

VILLAGE TRUSTEES
(DRAFT)

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, October 27, 2020

TRUSTEES: George Tyler, Vice President; Raj Chawla; Dan Kerin; Amber Thibeault; (Andrew Brown, President, was absent).

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Sarah Macy, Finance Director/ Assistant Manager.

OTHERS PRESENT: Bruce Brown; Annie Cooper; Renee Dall; Erin Dickinson; Betsy Dunn; Elaine Haney; Martin Johnson; Stacy Jordon; Adam Kavanaugh; Lynda Ossola; Mary Post; Rosanne Prestipino; John Rowell; Brian Shelden; Ken Signorello; Brian Smith; Mike Sullivan; Mike Thorne; Irene Wrenner; Alan__; Dan__; Susanna__.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Tyler called the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees meeting to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

There were no changes to the agenda proposed.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

With no changes to the agenda, approval was not required.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from public on items not on the agenda

There were no comments from the public at this time.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Discussion of public outreach for merger plan and vote

Mr. Teich talked about the previous seven years of efforts with the Town of Essex Selectboard, at meetings and planning sessions, including: department consolidations; hiring a Unified Manager; establishing a Governance Subcommittee; and studying taxes to move toward a potential merger. He said, to date, several hundred Village ballots had been submitted on the merger vote. He invited the Village Trustees to discuss what kind of public outreach they would move forward with if the merger is approved by the vote in the Village this fall.

The Trustees agreed that more community education should take place to explain how differences in the two charters would be addressed. Mr. Chawla said the Trustees should put the vote into the Selectboard's hands and continue to represent Village interests. He said they should explain that the Town of Essex and Village proposed merger charters are mostly the same with only one difference. Mr. Kerin said it is important for the Trustees to support the Selectboard's vote because the charter differences are not insurmountable. Ms. Thibeault said it is important for Village residents to understand why they should vote again in the spring, as Town residents, and understand what happens if the Town vote passes.

Ms. Cooper thanked the Trustees for providing good information and said she shared it with residents who had questions. She said the website has helpful information.

6. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Public Hearing on merger plan

Mr. Tyler opened the Public hearing on the merger plan at 6:47 PM. He began by sharing a slideshow about the merger, including the 7-year history of collaboration between the Town and

54 the Village. He said this collaboration led up to hiring a Unified Manager, establishing a
55 Governance Subcommittee of Trustees and Selectboard members, as well as hiring Legal
56 Counsel to help create a unified charter. Mr. Tyler talked about key issues with merging the
57 municipalities. He discussed the makeup of the board, as written in the Village proposed
58 charter, with 3 representatives of the Village ward and 3 from the Town outside the Village
59 ward, along with one at-large representative (3+3+1). He talked about the 5-year and 12-year
60 transition plans written into the proposed charter and how taxes would be equalized over 12
61 years. He explained the role special districts would play in the tax equalization strategy,
62 including a Sidewalk District, a Capital Improvement District, and a Downtown Improvement
63 District. Mr. Tyler said other features in the charter are to move to Australian Ballot voting; to
64 name the community Essex; and to maintain the water and sewer costs as they are. He said if
65 the merger does not pass in the Village, they would get feedback from residents and determine
66 next steps.
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68 Mr. Teich said people could vote by either bringing ballots to the dropbox outside of the Town
69 Clerk’s office or to the polling place on November 3rd.
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71 Mr. Tyler invited public comments, but no comments were made at this time so the Trustees
72 discussed frequently asked questions. Mr. Chawla explained how the remaining bond debt in
73 the Village would remain to be paid down by Village residents. Mr. Tyler said this merger plan is
74 different from the merger plan from years prior due to effectiveness in consolidating services.
75 Mr. Tyler talked about the charter’s special tax districts, explaining that the Vermont House of
76 Representatives’ Government Operations Committee and the Tax Department approved these
77 concepts to gradually equalize taxes.
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79 Ms. Dunn said most mergers usually include efficiencies and cost reductions, but she did not
80 see any in this merger plan. Mr. Tyler explained that the plan was to maintain service levels at
81 this time, because 2015 administration consolidation efforts resulted in significant cost savings.
82 He said more reorganization would take place within the first 5 years in the merger plan.
83

84 Ms. Cooper said the merger plan codifies the consolidation efforts to date. She said she heard
85 from people confused about how ordinances, like Dog Ordinances or Firearms Ordinances,
86 would be handled in a merger. She said she told these residents that specific ordinances
87 pertain to specific locations in the communities so they would not change. She said there are
88 many layers to the individual ordinances so interchanging pieces of them is not possible.
89

90 Mr. Rowell wondered what would happen if the Village voted yes to the merger plan and the
91 Town voted no. Mr. Tyler said, if that were the case, this specific merger plan would not
92 proceed. He assured Mr. Rowell that the issue of tax equity for the Village taxpayers would still
93 need to be resolved. Mr. Tyler said that he thinks the idea of a separation seems traumatic and
94 politically volatile. Mr. Kerin said the status quo would not be acceptable and is inequitable. He
95 stressed that it will be important for Villagers to vote again in the spring. Ms. Cooper said that
96 the idea of “Separate and Share” is being discussed but it is another version of what is currently
97 happening. She said she believes Essex is one community.
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99 With no other comments from the public, Mr. Tyler closed the public hearing at 7:47 PM.
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101 **7. CONSENT ITEMS**
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103 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, that the Trustees approve the**
104 **Consent Agenda:**

- 105 a. Check Warrants #17221—10/16/20; #17222—10/23/20

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The motion passed 4-0.

8. READING FILE

a. Board Member Comments

- Mr. Teich invited Ms. Cooper to recap the recent Out & About event in Essex. She called it a resounding success and talked about staff and business support and engagement from residents. Mr. Sheldon complimented Ms. Cooper for her efforts on this event.

b. Howard Center Community Outreach Program - Annual Update FY20

c. Upcoming meeting schedule

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION

a. *An executive session is not anticipated

No executive session took place.

10. ADJOURN

Ms. Thibeault made a motion, seconded by Mr. Chawla, for the Trustees to adjourn but they withdrew the motion when Mr. Sullivan requested to speak. Mr. Sullivan made a comment about his current activities outside of the meeting agenda.

AMBER THIBEAULT made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, for the Trustees to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 4-0 at 7:58 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Cathy Ainsworth
Recording Secretary