



VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA

2 Lincoln Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Tuesday, October 29, 2019
7:15 PM (or immediately following
Village Trustees Meeting)

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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**
 - a. Approve 2019-2020 Winter Operations Plan—Dennis Lutz
 - 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

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**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
JOINT MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, OCTOBER 29, 2019**

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.

54 The second survey received 844 responses, with roughly half of the respondents stating that
55 they lived in the Village, and half stating that they lived in the Town outside of the Village.
56 Respondents were broken up by voting district (8-1, 8-2, 8-3). The majority of respondents
57 stated they have lived in the community for more than ten years.

58
59 The first section of the survey asked how respondents would vote if there was a vote on the
60 merger tomorrow. In total, 48.46% of respondents said they are generally in favor of a merger,
61 33.41% said they are generally opposed, and 18.16% said they are undecided. There is more
62 support for merger in the 8-1 district, which encompasses the Village, than in the 8-2 or 8-3
63 districts, which encompass the Town outside of the Village. Mr. Treston noted that those who
64 have lived in the community for more than ten years tend to be less in favor of merger.

65
66 Mr Treston reviewed some of the reasons that respondents indicated that they were in favor of
67 merger, including the thoughts that Merger would lead to a stronger, more unified community;
68 would improve municipal services; would lead to tax equalization; and that it is time for the
69 merger to happen once and for all.

70
71
72 • Mr. Treston also reviewed some of the reasons that respondents indicated that they are
73 opposed to merger, including concern about increasing taxes, especially in the Town
74 outside of the Village; the belief that there are more negative consequences from a
75 merger than positive ones; concerns about inequitable representation; and the belief that
76 the issue has already been decided by the 2006 vote.

77
78 Mr. Treston noted that residents of the Village especially expressed concern for how
79 consolidation has occurred to date, believing that too much has occurred without a vote. He
80 said some residents, especially those in the Village, believe that merger is attempting to fix
81 something that is not broken.

82
83 Mr. Treston went on to state that he saw commentary throughout the process about the
84 communication regarding the merger feeling like a pro-merger ad campaign. Respondents felt
85 like they did not have enough details on the pros and cons of a merger. Mr. Treston said it is
86 important to present accurate and comprehensive information to residents for them to make an
87 informed decision on the issue. He encouraged the boards not to downplay concerns of
88 residents, and to ensure that resident input is heard throughout the process.

89
90 Mr. Treston noted that the largest percentage of undecided voters were in the 8-3 district. Some
91 of these respondents noted that they generally feel like merger is a good idea, but need more
92 information on the drawbacks and benefits.

93
94 Mr. Treston described representation as a major concern, with the composition of the governing
95 body as the heart of the issue. The second survey asked respondents to rank three proposals:
96 a board with all members elected at large, members from wards, or a combination of the two.
97 Mr. Treston reiterated that this was not a vote, just a method of obtaining a general idea of
98 where residents lean.

99

100 Respondents who favored at-large representation stated that believe it would remove perceived
101 Town/Village divides, lead to more fair representation, and because they felt elected leaders
102 would do a better job if they are serving the entire community. Respondents who did not favor
103 at-large representation cited concerns about equal representation, a more favorable opinion of
104 ward style representation, and concerns that issues facing specific areas of Essex would be
105 minimized.

106
107 Respondents who favored district/ward representation believed that it would allow for fairer
108 representation and more diverse representation. Those who did not favor district/ward
109 representation cited concerns that representatives would only serve their own district and that
110 it would increase divisiveness.

111
112
113 Mr. Treston discussed the idea of offering a combination between the two. Some respondents
114 expressed concern that this seemed overly complicated for a community our size and raised
115 concerns about the comparative power of the at-large representative compared to the ward
116 representatives. Mr. Treston stated that respondents were asked to rank the options. He noted
117 that some respondents did not choose to rank the options at all, because they stated that they
118 did not like any of them. He noted that this was just a survey, not a formal poll. The survey is
119 intended to get residents' feelings on the topic. Respondents expressed a desire to see the
120 fully fleshed out details of the plan before they made any final determinations.

121
122 Mr. Treston detailed the areas of consensus that he saw in the survey data. 60% of respondents
123 stated that they did not want a mayor for the community. 74% stated that the municipal budget
124 should be voted on by Australian ballot, rather than by a voice vote at Town or Village meeting.

125
126 Mr. Treston stressed the importance of communication to the Boards. Residents expressed a
127 desire to see more information on the pros and cons of each governance option. Respondents
128 favored e-mail, mail, and Front Porch as their desired communication methods.

129
130 In summary, residents remain divided on the issue. As more decisions are made, it is important
131 to continue to check the pulse of the community. More information needs to be prepared in
132 order for those that are undecided to decide. Communicate early in the process, objectively,
133 and out in the open.

134
135 Mr. Brown stated that it has come to the attention of the Boards that a member of the community
136 has taken an unethical step in encouraging members of the community to take the survey more
137 than once, and disseminating information on how to do so. He decried this effort, and stated
138 that genuine public participation in this effort is crucial. He asked Mr. Treston if the results of
139 the survey could be trusted in spite of this.

140
141 Mr. Treston stated that quality checks are done on all surveys. While names nor e-mail
142 addresses are collected, IP addresses are logged. If numerous responses came from the same
143 IP address, KSV looks at the raw data to see if there was differentiation among the results, as
144 it is possible that these results came from a public or workplace computer. He noted that there
145 were only two cases of multiple surveys coming from the same IP address where the results

146 were very similar. He noted that these results were not removed, and were not enough to skew
147 the results of the survey one way or another.

148

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

150

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

155

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

162

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

167

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

171

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

175

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

179

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

185

186 The Boards opened up the floor to public comments:

187

188 John Sheppard: Mr. Sheppard stated a desire to learn more about how the respondents were
189 divided between the three districts. He said that he noticed that taxes will increase for the Town
190 outside of the Village with a merger, however most residents do not think that the quality of
191 services will be affected. He noted that residents of the Town outside of the Village were

192 concerned that planning would be negatively affected by merger. He stated that anything that
193 did not consider these things was just a distraction. Mr. Sheppard also described a desire for
194 the separate and share model to be considered by the boards.
195

196 Irene Wrenner: Ms. Wrenner asked to confirm that the Boards have concluded that this was not
197 a statistically significant survey. Mr. Levy stated that was correct. Ms. Wrenner stated that this
198 survey only obtained a 4% response rate from the population, and that they would have gotten
199 significantly more responses if residents were excited about the merger. She asked if there
200 were controls present to ensure that respondents were above the age of eighteen and residents
201 of Essex. Mr. Levy stated that none were present, and that respondents were taken at their
202 word. Ms. Wrenner stated that trust has been difficult to earn and see in local government, and
203 that it cannot be counted on. She stated that she heard the Boards state that they will not be
204 building policy based on the survey results, and hopes never to hear Board members cite the
205 results of this survey when they make statements on why certain actions were taken.
206

207 Ken Sigronello: Mr. Sigronello reiterated that this was not a scientific survey. Inferences can
208 only be made to the sample, not the population as a whole. There should be a disclaimer stating
209 the results apply to the sample only, not the community as a whole.
210

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

212
213 Mr. Levy opened discussion up to the Boards with how to proceed with the results of the survey.
214

215 Mr. Kerin wanted to state that he has heard a lot of residents taking information from letters to
216 the editor in the Essex Reporter as fact. He encouraged anyone with questions to go to Town
217 and Village staff for answers, as they are unbiased parties. He noted that Finance Director
218 Sarah Macy researched separation, and noted that doing such would result in a higher tax rate
219 for the Town outside of the Village, and an even lower tax rate for the Village.
220

221 Mr. Tyler noted that the Joint Governance Subcommittee meets tomorrow night, and hopes to
222 try to form a plan with a general timeline to bring back to the Boards. He noted that many
223 respondents said that they were unsure how they felt due to a lack of information.
224

225 Mr. Levy asked if the Boards would allow the Joint Governance Subcommittee to come up with
226 an outline of a merger plan. This plan would be brought back to the Boards and the general
227 public for their input.
228

229 In regards to discussions on sample size, Ms. Haney noted that she cannot remember a time
230 when the Boards have received so much public input on a single topic. She stated that she will
231 continue to refer to survey results as a metric for decision making. Ms. Haney stated that she
232 has been getting questions about what will happen if the merger is voted down, and said that it
233 is imperative for the Boards to come up with a Plan B. Mr. Chawla stated his agreement with
234 this.
235

236 **6. CONSENT ITEMS**

- 237 a. Approve 2019-2020 Winter Operations Plan
- 238 b. Approval of minutes: September 24, 2019 (Trustees only)
- 239

240 **GEORGE TYLER** made a motion, seconded by **DAN KERIN**, that the Trustees approve the
241 consent agenda. The motion passed 5-0.

242
243 **ANDY WATTS** made a motion, seconded by **PATRICK MURRAY**, that the Selectboard
244 approve the consent agenda. The motion passed 5-0.

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246 **7. READING FILE**

- 247 a. Board Member Comments
248 b. Fiscal Year 2019 Report from Chittenden Solid Waste District

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250 **8. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

251 There was no executive session.

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253 **9. ADJOURN**

254
255 **GEORGE TYLER** made a motion, and **DAN KERIN** seconded, that the Trustees adjourn the
256 meeting. The motion passed 5-0, at 9:19 PM.

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

260
261 Respectfully Submitted,
262 Darby Mayville
263 Recording Secretary

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