

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF MEETING
August 16, 2011**

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: George Tyler, Dan Kerin, Lori Houghton, John Lajza, Mary Morris.

ADMINISTRATION: Dave Crawford, Village Manager; Robin Pierce, Development Director; Jonathan Williams, Management Assistant.

OTHERS PRESENT: Mary Cavanaugh, Edmond Daudelin, Shirley LaForce, Deb Ehler Holland, Tim Jerman, Chris Halpin, Nick Meyer, Bridget Meyer, Martin Rilling, Lyman Ross, Mike Donoghue, Harlan Smith, David Nistico, Bernie Lemieux, George Dunbar, III, Chuck Berry, Robert O'Neill, Genevieve Melle.

I. WELCOME and OPENING COMMENTS

Village President, George Tyler, opened the meeting at 5:30 PM and explained the special meeting to hold conversation with the Trustees and hear a general presentation on the crescent connector and other projects. Introductions were done.

II. PRESENTATIONS

1. Presentation of Crescent Connector

Village Manager, Dave Crawford, and Village Development Director, Robin Pierce, explained the proposal to construct a road around Five Corners from Route 15 (Main Street) over Railroad Street to Park Street following the arc of the railroad tracks (the road is being referred to as the "crescent connector"). The road will open a portion of the village for economic development that is currently underused due to difficult access. The road will also complement the development planned on the Lincoln Inn property. Future ideas include closing the portion of Main Street (Route 15) by Brownell Block and creating a pedestrian mall. The scoping study for the crescent connector is nearly completion. The project is prominent on the list of alternative projects to the circ highway because the road will decrease traffic and promote economic development. Mr. Crawford gave a history of the evolution of the crescent connector project due to the Governor's decision to eliminate the circ highway and consider alternative approaches (a task force has been formed to evaluate alternate projects from communities impacted by the loss of the circ highway; there will be public hearings on the chosen projects prior to inclusion in the state capital budget for consideration by the legislature). Robin Pierce reviewed anticipated traffic reduction and increased efficiencies with the crescent connector.

PUBLIC COMMENTS and DISCUSSION

There were questions/comments about the following:

- Creating a bottleneck with the new road – the scoping study seems to indicate this will not be the case. The road configuration will help the village. There are 35,000 cars per day through Five Corners and presently the six acres of land with water and sewer service along the railroad is underutilized. In-fill development in the area will generate traffic and projections indicate Route 15 will be used heavily as development continues in Jericho

and Underhill. The task force is looking at bridges over the Winooski River (North Williston Road, Lime Kiln, Route 2A) because there is a safety exposure.

- Additional traffic signals – There will be traffic signals added at the intersections of Railroad Street/Maple Street and Park Street/crescent connector.
- Phasing the project – the first phase (building the highway) is a state project as an alternative to the circ highway. Funding for the other changes, such as the pedestrian mall on Main Street and the associated work, may be by federal grants or bonding. The state will not consider this work as part of the circ alternative.
- Potential for Route 2A to be widened to four lanes – according to state representative, Tim Jerman, VTrans is not considering widening Route 2A as an option.
- Town of Essex circ highway alternative projects – the town proposes to enhance the intersection of Route 15/Susie Wilson Road and the intersection of Route 2A/2-89 at the Essex/Colchester boundary line.
- Concern for unforeseen circumstances with the crescent connector – the village will own and maintain the road, no businesses or residences are impacted by the road, the road will work with the planned development of the Lincoln Inn property and more residential development in the area, and alternate transportation (bus service) will be encouraged.
- Concern for the number of traffic lights on Park Street and pushing more traffic onto South Street and West Street into residential areas – the traffic lights can be synchronized to keep traffic flowing. Studies are being done to determine if traffic will increase on other residential streets.
- Concern for the road to be widened to accommodate increased traffic – all improvements (road widening, curbing, sidewalk) will be within the 50' public right-of-way.
- Only one intersection at Five Corners appears to improve with the proposed road (Pearl Street eastbound at Five Corners) - there will be fewer cars through Five Corners with the crescent connector in place so that improves the intersection.
- According to the "February 15, 2010 Essex Junction Village Connector Road Analysis Final Report", level of service at the Maple Street/Railroad Street intersection is "A", but with the crescent connector the level of service downgrades to "B" and in 2019 the level of service at Five Corners does not improve – traffic in the area is anticipated to increase with the continued development of outlying towns, such as Jericho and Underhill.
- Concern for the type of businesses attracted to the area served by the crescent connector – the goal is to make the village pedestrian friendly and as the population gets older, residents can walk and shop in the village.
- Keeping the village pedestrian friendly needs to be promoted by having well marked crosswalks with signs to stop for pedestrians, holding forums on enhancing the walkability of the village, and having more green space and traffic calming measures – traffic that is routed away from Five Corners can be slowed down and decreased.
- Crescent connector is not a panacea and will not do what the circ highway was supposed to do, but the project is on the fast track (high probability of being on the Governor's list and starting next summer) – the crescent connector will improve the flow of traffic through Five Corners, improve the downtown area, and allow a more livable downtown. Traffic from all over the county goes through Five Corners. Safety is the main issue. There is no circ alternative, only spot fixes. The traffic problem is not going to go away.
- Concern that the project has advanced and was not in the village capital plan presented at the annual meeting – the scoping study was in the capital plan. The project will be

included in the capital plan when more information is known. The village does not have the money to fund the project. The initial estimate of \$2.3 million for the road is underestimated.

- Consider the option of having one-way streets around the downtown area, especially if a portion will be closed to traffic – the dynamics of the area would change with one-way streets and it would be dangerous for pedestrians trying to cross the road if traffic flowed continuously.
- Concern for support of another track crossing by the railroad – the railroad has been present through the scoping and planning studies and notes that the crossing has a benefit to them because the amount of traffic is decreased crossing over the railroad tracks. The railroad company has indicated they will entertain giving the village the right-of-way for a crossing.
- Maintaining parallel parking on Railroad Street – the Village Engineer is critiquing the plan to determine the right-of-way. It is likely the parallel parking will be eliminated. The Village Engineer is taking the plan from scoping to preliminary.

III. TRUSTEES ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

1. Discussion and Open Q&A of Selected Action Items

George Tyler reviewed the Essex Junction Trustees 2011-12 Annual Action Plan which includes the Amtrak train and bus station renovation, seeking community grants, economic development activities, use of the village green, communication plan and policy, ladder truck funding, village-wide Wi-Fi, revamping the annual meeting, parks and walking paths, dealing with empty/blighted buildings, land uses, tax equity, and revenue generation. Lori Houghton noted a committee is looking at the issue of voting the annual budget by Australian ballot or trying to increase attendance at the annual meeting. Political scientist, Frank Bryant, will be at the Brownell Library in September to discuss town meetings. Other events will be planned. Regarding the empty/blighted building ordinance, vacant structures present a safety and fire issue. A committee is being formed to review each case. Regarding generating revenue, a local options tax is one method of generating income for the village.

2. Informal Discussion with Board Members

There was opportunity for informal discussion with the Trustees.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

1. Accept Ladder Truck MOU

Lori Houghton spoke in support of the ladder truck and the Fire Department, and stressed that the facts stated need to be accurate. Essex Junction Fire Dept. has many members responding to town calls and villagers pay taxes to the town. The payment of \$200,000 from the town toward the purchase of a ladder truck is a good first step, but not enough. It is hoped in the future the cost split will be 50/50. Mary Morris echoed the comments. George Tyler acknowledged the courage and vision on the part of the Essex Selectboard to take the first step. It is hoped the town and village can continue to work on initiatives because that is good for the community as a whole and what the citizenry wants the boards to do. Mr. Tyler noted the process to replace the 22 year old ladder truck began about two years ago. The ladder truck has been well maintained, but after thousands of calls is in need of replacement. The piece of equipment is much needed. Authorizing the replacement is a positive sign of support to members of the fire department.

MOTION by Dan Kerin, SECOND by John Lajza, that the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees hereby approves the ladder truck replacement MOU with the Town of Essex for a 100' aerial truck to replace the village's 75' ladder truck. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carried.

MOTION by Dan Kerin, SECOND by John Lajza, that the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees hereby authorizes the Village Manager to proceed with obtaining bids for a 100' aerial truck to replace the village's 75' ladder truck and the Village Manager shall submit his recommendation to the Trustees for final approval of said purchase to be based on a unit recommended by the Fire Chief, and further, the Village Manager in consultation with the Village Treasurer shall also obtain a loan for the funds required for this purchase. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carried.

2. Public Discussion: Grant Application for Rte. 2A/Lincoln Street Sidewalk Project
Jonathan Williams explained the sidewalk extension project on Route 2A (Lincoln Street) from North Street to St. James Place at a cost of \$272,288 of which \$217,831 is being sought from grants with a 20% local match. There was question about the exact extension. Staff clarified the sidewalk will be extended from the high school (North Street intersection) to St. James Place to accommodate people walking to the fair or to St. James Church. The Trustees reaffirmed support of the grant application for the project.

V. CONSENT AGENDA & READING FILE

MOTION by Lori Houghton, SECOND by Dan Kerin, to approve the consent agenda as presented:

- 1. Approve Minutes of Previous Meetings (7/19/11, 7/26/11 & 8/2/11)**
- 2. Approve Request from EJFD and VFW to Partially Close Lincoln Street for 9/11 Anniversary Ceremony at Memorial Park**
- 3. Reading List Acceptance (Letters & Communications)**
 - FY12 Tax Rates for Village and Town**

VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carried.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by John Lajza, SECOND by Dan Kerin, to adjourn the meeting. VOTING: unanimous (5-0); motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:36 PM.

RScty: M.E.Riordan