

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING
May 12, 2011**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: George Tyler (President), Dan Kerin (Vice President) John Lajza and Lori Houghton. (Deb Billado was absent.)
ADMINISTRATION: David Crawford, Village Manager.
Jonathan Williams, Management Assistant

I. CALL TO ORDER

Village President, George Tyler, called the meeting to order at 4:08 p.m. Bridget Meyer of Pleasant Street was present in the audience. Jonathan Williams served as secretary for the meeting and took notes for summary minutes.

II. NEW BUSINESS

1. Adopt and Sign Resolution for John O’Kane, retiring Manager of Government Relations for IBM. His retirement event at IBM is scheduled for Thursday, May 19.

MOTION by John Lajza, SECOND by Dan Kerin, to approve and sign the Resolution of Appreciation for John O’Kane of IBM. VOTING: 4 ayes; motion carried.

III. WORK SESSION TO SET BOARD PRIORITIES

The meeting began with Dave Crawford giving a review of his *Current Projects Summary*. George inquired about the *Waste Water Treatment facility Projects*. Dave noted that in addition to the general administration issues there is work on the financial considerations for the project to consider. He also noted that Jim Jutras will handle the “on-site” design/construction aspects of the project.

The sewer capacity sale was discussed; it was noted that Williston has responded which is a discussion item at the next Tri-Town Meeting and there will be final approval of the agreement by the BOT at their next meeting.

There then followed a discussion of *Development*; Dave led a discussion on the *Crescent Connector*; this discussion included discussing Phase 1 and Phase II, the Right of Way, the railroad crossing, and financial considerations for property owners, development, and the Planning Commission’s review of the proposed development. The LDG’s conceptual idea (as noted by George and Dave) has laid the groundwork for this idea and then had various groups come on board. Dave mentioned the potential for State and Federal grant opportunities. There followed a discussion of these opportunities, as well as the location of the rail/bus station location, rail/bus ridership and property ownership.

George brought up the idea of the “redevelopment authority” and the “TIP/TIF” special assessment district was put forth as an ‘alternative’ method with relation to the Village involvement. There was discussion of the past study presentations to the Board on the Crescent Connector.

Lori inquired into Robin Pierce’s work and wondered if the Crescent Connector constituted his “main project”. Dave explained how development projects are all “moving targets” with changes occurring on a week by week, day by day, which cause Robin’s priorities and work to be adjusted.

George noted that one of the problems the Village faces is the model/structure/workload of the Village municipal government. Dave noted that Essex Junction could explore other models. At this point we are using a collaborative approach with the LDG for the development of the Crescent Connector Project. There was a dialog on the involvement of the Town pertaining to development model and organizational structure of the development in general. There was mention of there not being an person completely dedicated as a “Economic Director” in the Town and Village. Goals were mentioned as: “tie down Right of Ways”, continuing discussions with RailAmerica, looking at other models for the project, and possibly involving the Town of Essex. Contacts/communication between the Village and Town Managers was talked about.

There was also discussion about LDC, Kalanges, and Park Street Properties, and the next 8 to 10 months schedule for the Crescent Connector. Dave explained much of the expected projects that are moving forward. Dave also noted that the Village hoping for an application to redevelop the apartment complexes on Thasha Lane, Green Meadows and Amber Lantern.

The group then began a discussion on the *Comprehensive Plan Update* and the *Orton Community Planning Grant Application*. It was noted that the Town of Essex indicating (generally) that they would like to be involved in the project. Dave noted that there are other players that should take the leadership role in this grant opportunity; he expressed concern about finding money sources for the requisite match. It was noted that Essex Junction is the “downtown” for both the Village and Town (as pertaining to the comprehensive plan) and whether or not the Town considered this so in their own economic development plans. John Lajza explained how he had trouble with some of the Town and Village's historical development and past infrastructure planning/growth. Lori began a discussion on size/area of the Village and Town and how they should grow and develop; this led into a general discussion on transportation infrastructure and general development in Essex Junction, Essex, and the State of Vermont, and the opportunities inherent in this development.

The Orton grant was also noted as an opportunity for the Town and Village to collaborate. There was discussion on the costs involved as well and who should fund the match. There was discussion on liquidating the Land Acquisition Fund (\$360K +/-) and putting it to use.

There followed a discussion on the *General Development* ideas, and the list Robin and Dave came up with (buildings for streetscape, creating parks/greenways, strategies to enable underutilized sites such as the LDG, continuing to nurture/encourage citizen initiatives (Farmers' Market, Railroad Avenue Recess, etc.), looking and ways to access funding such as grants and earmarks). This led into a conversation by the Board on general development, including transportation development/growth concepts. Pearl Street development was discussed. The past traffic engineering Pearl Street study was mentioned by Dave. Stevens Park improvements were also noted as a future need by Dave Crawford.

There was a dialog on the *Summit Street Reconstruction*; the final design and construction and timeline was discussed. Rick Hamlin's proposal for utilizing recycled foam to save money for this project was mentioned by Dave.

The Ladder Truck replacement, the Capital Plan Revision, Grants (including the train station/rail contacts), Volunteer Events and Activities, the Implementation of the Recreation Agreement, Personnel (Annual Evaluations, Employee Association Agreement Negotiations, General Issues), and General Government Operations were all subjects noted by Dave Crawford as being ongoing projects that are continuously being reviewed which are to be improved/worked upon in the future.

George Tyler began a discussion on the *Fire Engine Ladder Truck* and the *Fire Truck Replacement Committee*. There was then noted that the Town Selectboard has sent a Draft Memorandum of

Understanding. Dave reviewed a history of this ongoing joint purchase. There was talk as to who should be at the table and when there could be discussion (as work sessions). Lori and Dan expressed concern that \$200K was not enough money as a Town contribution. John noted that there might be other ways of purchasing the equipment/truck, and there followed a dialog on cost/tax structures.

A loss of credibility with residents due to “secret meetings” was considered, noted as a concern by Lori, and was discussed. Consideration was given to the opinions expressed in the Essex Reporter by Town residents and the Town Selectboard on the fire engine purchase. The combination of services of the Village and Town Fire Departments was discussed. The feelings and opinions of the Village Fire Department's members were mentioned as being important by John. Capital investments and capital fund models were also spoken on by John. Dave said that the Board should note that it is time for the Trustees to say to the Town that they are prepared for the special committee made up of two Board members each from Village and Town, the Managers and the Fire Chiefs to review and revise the Draft MOU. The revised MOU could then be presented to both Boards.

There was review, modification and agreement of the *Board of Trustees' Meeting Schedule*. The June 7 meeting will be canceled, and the next meeting will be on the 14th. CSWD will be on the 14th. The F-35 issue was discussed, and John inquired if it should be up for public input. George noted concern on there being people outside of Essex Junction speaking on the issue. Lori noted that the Trustees only had to hear or recognize Essex Junction residents at Trustees' meetings speaking on the resolution. Dan spoke on the resolution not needing every Trustee's signature, and discussion followed. Lori expressed concern that this issue was never on the BOT Agenda. It was agreed by the Board that the issue will not be on the next three agendas as previously discussed. The signing of the resolution will be put on hold until Board members have more information on the issue.

Dave briefed the Board on his consultation with the attorney on the borrowing for the fire truck as well as a potential opportunity for utilizing 45% of a 30 year note (\$1.7 million) compares to a 20 year 2% loan from the feds (by entering into an agreement with Bradford) for the WWTF and the Pump Station. The Board encouraged the Village Manager to looking into the Bradford borrowing opportunity.

There followed a discussion by the Board of Trustees on strategic plans and ideas by having each Board Member giving their thoughts. *Attached is a draft strategic plan which the board agreed to discuss at their next meeting.*

It was agreed that a plan for communication and economic development can be coordinated. The *Train/bus Station Work* was discussed, as was painting the train station (and combating graffiti). Dave spoke to the ongoing discussions with the train station personnel and the Village's ongoing discussions with Rail America, NECR, Amtrak, and CCTA on the train station roof/painting (brick red/terracotta). Planting and watering logistics at the train station was discussed with Bridget (in the audience). Paying for these projects was discussed (approaching businesses, etc.). The Board would like the painting done as soon as possible if Dave/Village can get permission, even if Amtrak later performs station maintenance/construction etc. A face to face meeting with Steve Carlson/CCTA was mentioned as being necessary to explain the Village's desire to paint the station to them. Dave will task Jonathan to work on these conversations. George will work on this issue from the Trustees' side.

The *Village Wi-Fi* initiative was discussed. The School District was taking the lead but the Trustees do not know where the School District is on the issue. Someone should call CCSU and/or the Prudential Committee Chair in order to inquire as to the progress/results of their hiring a consultant. Dan will take on pursuing this project and will update the Trustees. Costs, legal issues, and logistics of this project were also talked about by the Board.

The *Events Series* were discussed. Lori noted that the next step should be on the Committee's side with involvement from the Village Trustees as to find out where the events series can go. The Farmer's market was mentioned as possibly moving and/or expanding. RR Recess was noted as possibly not being able to do anymore activities/projects without more help/people (in order to be sustainable). The problem of "how to get more volunteers" was discussed by the Trustees. Access to more/better public spaces for the volunteer initiatives (example: Stevens Park) was also talked about. Lori noted that the volunteer groups should approach the Trustees' Board with more concrete suggestions soon. The volunteer success with the "Prize at the Five" program and its involvement with local Essex Junction businesses was mentioned by Dave as a positive development in this series. Dave and Robin will be more involved with this issue as the volunteers continue to strategize.

On *Economic Development* Dan noted that the Village should start rewarding businesses on positive contributions to the community (positive reinforcement). George also came up with the idea of advertising or linking to Essex Junction businesses on the Village website (give them away/permanent or temporary?), and there was general Trustee interest. Lori said she would get the graphics from those interested businesses. Further ideas as to how to promote economic development were discussed.

Stevens Park and how best to use it was discussed by the Board (parking, etc.). Dan will take the initiative on this issue. It was mentioned that the Recreation Advisory Committee will have ideas on this. Dave noted it may need to be put in the Recreation Capital Plan.

The concept of *Green Space* was dialoged on; Lori inquired if Robin Pierce had a map/ plan for all pocket parks in the Village; this will be looked into. The idea of "softening the concrete look" was brought up by Lori; issues of parking and "greening-up" the Village center was discussed.

The *Communication Policy/Plan* was discussed; the notion of internal and external communication was discussed. George noted that the Board and Village do not have a policy on the website survey feature. The posting of Village minutes/memorandum, communications issues (with the Village website, Front Porch Forum, Facebook, email), receiving citizen feedback and a communications response policy was noted and discussed (email groups). George suggested a document be created and worked on that addresses a comprehensive communication policy. Revisiting the Leadership Champlain document was mentioned as being pertinent. George offered to take the lead in this initiative. The idea of moving Trustees meetings to different locations was also brought forth by Dan; it was generally agreed that this is a good idea and should be explored.

John also brought up the issue of *Building and Zoning Eyesore Ordinance*. Dan noted that enforcement was the primary issue in enforcing the ordinance violation fines. Owner's rights were also spoken about. John volunteered to work on pursuing this initiative.

Revamping the Village Annual Meeting was talked about. The concept of the Australian ballot was discussed. Lori suggested that a group of citizens come together and work on the Australian ballot issue as well as improving meeting attendance/improving the Annual Meeting (on suggestions like coordinating baby-sitting, etc.). Dave suggested asking the Essex Junction public their feelings on this issue via a survey or some other media (and the importance of verifying that they are citizens of the Village). Lori offered to take on this issue and with the possibility of the Board creating a sub-committee on this issue.

The *River Walk* was noted by John as not happening quickly as there is no money currently for this initiative. Other board members noted that it would be very beneficial to Essex Junction, as there is a lot of community interest. Dan offered to follow up on this with the Winooski Valley Parkway.

Chickens in the Village was discussed as a project for the Trustees Board and the Village Municipal government. Jonathan and Lori have offered to work on this initiative and begin with establishing a Special Board Committee.

George offered to have conversations with Sue McCormack on possible *Alternatives to the Orton Planning Grant*.

The *Multi Use Safety Path* at the rail corridor between North Street and Central Street is being worked on. The Village is waiting on the RailAmerica Real Estate Department to approve the safety path. Staff has not been pushing RA too hard as there is currently no way to fund it without earmarks or some other source of revenue.

The issue of *Tax Equity* was discussed. John put forth the history of this initiative, his work on it, and the previous challenges and failures involved. Bringing this issue up with Essex Town was discussed. Dave noted that there will be opportunities to discuss this issue with the Town in upcoming joint meetings. Lori noted that the discussion should move away from merger/separation and into a conversation about services offered. Duplicate service organizations were noted as being willing to merge (in phases). The impact of the recession on community perceptions of this issue was also discussed. Lori noted that the Village would/should utilize potential turnover and retirement in the process (no one would be fired - all through attrition). The Town having to modify their charter in order to foster Tax Equity was mentioned. The advantages and disadvantages of combining services were discussed.

Revenue generation was also brought up by the Board. A *Dedicated Economic Development Person* was mentioned as being an idea. All of these concepts (tax equity, revenue generation, and a dedicated economic development person) were noted by George as needing to be discussed with the Selectboard. The Orton Community Grant was noted as being an opportunity to work on this issue by planning it out. It was agreed by the Trustees' Board that they want to work on these economic/tax issues in the future. This subsequently ended the *strategic plans and ideas* discussion.

The *Fire Truck* issue was discussed again; ways to approach the Town about this issue and to garner their support was talked about. The costs and purchasing timeline were again discussed. It was noted that the planned 100 foot truck will fit in the fire station. The history of this issue and whether or not the Village wanted to bring it up to the Town initially was brought up by George. Alternatives to the Proposed MOU was discussed, and the two Fire Departments coordinating their purchases. The political and economic situation of the Town Manager and the Selectboard were considered at length. The need of the Town for a ladder truck was agreed as a priority capital need.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by John Lajza, SECOND by Lori Houghton, to adjourn the meeting. VOTING: 4 ayes; motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Jonathan Williams, Management Assistant

DRAFT

Essex Junction Trustees 2011-12 Annual Action Plan

1. Actionable items (can be feasibly accomplished this year)

1) Amtrak train and bus renovation (George)

Purpose: Improve the appearance of the Amtrak/CCTA station on RR Ave to make point of entry to village downtown more welcoming and to deter loitering, graffiti, crime

- High priority; practical and symbolic value
- Volunteers willing to do the work
- Progress possible this year
- Main obstacle bureaucratic issues with NECR/RA and Amtrak which need to be discussed

2) Orton Grant (Lori)

Purpose: Orton Foundation Grant for long range community planning, economic development, preservation of value

- In progress with awards announced in September
- Town of Essex working jointly on grant

3) Orton Grant Alternative (George)

Purpose: Village and town are collaborating on Orton Grant application process and will be joint participants in helping plan village economic development if approved. However, grant is highly competitive, so need to develop an alternative plan for continuing collaboration if application fails.

- If Village is not awarded Orton grant, how to keep collaborative process moving
- Planning Commission would need community forum for comprehensive plan

4) Farmers Market/Event Series (Lori)

Purpose: Farmers Market and RR Ave projects and events have been successful, but how do we sustain and expand these efforts?

- RR recess needs new projects/energy/funding to move forward
- Expand/move farmers market?

5) Advertise village businesses on Village website (Lori + George)

Purpose: Benefit local businesses and general economic development

- What is permissible? What have other municipalities done?
- Need to have policy for doing this to be fair and consistent
- Economic development value

6) Green space (Lori)

Purpose: preserve and improve appearance of Village downtown

- Robin's plan for pocket parks
- Other plans for softening look of downtown area
- Village recently obtained grant to plant trees
- There was discussion of planting along RR Ave to help enclose street and block view of dumpsters and garage

7) Communication Plan and Policy (George and Lori)

Purpose: maximize benefits of village website, Front Porch Forum and other communication assets; develop policy for elected boards for using communication assets

- Regulate usage of website surveys by elected boards
- General policy on email
- Integration of website with Front Porch Forum
- How to maximize use of website and other communication assets to better engage village residents
- Include new policy for advertising village businesses on website

8) Fire truck (George and Dan)

Purpose: To encourage and help town follow through on their previous commitment to help fund Village ladder truck

- Subcommittee with fire chiefs, Managers, 2 SB members, 2 Trustees
- Review/revise draft MOU from town

II. Long Term Items (can be initiated but probably not completed this year)

9) Village-wide Wi-Fi (Dan)

Purpose: With wireless nodes at elementary school fiber-optically connected to server at EHS, there may be an opportunity to provide free wireless Internet. Idea was first proposed in 2009 by Prudential Committee to allow all students to have online access.

- Main task is to check on status with Prudential Committee
- Economic development value for village

10) Revamp Village Annual Meeting (Lori, John, Dan)

Purpose: Many residents have suggested that the village should budget be voted on by Australian ballot? Would we risk not having people come to annual meeting? If we keep the current system, how can we improve attendance?

- Australian ballot vs voice vote
- How to improve attendance at annual meeting
- Use survey to capture village citizen input
- Subcommittee to explore issue

11) Stevens Park – restrictions/covenants/re-purposing (Dan)

Purpose: Stevens Park is presently underutilized and unattractive for recreational use.

How can it be improved? Could it be used for other purposes?

- Obtain and review original deed and any restrictions
- Since rec department and PC have immediate oversight, any renovation or change needs to be a collaborative effort with PC and Rec Advisory Committee

12) Riverwalk (Dan)

Purpose: Can the village utilize its proximity to the Winooski River to create a walkway or path for public recreation?

- How can we use the river as an asset?

- Winooski Valley Park District has river trails in Essex. May be a source of information and ideas for grants and development

13) Building and zoning eyesore ordinance (John)

Purpose: What can be done to compel property owner, commercial and residential, to not allow their buildings and grounds to become eyesores?

- What ordinances do other communities use to prevent blight and encourage property owners to improve the appearance of their buildings and grounds?
- Enforcement is key issue.

14) Chicken ordinance (Lori and Jonathan)

Purpose: Village presently does not allow residents to keep chickens. Should this be changed?

- Six chicken limit and no roosters
- Should this be a public vote (charter amendment?) or new local ordinance
- Livestock in the Village is currently prohibited via the Land Development Code
- Do we need to investigate possible problems and pitfalls?

15) Village-wide multi-use path (Staff)

Purpose: A long-term vision is to have a bike/pedestrian path along the railroad tracks from North St to Pearl Street. The railroad has expressed tentative approval, but much federal funding would be needed.

- Will presumably require federal grant/earmark
- Staff needs to pursue funding

16) Tax equity with town

Purpose: Village residents presently support two municipalities. The town government does not fund village services or capital projects. The imbalance is unsustainable and needs to be resolved.

- Long term discussion
- Combine services?
- Merger through attrition?
- Mutual economic development?
- How to get town to recognize their interest in village redevelopment

17) Revenue Generation

Purpose: If tax equity with the town cannot be achieved, what alternatives are there for increasing revenues within the village to provide tax relief for village homeowners and businesses?

- Local option tax revisit?
- Continue staff efforts to find and apply for grants
- Other ideas?