon, proposes modifying the Kid Zone area and eliminating the secondary stage to improve efficiency and reduce costs and presents a proposed event layout, including changes to the main gate, accessible parking, and vendor placement. Joe also mentions, the need for power for vendors and the possibility of using generators and power packs and proposes a shuttle service to transport attendees from the back parking lot to the main gate, with the first stop at the main gate. Joe made mention of modifying the Kid Zone area and eliminating the secondary stage to improve efficiency and reduce costs, as well as an event layout, which included changes to the main gate, accessible parking, and vendor placement. A discussion regarding the cost of metal detectors for security at the main gate arose. Joe mentions the need for more garbage bins and recycling bins to manage waste during the event.
- Richard Tapping, mentioned working on a 'presenting sponsor' to donate \$10,000.
- Cate Back recommends offering an early bird price for main stage tickets and creating a VIP area for higher-priced tickets as well as the challenges of security and crowd control at the main gate and beer tent. She also raises concerns about volunteer retention, and the effectiveness of ride passes proposing a tiered system for volunteers, with additional benefits for those who complete multiple shifts. Joe Garon discusses the possibility of using ride passes as incentives for committee sponsors and a discount for the volunteers. Richard suggested getting a sponsor to cover the cost of passes for volunteers.
- Richard Tapping introduces a new business topic about revamping the Essex Fun Fest website. He volunteers to build and manage the website.
- Joe Garon recommends hiring someone for social media to handle messages and questions, freeing up time for event organization.
- Jake discussed the renewal of the bar management contract and will review to ensure no substantial difference from previous year. Pending no substantial changes, the committee made a motion to proceed with the contract.
- **Moved** by Kim Verbeek
- **Seconded** by Richard Tapping

10. FEO Conference

Joe Garon suggests sending two people to the conference, with Richard and Nicole as potential attendees. Jake will work with Richard and Nicole to work out the conference details.

11. Adjournment

Next meeting date for February 18, 2026, at 6:00PM and discusses the need to confirm the venue. Adjourned at 8:15pm

Moved By Kim Verbeek
Seconded By Nicole Atkinson

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:15 PM.

Carried

12. Future Meetings

Location: Barnett Room on February 18, 2026

Chair

Recording Secretary