The Selectboard and Trustees meet together to discuss and act on joint business. Each board votes separately on action items.

1. **CALL TO ORDER**  
   [7:15 PM]

2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

3. **APPROVE AGENDA**

4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
   a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
   a. Presentation of quantitative survey results on potential governance change
   b. Discussion of how to proceed with potential governance change and merger proposal

6. **CONSENT ITEMS**
   b. Approve minutes: September 24, 2019 – Joint Meeting (Trustees only)

7. **READING FILE**
   a. Board Member Comments
   b. Fiscal Year 2019 Report from Chittenden Solid Waste District

8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
   a. An executive session is not anticipated

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

Certification: 10/25/2019  
[Signature]
SELECTBOARD: Elaine Haney, Chair (via phone); Max Levy, Vice Chair, Patrick Murray; Annie Cooper; Andy Watts.

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

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Jeff Benjamin; Kim Chase; Diane Clemens; Jacob Dawson, Vermont Digger; Erin Fagnant, KSV; Matthew Heller, Linda McKenna; Mike Plageman; Sara Serabian; John Sheppard, Ken Signorello; Margaret Smith; Luke Tornadi; Dave Treston, KSV; Irene Wrenner.

1. CALL TO ORDER/ PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG
Andrew Brown called the Trustees back to order from their recess, and Max Levy, acting as chair, called the Town of Essex Selectboard to order at 7:19 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
      Irene Wrenner passed out a memo questioning the FAQs that the Governance Subcommittee would be discussing the following night. She said Essex and Essex Junction are nested communities, with Essex Junction residents holding dual citizenship, and not two separate entities sharing services. She noted that the FAQs state that the cost of merger will go up each year, but she said data from the 2006 merger proposal shows that the costs quoted for merger were higher at that time than they are now. She requested information on how the board determined that the costs of merger will be going up each year.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS
   a. Presentation of quantitative survey results on potential governance change
      Dave Treston, Senior Account Planner with contracted firm KSV, noted that KSV was invited to conduct research as an independent third party to learn how residents felt about a possible merger of the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction. This process began in June, with a high-level survey with open-ended questions. Later in the summer, KSV conducted six focus groups, two with only residents of the Village, two with only residents from the Town outside of the Village, and two with both. In September, KSV conducted a second, more qualitative, survey.

      At the end of the process, KSV produced an 87-page report intended to be a “pulse check” for the boards to see what residents think on the topic, and to provide context as the next phase of this project is developed.
The second survey received 844 responses, with roughly half of the respondents stating that they lived in the Village, and half stating that they lived in the Town outside of the Village. Respondents were broken up by voting district (8-1, 8-2, 8-3). The majority of respondents stated they have lived in the community for more than ten years.

The first section of the survey asked how respondents would vote if there was a vote on the merger tomorrow. In total, 48.46% of respondents said they are generally in favor of a merger, 33.41% said they are generally opposed, and 18.16% said they are undecided. There is more support for merger in the 8-1 district, which encompasses the Village, than in the 8-2 or 8-3 districts, which encompass the Town outside of the Village. Mr. Treston noted that those who have lived in the community for more than ten years tend to be less in favor of merger.

Mr. Treston reviewed some of the reasons that respondents indicated that they were in favor of merger, including the thoughts that Merger would lead to a stronger, more unified community; would improve municipal services; would lead to tax equalization; and that it is time for the merger to happen once and for all.

- Mr. Treston also reviewed some of the reasons that respondents indicated that they are opposed to merger, including concern about increasing taxes, especially in the Town outside of the Village; the belief that there are more negative consequences from a merger than positive ones; concerns about inequitable representation; and the belief that the issue has already been decided by the 2006 vote.

Mr. Treston noted that residents of the Village especially expressed concern for how consolidation has occurred to date, believing that too much has occurred without a vote. He said some residents, especially those in the Village, believe that merger is attempting to fix something that is not broken.

Mr. Treston went on to state that he saw commentary throughout the process about the communication regarding the merger feeling like a pro-merger ad campaign. Respondents felt like they did not have enough details on the pros and cons of a merger. Mr. Treston said it is important to present accurate and comprehensive information to residents for them to make an informed decision on the issue. He encouraged the boards not to downplay concerns of residents, and to ensure that resident input is heard throughout the process.

Mr. Treston noted that the largest percentage of undecided voters were in the 8-3 district. Some of these respondents noted that they generally feel like merger is a good idea, but need more information on the drawbacks and benefits.

Mr. Treston described representation as a major concern, with the composition of the governing body as the heart of the issue. The second survey asked respondents to rank three proposals: a board with all members elected at large, members from wards, or a combination of the two. Mr. Treston reiterated that this was not a vote, just a method of obtaining a general idea of where residents lean.
Respondents who favored at-large representation stated that they believe it would remove perceived Town/Village divides, lead to more fair representation, and because they felt elected leaders would do a better job if they are serving the entire community. Respondents who did not favor at-large representation cited concerns about equal representation, a more favorable opinion of ward style representation, and concerns that issues facing specific areas of Essex would be minimized.

Respondents who favored district/ward representation believed that it would allow for fairer representation and more diverse representation. Those who did not favor district/ward representation cited concerns that representatives would only serve their own district and that it would increase divisiveness.

Mr. Treston discussed the idea of offering a combination between the two. Some respondents expressed concern that this seemed overly complicated for a community our size and raised concerns about the comparative power of the at-large representative compared to the ward representatives. Mr. Treston stated that respondents were asked to rank the options. He noted that some respondents did not choose to rank the options at all, because they stated that they did not like any of them. He noted that this was just a survey, not a formal poll. The survey is intended to get residents’ feelings on the topic. Respondents expressed a desire to see the fully fleshed out details of the plan before they made any final determinations.

Mr. Treston detailed the areas of consensus that he saw in the survey data. 60% of respondents stated that they did not want a mayor for the community. 74% stated that the municipal budget should be voted on by Australian ballot, rather than by a voice vote at Town or Village meeting.

Mr. Treston stressed the importance of communication to the Boards. Residents expressed a desire to see more information on the pros and cons of each governance option. Respondents favored e-mail, mail, and Front Porch as their desired communication methods.

In summary, residents remain divided on the issue. As more decisions are made, it is important to continue to check the pulse of the community. More information needs to be prepared in order for those that are undecided to decide. Communicate early in the process, objectively, and out in the open.

Mr. Brown stated that it has come to the attention of the Boards that a member of the community has taken an unethical step in encouraging members of the community to take the survey more than once, and disseminating information on how to do so. He decried this effort, and stated that genuine public participation in this effort is crucial. He asked Mr. Treston if the results of the survey could be trusted in spite of this.

Mr. Treston stated that quality checks are done on all surveys. While names nor e-mail addresses are collected, IP addresses are logged. If numerous responses came from the same IP address, KSV looks at the raw data to see if there was differentiation among the results, as it is possible that these results came from a public or workplace computer. He noted that there were only two cases of multiple surveys coming from the same IP address where the results
were very similar. He noted that these results were not removed, and were not enough to skew the results of the survey one way or another.

Mr. Brown asked if the community could trust the results. Mr. Treston stated that they could.

Mr. Tyler noted that those who have lived in the community for more than ten years are more opposed to merger than those who have lived in the community for less time. He asked Mr. Treston if he believed that younger people are more in favor of merger than older residents. Mr. Treston stated that there was not a correlation between age and opinions on the topic.

Mr. Watts expressed serious concerns with Mr. Brown’s statements on the individual who encouraged others to take the survey multiple times. He stated that he was so upset that he was shaking and almost walked out, and that Mr. Brown could have expressed his concerns in a less accusatory manner, and without suggesting that unethical behavior occurred. Mr. Brown stated that it was not his intent to offend Mr. Watts, but that he wanted to ensure that the data from the survey could be trusted by the community.

Ms. Cooper stated that she had not heard of this situation until Mr. Brown brought it up. She said that she is hopeful that the community would not take a survey more than once. She said that both Boards have been working as a team quite well, and noted that they will need to continue to communicate throughout the process.

Mr. Tyler noted that the survey and focus groups were information gathering exercises, not a formal decision. The results of this survey will not determine the future tax rates nor the results of a merger vote.

Ms. Cooper said that this is a launching point for the Board in regards to communicating with the public. She stated that she would like to hear what residents think about this and other issues, and encouraged anyone to contact her at acooper@essex.org with concerns.

Mr. Murray asked Mr. Treston to comment on the sample size and the statistical significance of the survey. Mr. Treston stated that 800 responses would give an accurate representation of the voting age community as a whole.

Mr. Watts stated that he would like to refute Mr. Murray’s comment. This survey did not have a random sample, it was self-selected. As a result, it cannot be seen as statistically significant. Mr. Chawla stated that the sample size was good, but the term statistical should not be used. Mr. Murray stated that he takes back his point on statistical significance, but wanted to say that he felt that the numbers were encouraging.

The Boards opened up the floor to public comments:

John Sheppard: Mr. Sheppard stated a desire to learn more about how the respondents were divided between the three districts. He said that he noticed that taxes will increase for the Town outside of the Village with a merger, however most residents do not think that the quality of services will be affected. He noted that residents of the Town outside of the Village were
concerned that planning would be negatively affected by merger. He stated that anything that did not consider these things was just a distraction. Mr. Sheppard also described a desire for the separate and share model to be considered by the boards.

Irene Wrenner: Ms. Wrenner asked to confirm that the Boards have concluded that this was not a statistically significant survey. Mr. Levy stated that was correct. Ms. Wrenner stated that this survey only obtained a 4% response rate from the population, and that they would have gotten significantly more responses if residents were excited about the merger. She asked if there were controls present to ensure that respondents were above the age of eighteen and residents of Essex. Mr. Levy stated that none were present, and that respondents were taken at their word. Ms. Wrenner stated that trust has been difficult to earn and see in local government, and that it cannot be counted on. She stated that she heard the Boards state that they will not be building policy based on the survey results, and hopes never to hear Board members cite the results of this survey when they make statements on why certain actions were taken.

Ken Sigronello: Mr. Sigronello reiterated that this was not a scientific survey. Inferences can only be made to the sample, not the population as a whole. There should be a disclaimer stating the results apply to the sample only, not the community as a whole.

b. Discussion of how to proceed with potential governance change and merger proposal

Mr. Levy opened discussion up to the Boards with how to proceed with the results of the survey. Mr. Kerin wanted to state that he has heard a lot of residents taking information from letters to the editor in the Essex Reporter as fact. He encouraged anyone with questions to go to Town and Village staff for answers, as they are unbiased parties. He noted that Finance Director Sarah Macy researched separation, and noted that doing such would result in a higher tax rate for the Town outside of the Village, and an even lower tax rate for the Village.

Mr. Tyler noted that the Joint Governance Subcommittee meets tomorrow night, and hopes to try to form a plan with a general timeline to bring back to the Boards. He noted that many respondents said that they were unsure how they felt due to a lack of information.

Mr. Levy asked if the Boards would allow the Joint Governance Subcommittee to come up with an outline of a merger plan. This plan would be brought back to the Boards and the general public for their input.

In regards to discussions on sample size, Ms. Haney noted that she cannot remember a time when the Boards have received so much public input on a single topic. She stated that she will continue to refer to survey results as a metric for decision making. Ms. Haney stated that she has been getting questions about what will happen if the merger is voted down, and said that it is imperative for the Boards to come up with a Plan B. Mr. Chawla stated his agreement with this.

6. CONSENT ITEMS


b. Approval of minutes: September 24, 2019 (Trustees only)
GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, that the Trustees approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 5-0.

ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, that the Selectboard approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 5-0.

7. **READING FILE**
   a. Board Member Comments
   b. Fiscal Year 2019 Report from Chittenden Solid Waste District

8. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
   There was no executive session.

9. **ADJOURN**
   GEORGE TYLER made a motion, and DAN KERIN seconded, that the Trustees adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0, at 9:19 PM.

   PATRICK MURRAY made a motion, seconded by ANNIE COOPER, that the Selectboard adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0, at 9:19 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Darby Mayville
Recording Secretary