

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA
Saturday, March 24, 2018
Essex Community Educational Center - Cafeteria
Two Educational Drive
Essex Junction, VT 05452
10:00 AM**

Note: Refreshments will be available at 9:45 a.m. The public is welcome to enjoy breakfast and lunch.

1. **CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** [10:00 AM]

2. **JOINT MEETING**
 - a. Introduction (George Tyler & Jennifer Knauer) [10:05 AM]
 - b. Presentation: "Governance: What does it mean ... to an outsider" (Evan Teich) [10:10 AM]
 - c. Discussion: "As the Consolidation Effort progresses, what do you wish to preserve or protect?" (Opportunity for Public Input) (Jennifer Knauer) [10:30 AM]
 - Lunch** [12:00 PM]
 - d. Presentation: Consolidation Efforts to Date (Greg Duggan) [12:30 PM]
 - e. Discussion: "What have you learned from past mergers and consolidation efforts that might impact this next phase?" (Opportunity for Public Input) (Jennifer Knauer) [12:35 PM]
 - f. Discussion: Next Steps (Jennifer Knauer) [1:30 PM]

**All times are approximate*

3. **ADJOURN**

Members of the public are encouraged to speak during the Public to Be Heard agenda item, during a Public Hearing, or, when recognized by the Chair, during consideration of a specific agenda item. The public will not be permitted to participate when a motion is being discussed except when specifically requested by the Chair.

This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the Selectboard, like all programs and activities of the Town of Essex, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the Town Manager's office at 878-1341.

Certification: _____
Date Posted Initials

TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING
MINUTES OF MEETING
March 24, 2018

SELECTBOARD: Max Levy, Chair, Michael Plageman, Irene Wrenner, Andrew Watts, Susan Cook.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: George Tyler, Village President, Elaine Sopchak, Dan Kerin, Andrew Brown, Lori Houghton.

FACILITATOR: Jennifer Knauer

OTHERS PRESENT:

Andy Suntup, Linda Suntup, Diane Clemens, Jim Bernegger, Annie Dun-Watson, Betsy Dunn, John Egan, Mary Lou Hurley, Barbara Higgins, Marie Froeschl, Michael Ross, Margaret Smith, Paul Austin, Leah Pastel, Paula Duke, Lynn Smith, Greg Morgan, Dawn Hill-Fleury, Linda Myers, Paula DeMichele (Did not sign in), Jerry Fox (Did not sign in).

Max Levy and George Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Levy invited those present to join him in reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance."

BUSINESS ITEMS

Introduction (George Tyler & Jennifer Knauer)

Mr. Tyler welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief introduction.

Jennifer Knauer introduced herself and gave an overview of the rules and expectations of the meeting.

Presentation: Governance: What does it mean to....an outsider?- Evan Teich

Mr. Teich introduced himself in both his official role and his outsider status. The benefit to being an "Outsider" is that it allows him to have an objective stance as consolidation efforts progress. He identified Governance as a union that includes mutual likes, that becomes stronger over time. He moved forward with a slideshow presentation on Governance. The slides highlighted: Strategic Direction, Forms of Government, Respect, Governance through Policies, Procedures and Protocols, Culture and Philosophy, taxes, Fees and Equalization, Expert's Report, Legal Composition and Governance Is Up To You. Mr. Teich ended with comments about Change taking time.

Discussion: "As the Consolidation effort progresses, what do you want to preserve or protect?"

Ms. Knauer posed the question to the room, taking responses from the Board followed by the Public.

Irene Wrenner asked if there was a need to identify consolidation, pointing out different interpretations.

SELECTBOARD

March 24, 2018

50 Michael Plageman shared; consolidation is maintaining the level of service to both the Village and the
51 Town Outside the Village, without it decreasing in quality.

52
53 Ms. Wrenner spoke about lost representation for School Board slots for the Town Outside the village.
54 They were promised four representatives in that territory. She indicated that residents in the Village
55 need equal representation.

56
57 Elaine Sopchak suggested using the word alignment over consolidation, as services are currently
58 consolidated. She focused on keeping quality of service, removing language (inside and outside) as
59 they are exclusionary and divisive.

60
61 Lori Houghton recommended considering using the concept of individual communities.

62
63 Mr. Levy explained that consolidation equaled one budget, whereas alignment is two budgets.

64
65 Barbara Higgins objected to the order of comments and reinforced Ms. Wrenner's statement about
66 equal representation and raised the issue of needs being different between Village and Town.

67
68 Marie Froeschl commented about equal representation.

69
70 Jerry Fox stated that Board members are elected officials and should have opportunity to be heard first.

71
72 Ms. Froeschl commented representation over participation.

73
74 Ms. Knauer posed a second question asking what the merger and consolidation covered from 2015 to
75 the present. The public had the opportunity to respond first.

76
77 Paula Duke raised concerns about filling positions in governance and wants to ensure future structure
78 of representation won't preempt qualified individual from participating.

79
80 Iris Banks said it was important to have equal representation on the board, we can find qualified
81 people.

82
83 John Egan asked for clarification on representation from the Village and the Town Outside the Village.

84
85 Mr. Tyler explained the Town Charter doesn't distinguish districts.

86
87 Mr. Fox spoke about eliminating the language "Townie and Villager" within Town of Essex.

88
89 Annie Dunn-Watson asked why the Village has a Board of Trustees, adding too much government. Mr.
90 Tyler gave a history of charter, 19th century, explaining that the development of schools and fire
91 department, which started near the railroad, resulted in taxes, which needed consent from the state.
92 Ultimately a Charter resulted, in this area. Outside the village was sparsely populated and, at that time,
93 didn't have a need for a school of fire department. As this population grew, a separate charter was
94 created.

95
96 Ms. Sopchak asked Ms. Knauer to address quality of services. Ms. Knauer re-visited the overarching
97 question, as consolidation effort progresses, what do you want to achieve? What do you wish to

SELECTBOARD

March 24, 2018

98 protect? The audience was asked to consider and record any thoughts or questions on index cards,
99 provided by Ms. Knauer. The board had the first opportunity to respond.

100

101 Sue Cook wants services at same level or better, but not an inherited level of service. She wants
102 services to evolve based on collective input.

103

104 Mr. Levy commented that policy makers focus on the “Big Picture”, not just tomorrow, but decades
105 from now. He wants to focus on developing a sustainable community that is socially, economically and
106 environmentally resilient.

107

108 Mr. Tyler wants to respect the identity of folks outside and inside the Village. He added the Village
109 was formed to create services, not a division. Mr. Levy suggested that history is identity and this needs
110 to be preserved as we evolve.

111

112 Ms. Sopchak suggested maintaining the identity of the Village as “Down Town” and mandatory annual
113 meetings.

114

115 Andy Watts wants school development to follow consolidation process.

116

117 Mr. Kerin wants to ensure the quality of life maintained in terms of physical and business environment.
118 He added, we are stronger together than apart, a communion of communities. Ms. Knauer asked the
119 audience to define who we are together and how do we make the most of the communion.

120

121 Ms. Houghton identified defining characteristics of the village being walkability and wants that
122 preserved. She also wanted to identify the reason for community growth as well as achieving tax equity
123 and whole community involvement in economic planning and development. Last she spoke of Essex
124 being the second largest community in the state, but receives little press coverage for achievements.
125 She believes this is due to separation.

126

127 Jim Bernegger mentioned a new arrival’s confusion over his residence, Essex Town or Essex Junction.

128

129 Greg Morgan spoke to the size of the municipality and lack of recognition, adding it’s not the fault of
130 the media but the citizens. We need to identify a vision and market it. People who run for office need to
131 have an agenda and a vision for community growth over being a “good” person. He also feels the
132 current geographical boundaries are inefficient.

133

134 Ms. Dunn-Watson wants to turn to other districts that have joined forces to address moving forward in
135 a collaborative and participatory process.

136

137 Margaret Smith commented that she never felt like the Junction never wanted anything to do with the
138 Town. She identified inequality of representation and raised a concern about the impact this has when it
139 comes to voting.

140

141 Mr. Morgan spoke about loss of focus where development is concerned, citing loss of IBM as an
142 example of poor commercial health. He feels we must recognize that there are serious, but separate
143 concerns. He would like to see some focus on attracting new companies whilst maintaining current
144 ones.

145

SELECTBOARD

March 24, 2018

146 Ms. Higgins spoke to economic development as the crux of the problem; we haven't merged anything
147 apart from the police department. She asked representation to identify what is needed to move forward
148 in order to receive support.

149
150 Paula DeMichele addressed the concept of framing. She identified 4 frames, organizational, family,
151 political and celebratory. She wants us to focus on goals, not identity and feels community is stuck in
152 organizational and political frame citing dissipation of Heart and Soul grant as an example. The heart
153 and soul grant should have been kept and a public engagement specialist should have been hired.

154
155 Linda Smith said we are using Band-Aids when surgery is needed. She spoke to the need to be "small-
156 business friendly and supports the idea of districts. Mr. Egan expressed shared frustration with Ms.
157 Smith and spoke about inequality in representation.

158
159 Mr. Austin wants to see the charter amended adding that there is hostility between the Village and
160 Town, adding the needs aren't that different and future division will turn off residents and businesses.
161 He wants to see equal access to assets and feels the focus should be on the next generation.

162
163 **Lunch**

164
165 There was a break for lunch.

166
167 **Presentation: Consolidation Efforts to Date**

168
169 Ms. Knauer discussed that cards were available for audience members to write down topics. Ms.
170 Knauer asked the audience to focus on efforts thus far. She handed the mike over to Mr. Duggan for a
171 presentation on efforts to date.

172
173 Mr. Duggan clarified which board members were on each board. He told the audience that Ms.
174 Sopchak will be serving on both boards starting in April. He then began a power point presentation on
175 consolidation efforts to date.

176
177 Ms. Wrenner thanked the voters for their input and appreciates hearing their voice.

178
179 Mr. Duggan gave an overview of the decision to separate from the Town. The village voted to separate
180 in 1999.

181
182 Iris Banks asked a question about the consolidation of the senior center. Mr. Duggan and Mr. Tyler
183 clarified that the Senior Center is a collaborative effort. The Director is a Town employee but the center
184 itself is in a Village building.

185
186 Mr. Egan asked a question about where the schools fit in. Mr. Duggan clarified that the schools have
187 already merged and that we are currently just discussing municipal government.

188
189 Mr. Fox asked a question about what the next steps are. Mr. Duggan indicated that the budgets and
190 consolidation of departments are the next fiscal steps for the next coming year. Mr. Teich said the
191 continuance of the consolidation has to keep going internally. We have three unions, non-union staff,
192 and we have to align benefits and policies to find efficiencies and provide services at high levels.

193

194 Iris Banks indicated that she feels we aren't making progress.

195

196 Mr. Fox spoke about the community being a suburb that is in crisis, explaining change takes time. Mr.
197 Watts spoke to the need to consider relations between the elected officials and the residents as much as
198 the resident will accept the idea of reframing.

199

200

201 **Discussion: "What have you learned from past mergers and consolidation efforts that might impact this**
202 **next phase?"**

203

204 Ms. Knauer shifted focus, asking the audience to reflect: Looking back, what did we learn? What
205 worked? What didn't? The Board shared first.

206

207 Ms. Houghton doesn't want to focus on failures, but what do we want to become as one. We need to
208 identify as one, before moving forward. Tax equity issues must be resolved as well as creation of a new
209 charter.

210

211 Dan Kerin spoke about outreach and getting the message out by using facts and simple straightforward
212 language. He suggested learning from the past; focusing on outreach rather than past feelings of
213 animosity.

214

215 Andrew Brown spoke about sticking to facts, adding perceptions aren't helpful.

216

217 Ms. Sopchak sees the need for the Board of Trustees to speak with one voice and sees the need for a
218 communication specialist to handle press releases and manage a web-page.

219

220 Mr. Tyler commented on the relevance of identity during previous consolidation efforts and feels it
221 needs to be maintained. He feels the name of the new community needs to be taken into consideration.
222 He is concerned about the tax increase that will be shouldered by the town and wants to see a gradual
223 roll out of tax increase, which he expects to average \$380.00.

224

225 Mr. Levy spoke about the merger in 2002. He said the voting was close, yet polarized. He wants efforts
226 to be focused on transparency, keeping the community informed and validate recommendations from
227 the public. Mr. Plageman wants to see conscientious progress, gaining tax efficiencies for the electorate
228 on bite at a time. He added one sided tax increases will be the "Kiss Of Death". He would like to focus
229 on new community development such as The Recreation Department as a slow and thoughtful pace that
230 includes input from the public to inform the electorate.

231

232 Ms. Wrenner feels the electorate needs to see both upsides and downsides to the issues communicated
233 from an impartial source, a communications specialist. She also believes in consolidating when and
234 where it makes sense and would like all Town Offices to be located in Lincoln Center.

235

236 Mr. Watts spoke to the idea of selling issues, stating that no one is entitled to their own facts. He
237 recognizes there is a challenge for people to recognize information as factual in given scenarios. He
238 wants to resolve policies and adopt those into practice.

239

240 Ms. Cook indicated that a lot of what she had been thinking was already stated. She agrees that
241 outreach and communication are crucial to success. The term Transparency had not been said yet and is
242 very important. She also said there should be no bias in facts that come through.

243
244 Jerry Fox spoke about being “One” and keeping an eye on the goal.
245

246 Mr. Brown spoke about the need for the Select Board to spend more time having focused group
247 meetings with an emphasis on gathering input from the community and using that input to move
248 forward.
249

250 Diane Clemons spoke to her experience with the BOE consolidation and volunteered to share that
251 process.
252

253 Ms. Duke addressed the issue of the budgets allocated for each library and the fund raising by Brownell
254 Foundation, which is now dissolved.
255

256 Next Steps
257

258 Ms. Knauer guided the group toward a conclusion, asking audience to identify questions that can't be
259 answered. The following list was the outcome; lack of communication, improper information in
260 relation to votes, voting on the web, any member of either board having freedom to express opinions.
261 Mr. Levy thanked the public and the staff and Ms. Knauer proposed she create a report of all
262 information put forth.
263

264 **IRENE WRENNER MOVED AND MICHAEL PLAGEMAN SECONDED A MOTION TO**
265 **ADJOURN AT 2:00 P.M. THE MOTION PASSED 5-0.**
266

267 **DAN KERIN MOVED AND ANDREW BROWN SECONDED A MOTION TO ADJOURN AT**
268 **2:00 P.M. THE MOTION PASSED 5-0.**
269

270
271 **Respectfully submitted,**
272

273 Rebecca Coax
274 Recording Secretary
275

276 Approved this _____ day of _____, 2018
277

278 (See minutes of this date for corrections, if any).
279

280 _____
281

282 Susan E. Cook, Clerk, Selectboard
283

284 (THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT THE NEXT SELECTBOARD MEETING)
285
286
287
288
289