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**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
DRAFT SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
Monday, May 28, 2019**

SELECTBOARD: Elaine Haney, Chair; Max Levy; Patrick Murray; Annie Cooper

TRUSTEES: Andrew Brown, President; George Tyler; Raj Chawla; Amber Thibeault

ADMINISTRATION: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Sarah Macy
Finance Director/ Assistant Manager;

OTHERS PRESENT: Liz Gamache; Jennifer Knauer; Emerson Lynn; Jim O'Rourke; Margaret
Smith; Irene Wrenner

1. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG

Andrew Brown called the Trustees back to order from their recess, and Elaine Haney called the Town of Essex Selectboard to order at 7:30 PM, for the Special Joint Meeting of the Village of Essex Junction Trustees with the Town of Essex Selectboard.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/ CHANGES

There were no changes to the agenda.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL

With no changes to the agenda, no motion to approve was required.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

There were no comments from the public

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Preparation for Strategic Advance—Liz Gamache

Ms. Gamache, former Mayor and interim City Manager of St. Albans City, introduced Mr. Lynn, long-time, former owner and manager of the St. Albans Messenger newspaper, and Mr. O'Rourke, who is currently running the Messenger. In preparation for the Village of Essex Junction and Town of Essex's work on unification, Ms. Gamache and Mr. Lynn shared their experiences from St. Albans City's downtown revitalization efforts. They offered this information to identify parallels in their efforts that could help guide how Essex may want to manage their own large, municipal change effort. Ms. Gamache explained that St. Albans began from a place of potential downtown decay and stagnation, then developed a shared vision, effective planning strategies and achieved revitalization. She gave credit to strategies that built strong civic engagement, a transparent communication strategy, intentional community trust-building and formal as well as informal teaming for success. Mr. Lynn shared his insights into St. Albans' revitalization efforts and outcomes. He mentioned that there has been a 65% increase in revenue and \$52 million dollars added to the grand list since revitalization efforts began 6 years ago. Mr. Lynn described the connection between the vision of revitalization and core efforts dealing with existing landowners and landlords. Important community dynamics included the move of St. Albans' largest employer, Mylan, downtown, and enforcing a requirement that Walmart would revitalize two downtown buildings. He said transparency of all efforts was essential, and public trust was built through consistent, weekly Public Relations (PR) about the value of work being done, updates on issues and activities,

53 and opportunities for engagement. He said the buy-in established resulted in a 3:1 margin of
54 votes for each step of their revitalization process.
55

56 Ms. Gamache and Mr. Lynn offered key suggestions for Essex as they move forward with
57 unification. Mr. Lynn encouraged Essex staff, Trustees and Selectboard members to utilize
58 the Essex Reporter for consistent public relations. Ms. Gamache encouraged elected officials
59 to maintain visibility with accomplishments along the way. She said it is important to
60 remember that their messaging will be received by people who are at many stages of the
61 change process (awareness, knowledge, action) so opportunities for multiple levels of
62 discussions should be planned and information sharing should be scaffolded to meet people
63 where they are. She said staff should provide accurate analysis and technical information
64 while creating a space for constructive conversations around tensions or conflict to help shape
65 the direction. She stressed the importance of a clear communications plan, with an
66 understanding of who will be communicating what, and that space should be intentionally
67 embedded for people to process what they are learning. She encouraged officials to
68 empathize with the fact that each individual will go through a process of change through this
69 unification.
70

71 Ms. Cooper asked for suggestions about how to get started with the work Ms. Gamache
72 described. Ms. Gamache illustrated the importance of beginning by identifying what shared
73 values exist in the community around the issue. She said that the staff and elected officials'
74 ideas and plans should be communicated and reviewed by community members,
75 stakeholders and public officials. They should be ready to articulate why they are pursuing this
76 change including the details, content and rationale. She said staff and the board members
77 should listen carefully and become clear on what people feel like they are losing as well as
78 what they hope for or might gain- this can help shape direction. Mr. Lynn described the
79 importance of establishing buy-in with core stakeholders who believe in the importance of
80 unification. He said they can build community trust by ensuring that all interpretations of the
81 issues are open for honest discussion.
82

83 Ms. Haney asked for suggestions on what the roles of staff and elected officials should be.
84 Ms. Gamache said that they should have designated spokespeople for specific efforts, to
85 ensure consistent messaging. She suggested that the board and staff be disciplined about
86 finding internal agreements to challenging questions. She encouraged everyone to
87 consistently share what questions are being asked from all areas and understand the answers
88 being provided. Mr. Lynn said that staff and elected officials need to find clarity about why
89 they want to merge municipalities, create an engaging vision and definition of "Greater
90 Essex". He said that forward movement should be built on optimism and cautioned that when
91 the vision is not clear it might be filled in with negativity.
92

93 Mr. Murray asked for suggestions for how to address resistance to the idea of unification and
94 Mr. Brown wondered how to avoid misinformation. Ms. Gamache explained that it can help to
95 identify if the resistance is from a place of "I don't get it; I don't like it; or I don't like you", each
96 of which are progressively harder to address. She said that "I don't get it" can often be
97 resolved with clarifying information; "I don't like it" should be carefully discussed to determine
98 specifically what elements are not liked; and "I don't like you" signifies lack of confidence in
99 leadership, which can be hard to overcome. Ms. Gamache suggested that they establish
100 official sources of information, such as the newspaper, website, and official social media sites
101 in order to combat misinformation.
102

103 Mr. Tyler expressed concern that some elements of unification may not be exciting enough for
104 news stories because they involve things like board leadership structures and policy
105 consolidation. Ms. Gamache reminded everyone that because this change will touch
106 everyone, space should be created to discuss the “consolidation story”. She explained that
107 things will surface that need to be heard and addressed in order to stay the course. She and
108 Mr. Lynn both suggested that it would be helpful for staff and the board members to identify
109 stages or specific decision points that need community approval prior to moving into the next
110 things. Mr. Lynn also encouraged that they identify some exciting, visible, ancillary examples
111 of how people will be better off by the two municipalities working together in a unified model.
112

113 Mr. Teich wondered if there was anything St. Albans would do over in their revitalization
114 efforts. Ms. Gamache said it is important to answer emotional questions with empathy not
115 necessarily more data. She said overall the effort far exceeded expectations.
116

117 Ms. Haney invited community in attendance to share comments.
118

119 Ms. Wrenner asked how history informed the process of St. Albans Revitalization. Mr. Lynn
120 explained that the trajectory of not doing anything would have resulted in downtown decay,
121 which people agreed was not an option. He said they looked at the history of the town and
122 amplified it. For example, in the past there were hotels in St. Albans downtown and now there
123 is one again. CCV is considering relocating back into downtown. He explained that it is
124 important to engage people at multiple levels by including historical and visual contexts in
125 order to generate buy in.
126

127 Mr. Wrenner commented that many people do not receive the Essex Reporter and asked that
128 this be addressed with the post office so community members can remain informed. Mr. Teich
129 invited extra copies of the Essex Reporter be delivered to the Village Offices at 2 Lincoln
130 Street and the Town Offices at 81 Main Street and staff will deliver them to some of the local
131 municipal buildings for people to pick up.
132

133 The board members and staff thanked Ms. Gamache, Mr. Lynn and Mr. O’Rourke for their
134 time and said they plan to utilize the suggestions to inform their upcoming Strategic Advance
135 and efforts toward unification.
136

137 **b. Update from Governance Subcommittee—George Tyler**

138 Mr. Tyler updated the Trustees and Selectboard about insight shared by Barb Higgins, who
139 attended the most recent Governance Subcommittee meeting. Ms. Higgins pointed out that a
140 long-term result of consolidation may be a negative impact on Economic Development, if
141 business retention and development is hindered due to the tax increase in the Town Outside
142 the Village. Mr. Tyler requested that staff generate accurate financial information related to
143 this. He said the subcommittee would like to hear from businesses on the issue and be
144 prepared with accurate information. He also requested that staff provide a list of businesses
145 who currently receive tax abatements for the discussion. Mr. Chawla suggested feedback
146 should be solicited from the Economic Development Committee because individuals in this
147 group could become core leaders in the consolidation efforts.
148

149 Mr. Duggan explained that staff will be ready to recommend a community engagement
150 contractor for the Trustees and Selectboard to hire to host a series of focus groups and
151 surveys on consolidation issues. Ms. Haney and Ms. Cooper pointed out that a similar,
152 previous strategy called Heart & Soul had difficulty reaching their target audience and they
153 hope this new strategy will be more robust and more successful. Ms. Cooper suggested that

154 subcommittees should be mobilized to engage greater awareness of consolidation, and
155 stressed the importance of this community engagement effort. The boards also discussed the
156 possibility of providing incentives, such as in-kind access to Recreation programs, to people
157 so they will more readily participate in the focus groups and return surveys. Mr. Duggan
158 mentioned that if the contract ends up being \$40,000 or more, a waiver may be needed to
159 enter into the agreement. This should be determined by Monday, June 3rd.
160

161 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

162 a. Approval of minutes: May 6, 2019
163

164 **GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by AMBER THIBEAULT, that the Trustees**
165 **approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 4-0.**
166

167 **MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, that the Selectboard approve**
168 **the consent agenda. The motion passed 4-0.**
169

170 **7. READING FILE**

171 a. **Board Member Comments**

- 172 • Ms. Haney and Mr. Teich expressed gratitude for Ms. Gamache’s presentation. Ms.
173 Haney shared her impression that the Selectboard, Trustees and Staff will need to
174 increase effort and work hard on the unification effort.
- 175 • Mr. Teich announced the passing of active Essex Junction Firefighter, Charles
176 "Chuck" Barry, who served the Essex Junction Fire Department for the past 34 years.
177 He shared fond memories of this dedicated man’s service and contribution to Essex.
178 Mr. Teich noted that he would forward the service arrangements to board members.

179 b. **Stormwater Award for Chelsea Mandigo from Green Mountain Water Environment**
180 **Association**

181 Ms. Cooper and Ms. Haney expressed congratulations to Ms. Mandigo for her award.

182 c. **Recreation Award for Adriane Martin**

183 Ms. Cooper and Ms. Haney expressed congratulations to Ms. Martin for her award.

184 d. Brownell Library Staff and Director’s Report March 2019

185 e. “Garbage disposals vs. composting”, Burlington Free Press

186 f. Memo from Rob Paluba and Greg Duggan re: website updates
187

188 **8. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

189 There was no executive session.
190

191 **9. ADJOURN**
192

193 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and AMBER THIBEAULT seconded, that the Trustees**
194 **adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 4-0, at 8:58 PM.**
195

196 **MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, that the Selectboard adjourn**
197 **the meeting. The motion passed 4-0, at 8:58 PM.**
198

199 Respectfully Submitted,
200 Cathy Ainsworth
201 Recording Secretary