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.

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Date Posted ____________________________  Initials
SELECTBOARD

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

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

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

Lori Houghton recommended considering using the concept of individual communities.

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

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

Marie Froeschl commented about equal representation.

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

Ms. Froeschl commented representation over participation.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Tyler explained the Town Charter doesn’t distinguish districts.

Mr. Fox spoke about eliminating the language “Townie and Villager” within Town of Essex.

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

Ms. Sopchak asked Ms. Knauer to address quality of services. Ms. Knauer re-visited the overarching question, as consolidation effort progresses, what do you want to achieve? What do you wish to
protect? The audience was asked to consider and record any thoughts or questions on index cards, provided by Ms. Knauer. The board had the first opportunity to respond.

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

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

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

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

Andy Watts wants school development to follow consolidation process.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Morgan spoke about loss of focus where development is concerned, citing loss of IBM as an example of poor commercial health. He feels we must recognize that there are serious, but separate concerns. He would like to see some focus on attracting new companies whilst maintaining current ones.
Ms. Higgins spoke to economic development as the crux of the problem; we haven’t merged anything apart from the police department. She asked representation to identify what is needed to move forward in order to receive support.

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

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

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

**Lunch**

There was a break for lunch.

**Presentation: Consolidation Efforts to Date**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Fox asked a question about what the next steps are. Mr. Duggan indicated that the budgets and consolidation of departments are the next fiscal steps for the next coming year. Mr. Teich said the continuance of the consolidation has to keep going internally. We have three unions, non-union staff, and we have to align benefits and policies to find efficiencies and provide services at high levels.
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Iris Banks indicated that she feels we aren’t making progress.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ms. Cook indicated that a lot of what she had been thinking was already stated. She agrees that outreach and communication are crucial to success. The term Transparency had not been said yet and is very important. She also said there should be no bias in facts that come through.
Jerry Fox spoke about being “One” and keeping an eye on the goal.

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

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

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

**Next Steps**

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

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Coax
Recording Secretary

Approved this ____________ day of ____________, 2018

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

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Susan E. Cook, Clerk, Selectboard

(THES MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT THE NEXT SELECTBOARD MEETING)