



Essex Junction Independence Frequently Asked Questions

Questions about forming a city

Is there a precedent for what the Village is trying to do? Can a village even legally separate from a town?

Yes - to both questions.

There are 9 cities in Vermont, most of which were formerly incorporated villages. In the last century, 3 cities were approved by the Legislature. Newport separated from the Town of Newport in 1918. Winooski separated from the Town of Colchester in 1922. South Burlington initially became a town in 1864, when the Village of Burlington separated from the Town of Burlington; the Village of Burlington became a city, and the Town of South Burlington was born. South Burlington became a city in 1974. You can read more about this at the Secretary of State's [website](#).

Why do we have to become a city? Why can't we remain the Village of Essex Junction? Could we become a town?

In Vermont, villages do not exist outside of towns. If a village separates from its parent town, it becomes a city. In Vermont, there is no other option but to become a city if we vote to separate from the Town of Essex.

Here is a [list](#) of all the current and former villages in Vermont. Many villages became unincorporated (or “dissolved”) and were absorbed into their parent towns. The villages that separated became cities.

Does the Village of Essex Junction government have the expertise and resources to become a city?

Yes. The Village has been operating as a full service, self-governing, and self-sustaining municipality since 1893.

Right now, the Essex Junction government owns and operates all the public works utilities, service equipment, water and sewer lines, and pumping stations within the Village. It owns and maintains all the streets, sidewalks, bridges, parks, walking paths, and other public infrastructure within the Village.

If it's not from us, it's not official.





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The Essex Junction government presently has full authority over its own ordinances, building and zoning regulations, municipal planning, community and economic development, engineering and legal services, and capital expenditures. It has its own seat on the governing boards of the regional planning commission, solid waste district, and water district. It procures its own bonds and interfaces directly with state and federal agencies. It owns and operates the administrative offices at Lincoln Hall, the Essex Junction Fire Department, the Essex Junction Wastewater Treatment Plant, the Brownell Library, Essex Junction Recreation and Parks, and the Senior Center. The Essex Junction community elects its own representatives to the Vermont Legislature.

The only major service the Town of Essex provides within the Village of Essex Junction is the Essex Police Department, which is why the Trustees and the Town Selectboard have tentatively agreed to negotiate a contract for continuing Town police service within Essex Junction after separation.

The only hurdles for becoming a city are (1) voter approval and (2) legislative approval at the state level and its related political challenges (see the question about what happens after we vote on the charter). There are no financial, operational, or technical barriers preventing Essex Junction's transition from village to city.

If we became a city, how would we compare with other Vermont cities?

The City of Essex Junction would have about 11,000 people living within 4 square miles, with a total estimated budget of about \$9.5 million. It would be Vermont's fourth largest city by population after Burlington, Rutland, and South Burlington.

By comparison, the City of Barre has about 8,500 people within 4 square miles with an FY22 budget of \$12.8 million. The City of Montpelier has about 7,300 people in 10 square miles with an FY22 budget of \$14.4 million. The City of St. Albans has about 6,900 people in 2 square miles with an FY22 budget of \$9 million. The City of Winooski has about 7,300 people in 1.5 square miles with an FY22 budget of \$8 million.



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The Village's present budget is \$5.6 million. If the new city budget is \$9.5 million, won't that require a large tax increase for Essex Junction taxpayers?

No. The money Essex Junction property owners save by no longer paying taxes to the Town of Essex will offset the cost of a new city budget and may even result in a net tax savings.

Essex Junction property owners will pay \$3.7 million in taxes this year to support the Village's \$5.6 million budget, and they will pay \$6.1 million to the Town of Essex to help pay the Town's \$15.9 million budget. Exact numbers can't be known at this time but the total \$9.8 million paid out by Essex Junction taxpayers for municipal services this year exceeds the estimates of the new City of Essex Junction budget. It's important to note that the Village and the Town, like most municipal governments, acquire revenue from a variety of sources other than property taxes, such as grants and fees. The new City of Essex Junction will probably not require \$9.5 million in property taxes to fund a \$9.5 million budget.

Questions about the charter and the process of separation

When do we vote on separation? Is it in person at the polls or will we vote by mail?

At their August 24th meeting, the Trustees voted unanimously to hold the separation vote by mail-in ballot. Also, the polls will be open for voting on Tuesday, November 2nd, 2021 at Essex High School.

What happens after we vote on the charter?

All municipal charters must be approved by the Vermont Legislature and the Governor. A passing vote by Village residents will kick off a [state-level process](#) that has many steps.

Here is a summary of the steps that will follow a positive vote by the Village:

1. The voter-approved charter is submitted by Essex Junction's state representatives to the House Government Operations Committee (HGO).
2. HGO will take testimony on the charter, consider/debate it, and decide whether to approve or reject it. They can also make changes to the charter itself. The charter will



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also be vetted by Legislative Council (the attorneys who serve the Legislature) and they will provide commentary and flag any issues.

3. If HGO approves the charter, it then goes to Senate Government Operations (SGO).
4. SGO can take testimony on the charter, consider/debate it, and decide whether to approve or reject it. They can also make changes to the charter itself.
5. Because separation would impact the taxation of both municipalities, the charter will most likely also go before the House Ways & Means Committee and Senate Finance Committee. These are the two legislative committees responsible for taxation. They would also have the ability to make changes to the charter or reject it.
6. If SGO makes changes to the charter, it must go back to HGO again for their approval.
7. After both HGO and SGO have approved the charter, it then goes to the full House for approval.
8. If the House approves the charter, then it goes to the full Senate for approval.
9. If both the House and Senate approve the charter, then it goes to the Governor for approval. The Governor can veto the charter.
10. If the Governor approves the charter, then it goes into effect and the City of Essex Junction would be created according to the charter's terms.

The charter can be revised by any of the state legislative bodies that touch it. It can be rejected by a committee and sent back to the Trustees for any number of reasons. Delays could prevent it from being considered for a few weeks or months, a year, or even until the next legislative session. Even if it clears both the House and the Senate, the charter could be vetoed by the Governor.

The reason the Legislature and the Governor have so much influence in this process is because Vermont is a "[Dillon's Rule](#)" state. This means that all Vermont municipalities are instruments of the state and cannot make certain decisions on their own without legislative approval.

Citizen advocacy by those in favor of separation at the local and state level is likely to be an important factor in its success or failure. The Town Selectboard may oppose separation and seek to prevent Essex Junction from becoming a city that would no longer pay taxes to the Town. The Legislature may give the Selectboard an opportunity to testify and explain any opposition or objections they have. The Selectboard could also initiate legal challenges to separation on their own or be petitioned to do so by Town citizens.



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Village residents are able to reach out to legislators and committees to share their support of the charter's passage. There will be opportunities to testify in support of the charter. High turnout at legislative meetings and frequent communication with the Legislature will have impact.

However, there are also citizens in the Village and the rest of the Town of Essex who do not want to separate. They have the same opportunities for advocacy that people who want the charter to pass have. The Town Selectboard and the Vermont Legislature will be lobbied heavily by people who do not want the Village to separate.

A charter change initiative for transitioning from village to city has many hurdles to overcome. Residents should not feel assured of success if the November vote passes. That is simply the first step in the next part of the process. However, this is an opportunity for Village residents to

strongly advocate for our community's future and come together in large numbers to achieve success by positively and clearly telling the Legislature that they want the charter to pass.

Does the Town have to also vote on separation? Can the Town stop us from separating?

The November 2021 vote will be for Village of Essex Junction residents only.

As mentioned above, the Town Selectboard and citizens advocating against separation could potentially influence the legislative process against passing the charter.

There is precedent in Vermont that a village can vote by itself to separate from its parent town. There are other instances when a village and a town both voted and separation was defeated. You can learn more about this at the Secretary of State's [website](#).

I have been hearing about breaking us up into voting districts--is that part of separation? What happens to our Trustee and Selectboard representation post-separation?

If the Village separates from the Town, the Town Selectboard would no longer represent the Village in any way. The City of Essex Junction would have a city council. The councilors would be elected at-large.



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After separation the Town Selectboard would represent only the residents of the Town, within the new borders that would be established by the separation of the Village. Former residents of the Village within the Town would now solely be residents of the City of Essex Junction. They would no longer be Town residents and would no longer be allowed to serve on the Selectboard.

The Village Trustees recently decided that the new city council would be elected at-large. This means that all city councilors would be elected by all residents of the City of Essex Junction, and all city councilors would represent the entire City. This is how Village Trustees are currently elected. There would be no voting wards. However, at any time in the future the City Council could decide to create voting wards.

Questions about municipal services

Would I still be able to use the Essex Free Library if we separate?

Yes. Like all Vermont public libraries, anyone can go to the Essex Free Library as well as the Brownell Library. As for borrowing books, both libraries are members of the Chittenden County homecard system, which allows library card holders at 27 different libraries to borrow books from each other's libraries. Here is a [list of all the libraries in the homecard system](#).

Will we be able to have the same access to Indian Brook we have now? What about Saxon Hill and other Town parks?

Currently all Town [parks](#) except Indian Brook Park have open access. Anyone can use them, regardless of where they live. This is also true of all Village parks.

Indian Brook Park [currently sells season passes](#) that are only available for Town residents. New in 2021, non-Town residents can purchase day passes, which would provide future City of Essex Junction residents access to the park. However, given our history and the financial support of the park by Village residents, the Village Trustees and Town Selectboard will be discussing how to handle access to Indian Brook Park by Village residents after separation, as well as parks and recreation services in general. We will update this answer once there is a decision regarding this topic.



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What will happen to the Senior Center and the Senior Van? Will there be changes?

Currently the Village and Town provide senior services jointly. The [Senior Center](#) is housed in the Village Offices at 2 Lincoln Street. The Town provides the [Senior Van](#) service. The Village and Town share the cost of Senior Center staff. Keep in mind that Village taxpayers pay for 42% of the cost of this service. Town residents have a lower membership fee than non-residents.

The Village Trustees and Town Selectboard will be discussing how to handle senior services after separation. We will update this answer once there is a decision regarding this topic.

What's the plan for the police?

Currently, there is general agreement between the Village Trustees and Town Selectboard that after separation both municipalities will share the services of the [Essex Police Department](#) so that there is no change in how residents are served. The police department has stated they recognize and appreciate their commitment to the Village and are committed to serving both the Village and the Town.

Both boards will be discussing how to handle the cost of police services after separation. We will update this answer once there is a decision regarding this topic.

What new services would the Village have to start offering that the Town usually provides?

There are a few administrative services that the Town provides for the Village that the Village would have to take on after separation.

New services that the Village currently does not provide for itself include offering animal licenses, marriage licenses, and the office of Health Officer. In addition, the new governing board of the City of Essex Junction would also serve as its own Liquor Control Board to grant liquor licenses and would adjudicate dog bite cases.

Village taxpayers currently pay for the services of the Town assessor. The Village Trustees are currently discussing with the Town Selectboard whether to continue sharing that service after separation, or to hire or contract out the services of an assessor.



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What will happen to the Wastewater Treatment Facility after separation? Will separation affect my sewer or water bill?

Separation will not affect water or sewer bills.

Essex Junction purchases its water from the Champlain Water District, which it resells directly to Village residents and businesses. This will continue after separation. Essex Junction owns and operates the community wastewater/ sewage treatment facility and will continue to do so after separation. The Town of Essex and Town of Williston purchase water treatment service from the Essex Junction facility and will continue to do so after separation. Separation will not affect their rates.

Questions about the school district and school taxes

Will separation affect the school district? Would the school district also have to separate?

Separation will not affect the school district or school operations, and the school district would not have to separate. Essex Junction schools are part of the Essex Westford School District, which functions as an entirely separate municipal operation from the Essex Junction, Town of Essex, and Town of Westford governments.

Questions about municipal taxes

Would I still have to pay taxes to the Town? Would we go back to getting 2 different tax bills?

Village residents will still have to pay some taxes to the Town on a temporary basis in order to fulfill obligations. If the Village separates, residents would receive only one tax bill that would include municipal and education taxes.

Village residents voted to approve the building of the Essex Police Department facility and will have to continue paying off that bond along with Town outside the Village residents. That bond will be paid off in 2033 and then Village residents would no longer have to pay it.



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If the Village Trustees and the Town Selectboard agree to share some services after separation--like police services--then there would be a financial agreement between the two municipalities and Village residents would pay for their share of those services.

If the Village separates, residents would receive only one tax bill that would include municipal and education taxes, but only for the new City. Any taxes still owed to the Town would be included in your City taxes.

Is it true that Essex Junction depends on Global Foundries for tax revenue and that an independent City of Essex Junction would suffer if Global Foundries closed?

No. Essex Junction and the Town of Essex no longer rely heavily on Global Foundries (formerly IBM) for tax revenue.

Prior to 2012, IBM's assessed property tax value was significantly reduced and its tax subsidy to the Village and Town was phased out. Global Foundries currently comprises about 8% of Essex Junction's Grand List (total taxable property), but if the plant were to be sold or cease operations, the industrial park would retain most of its assessed value and the owner would still be required to pay Essex Junction property taxes.