



Essex Junction Independence Frequently Asked Questions

I really just don't want to separate. I just want us to stay as one Town of Essex. Merger didn't happen, so why can't things just stay the way they are?

The Essex Junction Trustees firmly believe the imbalance of tax burdens between Village and Town residents is unacceptable in terms of good governance, and unsustainable in terms of our financial health and quality of life. Right now, Village households pay, on average, \$925 more per year to help support the Town of Essex government while also supporting their own local Essex Junction government services. With our current Village-Town arrangement, this disparity increases as the Town beyond the Village grows. If merger isn't possible, separation is the only permanent way to change the arrangement.

The development we've seen in the Five Corners area, and in other parts of the Village, needs to be managed carefully, which requires local investment. Our Village infrastructure – streets, bridges, culverts, sidewalks – needs constant monitoring and upkeep. To finance these costs, the Trustees must continually choose between raising taxes on already overburdened Village taxpayers, borrowing money, or putting things on hold with the hope that federal or state grants, or other revenue sources, will come our way. “Staying the same” – with no merger or separation – means this problem will only grow worse as the Town continues to draw more and more revenue from the Village to pay for its own needs outside the Village. Separation will redirect Village tax dollars to only pay for Village needs – like every other Vermont community – while still delivering tax relief to our citizens.

Isn't Essex Junction just an overlay district or special taxing district of Essex Town?

No. Like every other charter-incorporated city, town, or village in Vermont, Essex Junction is a full-service municipal government, empowered to raise taxes to provide all municipal resources its citizens require. The entire network of the Village's municipal service infrastructure – streets, sidewalks, bridges, water and sewer lines, parks, recreation, library, fire department, water treatment plant – was built by Essex Junction taxpayers and comes under the sole jurisdiction of the Essex Junction government.

The main difference for incorporated villages is that they must exist within the geographic boundaries of a town, and village citizens are considered citizens of the town and must pay property taxes to the town even if town services are not provided within the village. Incorporated villages exist all over Vermont.

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





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Overlay districts and taxing districts are sections of cities and towns specially zoned for environmental or historic preservation purposes, or for providing a particular service unavailable to the rest of the community.

Like any other city or town, such as Winooski or the Town of Essex, Essex Junction has full authority to write ordinances, own municipal property, regulate its zoning and development, receive federal and state grants, and interact directly with county, state, and federal agencies.

All of Essex Junction's major services – fire, library, street department, water & sewer, parks & recreation – predate their counterparts in Essex Town. Essex Junction transferred control of its police department to the Town in the 1970s, with the understanding that it would serve the entire community, to avoid having its taxpayers fund a Village police department and a separate Town department.

Other than police, the Town of Essex provides some administrative and clerical services for the Village, such as the property assessor, liquor licenses, and health officer, and it pays some intergovernmental costs (such as county taxes) that Essex Junction would be required to pay as an independent city.

Why doesn't Essex Junction just dissolve its charter and force a merger with Essex Town?

The Vermont Legislature must approve changes to municipal charters, including dissolutions, and the Legislature would not allow Essex Junction to walk away from its debts, assets, contractual obligations, and other responsibilities by simply dissolving its charter.

The Town of Essex has never owned the Village's assets or properties, so it wouldn't automatically acquire them by default if the Village charter was dissolved. Nor would the Town be required to fund and operate Essex Junction's current municipal services, such as fire, library, and recreation.

The Legislature would dissolve Essex Junction's charter only if there were a comprehensive and binding legal agreement for an orderly transfer of assets and responsibilities between Essex Junction and the Town of Essex. The municipal merger charter that was rejected by Town voters earlier this year contained such an agreement.





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There have been discussions about new personnel that would need to be hired if we became a city, like a Village/City Manager, CFO or other finance personnel, HR Director/Assistant City Manager and others. Are these positions going to be filled from current staff or will they be new employees and, therefore, added costs?

There will be a mix of continued positions and new positions. Staff in the current Town-Village unified administration would be eligible for all positions. The Trustees anticipate that a fully independent city government will require restructuring the current unified administration, and possibly creating a few new positions, but the overall cost to Essex Junction taxpayers is anticipated to go down. It is possible that the impact on Village taxpayers could be neutral or a slight increase, but this would depend on the extent of the restructuring.

Village taxes will change because Essex Junction property owners will no longer be taxed by Essex Town to help pay its administrative costs. Essex Junction residents will only be required to fund city services. The Trustees don't have a precise estimate yet, but they are confident the per-household cost savings should offset any new administrative costs.

Splitting the current Town-Village unified administration into two smaller administrations may require creating new positions, but it will also eliminate some positions and costs. For example, the Town of Essex information technology office currently has two full-time employees with a total budget of \$434,470. Such a large operation may be necessary to serve two governments, but estimates show that the new City could provide excellent IT service for much less than the Village's current \$182,477 (42%) share of the Town's IT expenditures. Larger size doesn't always create efficiencies. The Trustees believe there are other significant costs incurred from operating a large, unified administration that can be reduced or eliminated by separating from the Town of Essex.

If we separate, would we still have to go to the Town of Essex for a marriage license or a dog license? Would the Town Selectboard still handle issues with dogs?

No. With separation there would be a new City Clerk, who would offer all the same services that the Village Clerk once provided, with the addition of issuing marriage licenses and dog licenses. The City Council would have the responsibility for dog issues, including maintaining leash laws and hearing dog bite cases.



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Are Town trucks going to come through a Village neighborhood to plow part of a road for houses located in the Town?

No. There are no Village or Town neighborhoods fitting that description. The only roads connecting the Village and Town are state highways: Routes 15, 117, and 2A. There are no secondary roads connecting Village and Town neighborhoods and no neighborhoods straddling the Village-Town boundary.

The Town has spent a lot of money renovating 81 Main Street. Lincoln Hall access and parking are challenging. How do staff feel about returning to Lincoln Hall? Will the Village/City want to build a new, more accessible office, possibly incurring more costs?

Village staff and the Trustees feel uniformly excited by the prospect of returning historic Lincoln Hall to its role as the vital hub of Essex Junction government. The Trustees anticipate that alterations to the building will be necessary to accommodate a larger staff and more public activity. We are also working with local developers to increase the number of nearby public parking spaces. The Trustees have always restrained their spending on the building out of concern that Village taxpayers are required to support Essex Town's capital expenditures as well as the Village's. If separation is successful, the overall cost savings would help fund Lincoln Hall renovations while still delivering a tax savings to Essex Junction property owners.

There are anti-separation and anti-merger folks in both the Village and the Town outside the Village. Currently the Boards are working together. What happens if we end up with "anti-whatever" people on one or both boards? How will that impact the shared services, particularly police?

Both the vote for separation and, if successful, consideration by the Vermont Legislature will occur before the Village and Town annual elections in the spring of 2022. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the current membership of the two boards will remain as it is through the pivotal periods of the Village's separation effort.

If the Village becomes a city, it's always possible that elected officials on either side could seek to overturn any inter-municipal agreements established by the current boards. But inter-municipal agreements, such as sharing the cost of the police, are structured to benefit both sides. Newly elected officials seeking to overturn such an agreement for political purposes, and



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thereby impose unnecessary spending increases and/or decreases in service levels on their community, would likely face significant resistance by other board members and voters.

Does the Champlain Valley Expo pay taxes to the Village? What will happen if the Expo sells off or develops part of its land? And how much of the land is in the TOV and how much is in the Village?

The Expo is a tax-exempt property and is not part of the Village's or Town's grand list properties for taxation. This is because of state statutes regarding agricultural venues, and not a local decision. Because it pays no property taxes, the Expo's status won't affect any cost sharing agreements between Essex Junction and Essex Town.

The Expo provides Essex Junction \$15,000 annually as a payment in lieu of taxes (aka PILOT), and it frequently makes its land and buildings available for public use--the most recent example being its serving first as an alternate hospital, then a testing site, and then a vaccination site throughout the pandemic.

All of the Expo's property is within Essex Junction. Any subdivision and sale of its properties would occur within the city boundaries, and any new opportunities for property tax assessments would be available only to the city.

How will the timing work for mail-in ballots for voters who are deployed? Currently it takes about 3 to 4 weeks for mail to get to service members overseas, and 3 to 4 weeks to get back. If the vote is November 2nd, will there be enough time for them to vote absentee?

For most deployed military personnel and civilians overseas, ballots are emailed. Once they receive it they must print the ballot out, mark it with their vote, and then mail it back via regular mail. Deployed service members should put in a request for a ballot to be sent to them electronically in order to get the ballot delivered as soon as possible after it is ready.

Deployed service members can request an electronic ballot by contacting the Village/Town Clerk's Office at 802-879-0413 or clerk@essex.org. Requests can be made now, no need to wait. The [Vermont Secretary of State's Office](#) has more information about early and absentee voting.

