COVID-19 UPDATE: Due to the Covid-19/coronavirus pandemic, the meeting will be held at the Town of Essex Offices, 81 Main St., Essex Jct. This meeting will be held remotely. **In-person attendance should be used as a last resort. The public is encouraged to join the meeting using the conference call in information.** The meeting is to be live-streamed on Channel 17’s YouTube channel, as is always the case. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

- Join via conference call (audio only): (802) 377-3784 | Conference ID: 930 802 7#
- For the purpose of recording minutes, you will be asked to provide your first and last name.
- When listening to the meeting, please keep your phone on “mute” as to prevent interruptions during the meeting. For agenda items when it is appropriate for the public to speak, please unmute your phone and introduce yourself before requesting the floor from the Board President/Selectboard Chair.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [7:00 PM]
2. **STATEMENT ABOUT COVID-19 AND PUBLIC MEETINGS**
3. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
4. **APPROVE AGENDA**
5. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
   a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda
6. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
   a. Discuss recommendations from Governance Subcommittee memo and draft transition provisions
   b. Discuss Q&A for water/sewer district recommendations and public works infrastructure
   c. Discuss future meeting schedule of Governance Subcommittee
   d. Discuss Strategic Advance and potential new date
   e. COVID-19 Update and discussion of community and local business impacts
7. **CONSENT ITEMS**
   a. Approve minutes: February 3, 2020 – (Trustees only; Selectboard approved 2/18)
8. **READING FILE**
   a. Board Member Comments
9. **EXECUTIVE SESSION**
   a. An executive session is not anticipated
10. **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.
SELECTBOARD: Elaine Haney, Chair; Annie Cooper; Max Levy; Andrew Watts; Patrick Murray.

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Sarah Macy, Finance Director/Assistant Manager; Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director; Rick Jones, Public Works Superintendent; Jim Jutras, Water Quality Superintendent.

OTHERS PRESENT: Ken Signorello.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Andrew Brown called the Village of Essex Junction Trustees back to order from recess, and Elaine Haney called the Essex Selectboard to order, to enter into the Special Joint Meeting of the Village of Essex Junction Trustees and the Town of Essex Selectboard at 7:09 PM.

2. STATEMENT ABOUT COVID-19 AND PUBLIC MEETINGS

Ms. Haney made a statement explaining how the meeting would proceed, with changes instituted to adhere to COVID-19/coronavirus social distancing mandates. She said, even though the meeting location was in the Town of Essex Offices, 81 Main St., Essex Jct., board members would participate remotely via Microsoft Teams. She invited the public to participate remotely using conference call-in information.

3. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Ms. Haney proposed to change the agenda by addressing item 6e as the first business item.

4. AGENDA APPROVAL

MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, that the Selectboard approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

DAN KERIN made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, that the Trustees approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 5-0.

5. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from Public on Items Not on Agenda

There were no comments from the public at this time.

6. BUSINESS ITEMS

e. COVID 19 Update and discussion of community and local business impact

Mr. Teich provided an update on department planning for COVID-19. This included strategies to keep staff separated from each other when working in the same departments or buildings. He also said only essential personnel are on-site and the business offices are closed to the public, except by appointment for business that cannot be conducted remotely; most business office employees are working from home. Since Mr. Teich’s closures and cancellations update at the last Selectboard meeting on March 16, the community’s Senior Van has also been suspended. The Selectboard members encouraged Mr. Teich to consider Town Clerk tasks,
such as title searches, as non-essential. Mr. Teich clarified that dog licenses registered after
the April 1 deadline will not have penalties. He encouraged the public to process dog licenses
by mail. Ms. Haney noted that the State House is considering legislation to allow public
meetings to be held completely online.

Mr. Teich said he would like Town and Village staff to host a community support event to help
in some way during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Levy suggested he consider a blood drive,
as the Red Cross is in serious need. The board members praised municipal staff for excellent
communications, flexibility and adaptability.

a. Discuss recommendations from Governance Subcommittee memo and draft transition
provisions
Mr. Tyler asked the Trustees and the Selectboard members to decide what to do with the
Governance Subcommittee’s recommendations for the following provisions of a Town and
Village merger plan: Representation, Tax Rate Integration and Transition. Ms. Cooper
encouraged them to also consider that living through the current pandemic may influence the
governance discussion moving forward.

The board members discussed what representation model should be included in the charter.
The majority of the Selectboard members and Trustees said that the 3-3 model recently
passed by voters should be included, instead of the Governance Committee’s suggested 2-2-3
model. They discussed some of the challenges inherent with the 3-3 model and their
concerns about tie votes. They agreed that changing a recently passed governance structure
could be confusing for voters. The board members said that submitting a governance
structure for legislature consideration that is similar to the one recently passed by voters, may
make the process smoother. Mr. Watts suggested the representation section not be included
in the merger charter, instead letting the 3-3 model passed by voters remain in place if
passed by the state legislature. Mr. Brown said if a municipal charter does not specify the
make-up of the legislative body, the State of Vermont requires that it default to a three-
member Selectboard. Mr. Tyler stressed, and Ms. Haney strongly agreed, that the new
charter should require the new board to establish a commission to research whether to
implement and move forward with a ward structure in Essex. They discussed whether this
commission’s recommendations should be ready in two or five years.

The board members discussed the Tax Rate Integration models suggested by the
Governance Subcommittee. The majority of the board members agreed with the concept of
implementing tax integration models. Most were in favor of a sidewalk district for the Village
but discussed whether the district could be expanded in future years. Most were also in favor
of the Debt Assessment District and Mr. Levy suggested it be connected to actual dates of
when debt is paid off. Board members expressed concerns with the idea of keeping a tax just
on businesses in a downtown district, but Ms. Haney suggested they consider a penny on the
tax rate kept for businesses as well as residents. Mr. Watts said the Capital Investment
District should be a shorter timeline based on the Village’s five-year capital plan. While Mr.
Brown and Mr. Chawla agreed with the models, they acknowledged their struggle to make a
decision without having actual numbers included. Ms. Cooper stressed that without seeing a
picture of costs associated with a complete separation of the Village from and the Town
outside the Village, she was not comfortable supporting any of the proposed Tax Rate
Integration plans. She said voters would not have enough information to make an informed
decision without this visual. Staff talked about the challenge of having to make a large number
of assumptions in order to present separation costs. Mr. Watts said he has received many
comments from residents in the Town outside the Village that the Village should “give
something up” to decrease the tax burden of merger. The board members discussed the that
there are misunderstandings and unsubstantiated perceptions about the Town and Village tax
structures; for instance, childcare offered by Essex Junction Recreation and Parks is paid for
entirely by users, not taxpayers. Ms. Macy said she would create new excel workbooks to
illustrate the topics discussed. Mr. Kerin suggested a visual be created that illustrates what is
paid for together and separately between the Village and the Town outside the Village.

The board members suggested the following regarding the proposed transition provisions for
a merged charter:

- Section 105a: provide flexibility to allow for occasional slow times when meetings may not
take place, like in some summer months.
- Section 114: confirm with legal counsel, and make explicit, who needs to vote for what in
order to dissolve the Town and Village charters and approve a new one.
- Section 109e: Ms. Haney clarified with Mr. Teich that separate labor unions for the current
municipalities cannot be dissolved with a charter change, but the employees would be
able to choose one or the other.

b. Discuss Q&A for water/sewer district recommendations and public works
infrastructure
Mr. Jones, Mr. Lutz and Mr. Jutras talked about the draft Q&A document about how water and
sewer districts would be handled in a merged community. Pointing to the Infrastructure
Comparison Document, Ms. Haney requested that the last line of the Sewer Utility and the
Water Utility sections be revised to say that residents not using municipal sewer and water
have their own costs for septic systems and wells. The board members also discussed
whether the document should note that connection costs to the municipal systems are the
responsibility of the property owners. Mr. Brown suggested the Q&A have an explicit sentence
about how the sewer system may expand in the future. Mr. Lutz said the sewer area
expansion process is very complicated and hard to explain briefly, but that he would try to
craft a sentence. Mr. Watts suggested the document include more about rates and why the
Village and Town outside the Village have different rates. Mr. Teich said the cost differences
are due largely to salaries so having to make assumptions about how departments would be
structured after a merger is challenge.

Mr. Signorello said that he pays for septic and water hookups to his septic system and his
well.

c. Discuss future meeting schedule of Governance Subcommittee
The Trustees and Selectboard members acknowledged the extensive research and hard work
of the Governance Subcommittee. They noted that the basic framework for a merger is almost
complete. They discussed whether or not to disband the subcommittee. The board members
decided to allow the subcommittee to remain intact for possible questions, but they will not
assign new tasks at this time. Mr. Tyler and Mr. Watts agreed to work with staff to finalize
details of the merger plan.

d. Discuss Strategic Advance and potential new date
Mr. Teich explained that the date planned for this year’s Strategic Advance should be
rescheduled to avoid any COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings. He said he would send out a
doodle to settle on a new date sometime between late May and June. He briefly reviewed the
proposed agenda for the day, which will set goals for the upcoming year, and suggested the
board members send him suggestions.

7. CONSENT AGENDA

a. Approve minutes February 3, 2020 – (Trustees only; Selectboard approved 2/18)

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

8. READING FILE

a. Board Member Comments
- Mr. Tyler suggested that an upcoming meeting should include an agenda item of planning an
  exit poll for the merger vote so the reasons behind the vote results are clear.
- Mr. Levy expressed interest in the Strategic Advance agenda item 5 about creating a
  nonbinding resolution to continue the merger vote effort. He also suggested the boards
  choose a date at which point they need to decide whether to put a merger vote on the
  November 2020 ballot.
- This was Mr. Levy’s last municipal meeting as a Selectboard member. He thanked everyone
  for the support, camaraderie, and friendship he experienced. He said this was a great
  opportunity to do great work together with the staff and leaders of Essex.

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION

a. An executive session is not anticipated
An executive session did not take place.

10. ADJOURN

MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, for the Selectboard to
adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:14 PM.

DAN KERIN made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, for the Trustees to adjourn the
meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:14 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cathy Ainsworth
Recording Secretary