

**SELECTBOARD & TRUSTEES
(DRAFT)**

**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
DRAFT JOINT MEETING MINUTES
Monday, September 28, 2020**

SELECTBOARD: Elaine Haney, Chair; Dawn Hill-Fleury; Vince Franco; Patrick Murray; Andy Watts.

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

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Jill Evans, Essex Community Justice Center Director; Sarah Macy, Assistant Manager/Finance Director; Travis Sabataso, Human Resources Director; Harlan Smith, Grounds & Facilities Director.

OTHERS PRESENT: Wayne Churchill; Diane Clemens; Kevin Collins; Annie Cooper; Renee Dall; Patty Davis; Tracey Delphia; dickins1; Betsy Dunn; Angela Elderton; Richard Hamlin; Rep. Lori Houghton; Adam Kavanaugh; RSM; Tim Miller; Diane Percy; Roseanne Prestipino; Gabrielle Smith; Margaret Smith; Ken Signorello; Sara Stultz; Mike Sullivan; Linda Waite-Simpson; Liz Subin; Irene Wrenner; Lorraine Zaloom; Bridget___; Charlotte _____.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Elaine Haney called the Town of Essex Selectboard to order for the joint meeting with the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees at 6:33 PM.

Andrew Brown called the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees to order for the joint meeting with the Essex Selectboard at 6:33 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Mr. Duggan requested an addition and a change to the agenda:

5h *Discussion of Personnel (Selectboard only)

8a *An executive session is anticipated to discuss the employment of a public employee

3. APPROVE AGENDA

PATRICK MURRAY made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard accept the agenda. The motion passed 4-0 (Vince Franco not yet in attendance*).

RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, that the Trustees approve the Agenda as amended. The motion passed 4-0 (Andrew Brown not yet in attendance*).

*Multiple attendees noted technical difficulties during this meeting

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Rep. Houghton made a request for the Trustees to check on what may be happening with the Railroad Ave. building that used to house "Up in Smoke".

Mr. Signorello noted that the chat feature on his Microsoft Teams account was not visible.

Ms. Dunn requested that abatement penalties not be included as part of the municipal fiscal year (FY) 2022 budget when it is being drafted.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. **Presentation and discussion of Village/Town current budgetary funding analysis and estimated separation numbers**

54 Mr. Tyler introduced Ms. Macy to present a budgetary funding analysis and estimated numbers of
55 a separation of the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction, which she created in response
56 to resident requests for more information about how much money is spent currently, on what
57 items, and how this might look if the municipalities separated. Ms. Macy provided an overview of
58 the analysis, including assumptions and variables behind the numbers in the separation section.
59 She explained that the taxes paid in Essex are non-exchange transactions, which may lead some
60 people to see inequities from paying for services they may not use. She also explained how
61 Village taxpayers currently pay more to have equal access to similar services. She talked about
62 the dynamics and mechanisms in the FY21 budgets and her adaptations to reconcile them for
63 the sake of comparison and analysis. She said she also removed grants and user-fees to
64 compare only taxpayer funds. She pointed out Table 5b in her analysis, which shows who pays
65 for what in Essex after these adjustments were made. Ms. Macy walked through how to read the
66 documents she provided for each department, which show tax impacts of separated functions
67 and consolidated functions. She said some departments are more complicated to explain than
68 others.
69

70 Before discussing the last section of the analysis, Ms. Macy encouraged people to think about
71 how they see their community and what they want for it; then to imagine how a separation may
72 impact that vision of Essex. She explained the separation section of the funding analysis. She
73 focused on the Police Department to demonstrate how future departmental variables, that are
74 currently unknown, could significantly change the numbers presented. Ms. Macy explained that
75 the municipal growth rates and service level variables should also be considered.
76

77 The board members all expressed gratitude to Ms. Macy for her work and presentation. Mr.
78 Murray wondered if the merger analysis seemed more consistent than separating and talked
79 about the benefits of having joint municipality efforts to leverage benefits for all. Mr. Brown
80 discussed challenges associated with projecting costs, with an example of building expenses. Mr.
81 Tyler and Mr. Kerin said they envision that the Police Department would be equally shared, even
82 if the municipalities separate. Mr. Tyler said that the municipalities evolved differently, with the
83 Village taking a conservative approach when constructing their budgets. He talked about
84 inequity, reiterating that Village residents pay, on average, \$800 more each year in taxes than
85 people outside the Village. Ms. Macy said that the grand lists for the two municipalities are
86 growing but, even though real estate costs are going up, the average assessed home value is
87 still \$280,000. She said the analysis also assumes that the current tax levy from the Town and
88 Village would stay the same. Mr. Chawla wondered if separating the community may put them in
89 competition with each other for funds and resources, and Mr. Tyler illustrated how the Town and
90 Village both benefit from joint funding applications for Stormwater. Mr. Franco said his question is
91 less about numbers and more about if they want to be a whole community.
92

93 Ms. Zaloom complimented Ms. Macy on her presentation. Ms. Zaloom asked for information
94 about who had been participating in the Racial Sensitivity trainings. Mr. Teich and Ms. Haney
95 shared information with her on this and Mr. Duggan invited people to email their questions to him.
96

97 Rep. Houghton thanked Ms. Macy for her analysis. She said she was not advocating for
98 separation or merger but thought the boards included scare tactics in their discussion. She
99 agreed with Mr. Franco that people should think about what the value of being whole is, and have
100 a vision for success, as they consider why or why not to separate.
101

102 Ms. Cooper expressed gratitude to Ms. Macy for her work. She agreed that Essex residents
103 should step back and consider what people want Essex to be. She also wondered why the
104 Selectboard did not have questions about the complex elements in the presentation.
105

106 Ms. Davis extended her thanks for the signs put up on Saxon Hill Road. She talked about a town
107 in southern Vermont experiencing COVID-19 resettlement. She wondered if a similar population
108 change will take place in Essex, and how this would affect the merger/separation discussion.
109

110 Mr. Signorello said he thinks people do not want merger or separation but want, instead, to be
111 separate and working together. He requested that the meeting which took place immediately
112 prior to this meeting be made public.
113

114 Mr. Sullivan said he wants his taxes to be fair. He thanked Ms. Macy for her hard work and
115 passion for the community. He clarified which southern town Ms. Davis referenced and said it
116 made a case for high speed internet infrastructure.
117

118 Ms. Stultz said that the people who voted down the merger in the past did not want a merger to
119 pass quickly. She said sufficient time has been given this time.
120

121 Ms. Subin said she wanted people to keep in mind that a small and privileged minority is making
122 it difficult to envision a future together.
123

124 Ms. Wrenner said that the communities and neighboring towns could work together if they
125 wanted to, if separated. She said there should be equal voices at the table from both parts of the
126 Town in merger negotiation planning. She expressed gratitude to Ms. Macy for her report and
127 said merger would revoke municipal autonomy, while separation would maintain this.
128

129 Ms. Gabrielle Smith said she wants to stop being unfairly taxed and stop subsidizing a lower tax
130 rate for the Town. She said she wants tax equity across the two parts of the community, and said
131 the numbers in Ms. Macy's analysis illustrate unfair taxation.
132

133 Ms. Dall said she is frustrated with meanness coming from residents of the Town, related to the
134 merger. She said Village residents are put down as "high spending" but the Village residents are
135 frustrated with their high taxes. She said separation is ok, but merger is good.
136

137 Mr. Churchill said it is hard to hear the meanness from the Town. He said it feels like Essex is all
138 together at this point with three possible paths forward: status quo, which he said feels like an
139 insult to the Village from the Town and would continue to allow the Village to "bleed" taxes;
140 separation, which he said would increase taxes for everyone, and seems like a terrible thing; and
141 merger, which he said seems most fair.
142

143 Ms. Delphia suggested that the community digest the numbers presented; take a step back and
144 ask hard questions; and talk to their neighbors, as they hope for the best for the community. She
145 said the numbers do not say yes or no to separation.
146

147 Ms. Haney talked about work that has gone into the merger and next steps.
148

149 **b. Discussion of draft charter for merger of Village of Essex Junction and Town of Essex**

150 Mr. Teich gave an update on where the boards were with the draft charter for merger. He said
151 the Village put a merger question on their November ballot. The Selectboard received a draft of
152 the charter from the Village Trustees with questions for discussion, and the Selectboard sent
153 their comments back to the Village. Mr. Brown confirmed that the Village Trustees approved a
154 charter for the Village's November vote, which incorporated suggestions from the Selectboard.
155 Ms. Haney said the Selectboard still had some details about the draft charter which were being
156 reviewed by the attorney hired to consult on the merger. She said the Selectboard plans to have
157 a final version of the draft charter complete by the end of October, and listening sessions
158 scheduled in November, for feedback from the community. Mr. Brown talked about the
159 differences between draft charters, including the ordinance adoption process and the governance

160 model. Mr. Tyler said the Trustees moved forward with a 3+3+1 governance structure and
161 suggested a moderator could become a seventh vote tiebreaker during annual meeting under a
162 3+3 structure. He said this may remedy the roadblock on this issue. Mr. Murray wondered about
163 the status of the Town's current voter-led charter change and Ms. Haney clarified that Rep.
164 Redmond will reintroduce it to the Vermont House's Government Operations committee in
165 January.
166

167 **c. Discussion of how to update GreaterEssex2020.org**

168 Mr. Duggan asked for direction for how to proceed with updating the GreaterEssex2020.org
169 website. The Selectboard members and Village Trustees agreed that the site should continue to
170 be updated with current information about merger. Mr. Brown said the Trustees have included
171 information on the Village website about the Village vote. Mr. Tyler clarified they used the Village
172 website because the turnaround for getting approval from both boards, to upload to the
173 GreaterEssex2020 site, was too long to keep it up-to-date. Mr. Chawla suggested a link to the
174 Village website be put on the GreaterEssex2020 site to the Village vote information.
175

176 **d. Discussion and potential action on creation and hire of new Assistant Manager**

177 Mr. Teich reviewed job responsibilities for a new Assistant Manager and said the position could
178 be funded mostly from a vacant Project Manager position. He talked about the rigorous workload
179 and high number of responsibilities within the Assistant Manager/Finance Director position,
180 including managing two municipal budgets, two audits, supervising a full Finance Department
181 and managing multiple other municipal departments, while also planning for and attending twice
182 as many municipal meetings compared to other communities. Mr. Duggan talked about some of
183 the efforts that are delayed due to the current workload. Ms. Macy described the dynamic tension
184 of having both jobs.
185

186 The boards discussed the proposed Assistant Manager position. Mr. Murray expressed support
187 of the position but wondered if it could be filled earlier than the suggested timeline. Ms. Macy
188 clarified that currently Essex Town's tax collection is better than average for this time. Mr. Watts
189 said he would prefer to not set a precedent of adding a headcount outside of the budget planning
190 process. He clarified that the intention is to hire in 2021, then add the position to the FY22
191 budget. He wondered if the position could be temporary, but staff pointed out that a temporary
192 position would make it harder to attract candidates. Mr. Brown said he thought the Village should
193 vote on the position, to acknowledge approval of it, but the vote to fund the position should be
194 with the Selectboard. Mr. Tyler said the Trustees need some jurisdiction of the position because
195 it may supervise Village staff. Mr. Tyler expressed concern that adding the position could result in
196 more bureaucracy and encouraged the Town to be fiscally conservative. Mr. Murray reminded
197 the board members that the position was developed because the boards asked staff to explain
198 how they are overloaded and what could be done.
199

200 Ms. Davis wondered if the position could be hired for just the Town outside the Village and if they
201 could wait until January to see how much the Town has grown. Mr. Chawla clarified that,
202 because the Town outside the Village is not a legal entity, a person cannot be hired for only that
203 section of the Town.
204

205 Ms. Cooper said the job description presented was clear and Mr. Teich was clear and confident
206 with the scenarios he presented at the previous Joint meeting in response to the boards' request.
207 She said she supports the proposal.
208

209 Mr. Watts suggested that the economic development objective of the job description also have a
210 related essential function. He also wondered if the position could include equity and inclusion. Mr.
211 Chawla agreed with this and Mr. Tyler asked why equity and inclusion would not be part of the

212 HR Director's position. Mr. Sabataseo clarified that his work with equity and inclusion is focused
213 on staffing, as there is only one full-time employee in HR, not broad-municipality equity and
214 inclusion initiatives.
215

216 **PATRICK MURRAY made a motion, seconded by VINCE FRANCO, that the Selectboard**
217 **approve the creation and hire of an Assistant Manager with details and responsibilities laid**
218 **out in the memo.**

219 Mr. Watts confirmed with Mr. Brown that the position creation has consensus from the Village
220 Trustees. Mr. Chawla thanked staff for the work being done and responding to their request.

221 **The motion passed 5-0.**
222

223 **GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, a similar motion as the**
224 **Selectboard, without budgetary implications. The motion passed 5-0.**
225

226 e. **Discussion of budget goals for fiscal year 2022**

227 Mr. Teich requested that the board members set priorities for the FY2022 budget, keeping in
228 mind that the Town budget saw a zero increase in FY2021 due to the impact of COVID. Mr.
229 Murray suggested prioritizing the winter plan and plowing needs of the Town outside the Village,
230 and continuing equity work. Mr. Watts suggested focus on park maintenance (possibly a canoe
231 launch); public works and highway efforts; elimination of the Town outside the Village Highway
232 Tax; the Building Space Needs study; fixing Essex Free Library to address snow and ice
233 problems; constructing a Housing Commission budget; and including a line item in the budget for
234 Equity and Inclusion. Ms. Haney also suggested eliminating the Highway Tax; addressing the
235 Public Works budget and rolling stock move to the Village; establishing transparency with the
236 Capital plan, and reallocating funds from policing to increase funding of the CJC and training. Mr.
237 Tyler said he supports Ms. Haney's suggestion to change the rolling stock process. He also
238 suggested the Town look at how the Village conducts capital planning as a model for how they
239 may want to move forward. He requested that the Town keep in mind that Village taxpayers pay
240 \$800 more each year in taxes so, as they are designing their budget, they are fiscally
241 conservative. Mr. Chawla suggested an increase in stipends for board members and to strategize
242 keeping Town outside the Village plowing off Village taxes. He also suggested considering park
243 needs. Ms. Thibeault suggested that they focus on revenue, not just expenditures, during the
244 budget process, and to align fees with rates of other towns. Mr. Brown suggested looking at the
245 Tree Farm Management Plan; implementing a local option tax; making ballot-mailing permanent;
246 ensuring volunteers are remunerated for meetings; and a review of impact fees. Ms. Wrenner
247 suggested the Highway Tax remain and be used for plowing expenses.
248

249 **Mr. Brown requested a change in the agenda, and the Selectboard members and Trustees**
250 **agreed, for the Trustees to approve the consent agenda and adjourn the meeting early,**
251 **because all items left were intended for Selectboard only.**
252

253 **DAN KERIN made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA to approve the consent agenda. The**
254 **motion passed 5-0.**
255

256 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by GEORGE TYLER, that the Trustees adjourn the**
257 **meeting. The motion passed 5-0.**
258

259 f. **Approve warning for Special Town Meeting on November 3 (Selectboard only)**

260 Mr. Duggan said the Australian ballot vote in November requires a warning of a special town
261 meeting.
262

263 **ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, to warn a special town**
264 **meeting for November 3, 2020. The motion passed 5-0.**
265

266 **g. Approve sending ballots to all active voters for November 3 election (Selectboard only)**
267

268 **ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard**
269 **approve sending ballots to all active voters for the November 2020 election. The motion**
270 **passed 5-0.**
271

272 Ms. Zaloom wondered why the ballots that were sent did not have the districts written onto them.

273 Ms. Hill-Fleury clarified that there is a bar code on each ballot to signify the district.
274

275 **h. *Discussion of Personnel (Selectboard only)**

276 This discussion took place during Executive Session, as item 8a.
277

278 **6. READING FILE**

- 279 a. Memo from Greg Duggan re: Proposed changes to Motor Vehicles, Traffic, and Parking
280 ordinances
281 b. Email from Travis Sabataso re: Unemployment rates
282 c. Email from Bob Stock re: Many thanks for great 2020 Census
283 d. Memo from Jim Jutras re: UVM Corona Virus Research update
284 e. Upcoming meeting schedule
285

286 Mr. Watts and Ms. Haney said they would be attending Vermont League of Cities and Towns
287 town Fair during the week.
288

289 Mr. Murray reminded people to complete census updates, because it will be ending soon.
290

291 **7. CONSENT ITEMS**

- 292 a. Approve minutes: August 20, 2020 (Trustees only); August 25, 2020 (Trustees only)
293 This took place just before item 5f.
294

295 **8. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 296 a. An executive session is anticipated to discuss the employment of a public employee
297

298 **ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, for the Selectboard enter into**
299 **executive session to discuss the employment of a public employee in accordance with 1**
300 **V.S.A. Section 313(a)(3) and to include the Unified Manager, Deputy Manager, Police Chief,**
301 **and Human Resources Director. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:09 PM.**
302

303 **9. ADJOURN**
304

305 **DAWN HILL-FLEURY made a motion, seconded by VINCE FRANCO for the Selectboard to exit**
306 **executive session and adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 10:26 PM.**
307

308 Respectfully Submitted,
309 Cathy Ainsworth
310 Recording Secretary
311