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**SELECTBOARD & TRUSTEES
(DRAFT)**

January 25, 2021

**TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
DRAFT JOINT MEETING MINUTES
Monday, January 25, 2021**

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

TRUSTEES: Andy Brown; Raj Chawla; Dan Kerin; Amber Thibeault; George Tyler

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Courtney Bushey, Assistant Finance Director; Tammy Getchell, Assistant to the Manager; Sarah Macy, Assistant Manager/Finance Director; Linda Mahns, Administrative Assistant; Travis Sabatato, Human Resources Director

OTHERS PRESENT: Marcus Certa; Kevin Collins; Tracey Delphia; Erin Dickinson; Betsy Dunn; Roseanne Prestipino; Ken Signorello; Margaret Smith; Sara Stultz; Mike Sullivan; Mike Thorne; David Voegele; Irene Wrenner, Sharon Zukowski; Joanne___; Toni ___

1. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Haney called the Town of Essex Selectboard to order for the Joint meeting with the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees at 6:30 PM.

Mr. Brown called the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees to order for the Joint meeting with the Essex Selectboard at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Mr. Teich requested the addition of 6b to the Consent Agenda: Adopt Temporary COVID-19 Emergency Leave Policy with an effective date of January 1, 2021, along with an additional handout for this item: Memo and attachment from Travis Sabatato, Human Resources Director. The board members expressed interest in taking time to read the information provided by Mr. Teich. They suggested these items be placed on the agendas for the Tuesday 1/26/21 Meeting of the Trustees' and the Thursday 1/28/21 meeting of the Selectboard, instead of this meeting's agenda. Mr. Sabatato said the boards would be able to adopt the temporary policy retroactively.

Mr. Watts requested moving the meeting minutes of 1/11/21 from the consent agenda for discussion as a business item.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by AMBER THIBEAULT, that the Trustees amend the agenda as recommended by Selectboard member Andy Watts. The motion passed 5-0.

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

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Mr. Signorello challenged any public official to a mediated public debate with Ms. Wrenner.

Ms. Wrenner described a fictional scenario: if Burlington expected Essex to pay for a section of Burlington's budget, to illustrate what she said was an unfair expectation of Essex Town to pay for Village services. She said the proposed merger would put Village expenses on the Town even though the Town did not previously vote for them.

Ms. Dunn said she was disappointed that the Trustees and Selectboard have not prepared Essex for Vermont's Marijuana legislation to monetize local businesses wanting to open.

55
56 **5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

57 ~~a. Essex CHIPS annual update -- David Voegele~~

58 Mr. Voegele experienced technology challenges which delayed his attendance for Business Item
59 5a. Mr. Brown suggested the boards address Business Item 5e first, then return to the Essex
60 CHIPS update. The Trustees and Selectboard members agreed. Business Item 5a took place as
61 the third Business item on the agenda. (see below)
62

63 e. **Approve minutes: January 11, 2021 – Selectboard only**

64 On lines 201-203 of the January 11, 2021 minutes, Mr. Watts requested replacing "He also was
65 concerned with the wording of the Sidewalk District in the Charter because some plowing--like at
66 the library-- seemed to be beyond its scope." He suggested the statement, instead, read, "He
67 also was concerned with the wording of the Capital District in the Charter because some projects,
68 like paving the library parking lot, would be hard to justify as benefitting only residents of the
69 Village."
70

71 **ANDY WATTS made a motion, seconded by DAWN HILL-FLEURY, that the Selectboard**
72 **approve the meeting minutes of January 11, 2021 as amended. The motion passed 5-0.**
73

74 Because Mr. Voegele was not yet in attendance, at this point in the meeting, Mr. Brown
75 suggested they address item 5d next. The Selectboard members and Trustees agreed.
76

77 d. **Consider approval of mailing ballots for Town and Village annual meetings**

78 Mr. Teich requested the boards act on to whom to send ballots for the Town and Village annual
79 meetings. He suggested they be sent to all active voters. Mr. Brown said this was the strategy
80 used with the Village municipal meeting and school budget votes and that it worked out well. Mr.
81 Tyler agreed. Ms. Hill-Fleury said, as a Selectboard member who also serves on the Board of
82 Civil Authority, she is allowed to stuff ballots for mailing but she may not put returned ballots into
83 the machines. She agreed with the recommendation that ballots be sent to all active, registered
84 voters and said this could help limit the spread of COVID.
85

86 Ms. Delphia asked for clarification on the cost of mailing ballots. Mr. Teich said it would cost more
87 to send ballots to all registered voters versus all active, registered voters. He said the cost
88 includes mailing ballots to and from active voters which has been calculated at the new postal
89 rate.
90

91 **PATRICK MURRAY made a motion, seconded by ANDY WATTS, that the Selectboard approve**
92 **mailing ballots. The motion passed 5-0.**
93

94 **GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, that the Trustees approve**
95 **mailing ballots. The motion passed 5-0.**
96

97 a. **Essex CHIPS annual update -- David Voegele**

98 Mr. Voegele provided an overview of the activities and accomplishments of Essex CHIPS in the
99 COVID era to date. As detailed in his report, he talked about: Teen Center activities, which he
100 said are thriving despite the COVID challenges; Substance Use Prevention; Outlet; Essex Youth
101 Empowerment; Youth Mental Health First Aid Training; Quality Youth Development; Mentoring;
102 and the Teen Line. He described adaptations made to programs including: moving them online,
103 like the hula hoop competition; and bringing opportunities outside, like the scavenger hunt. He
104 said the mentoring program is now community-based instead of school-based, and they are
105 currently recruiting for more mentors. Mr. Voegele talked about the challenges of teens being
106 lonely and distressed during these times, so mentoring and the Teen Line have been important.
107 He also mentioned that Essex CHIPS implemented a new software system.

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The board members talked with Mr. Voegelé about Essex CHIPS. Ms. Thibeault suggested the board members and Essex CHIPS teenagers should hold a virtual hula hooping competition fundraiser. Mr. Voegelé said he liked the idea and would be in touch with them. He talked about the role of an AmeriCorps member working with the Essex CHIPS to help mitigate challenges related to COVID. Mr. Teich wondered if she could also help Senior Center members make appointments to get vaccinated. Mr. Voegelé said he would look into this. Ms. Haney wondered about the morale of teens. Mr. Voegelé said Essex CHIPS teen mentoring relationships are strained because youth do not want to go back online after school to meet with their mentors. He said teens are struggling but Essex CHIPS is looking at creative ways to keep them engaged. The board members thanked Mr. Voegelé for his work.

Commented [GD1]: The AmeriCorps member?

Mr. Signorello said the recent Speech and Forensics competition was a great event. He said debate is an allowed sport and Essex youth may be in nationals this year.

b. Merger Cost Update (memo from Sarah)

Ms. Macy provided an update on the cost of Merger, utilizing the Fiscal Year (FY)2022 budget, which is not yet voter approved or adopted, and the FY2021 actual Grand List. She reviewed the memo she provided for this agenda item, recapping the frameworks and assumptions she had previously used to consider tax rate implications of merger and the rate of convergence of Town and Village taxes over 12 years. She then provided an overview of annual costs to the Town outside the Village utilizing the FY2022 budget. These costs were presented in a range based on hypothetical scenarios of how much the Grand List may grow to help offset taxes. She discussed her assumptions for the high, middle, and low ranges of possible total costs and annual costs to taxpayers, along with a full worksheet of calculations to illustrate how she arrived at these costs. Ms. Macy went on to explain the tax convergence model of how the merger would arrive at “middle ground” over 12 years, between Village and Town outside the Village resident taxes, in an effort to find tax equity. By comparison, she talked about what taxes would look like if there was no merger and no change to the taxing structures over 12 years. She discussed the 12% differential on the total amount TOV taxpayers would pay when comparing the two models. She also compared these models to the implications of if TOV taxes increased all at once.

The board members discussed Ms. Macy’s presentation with her. Mr. Franco asked for clarification on the range of possible tax increases presented. Ms. Macy said that, assuming no Grand List growth, utilizing the FY2022 budget and considering the impact of collapsing the “districts” in year 13, the tax increase would be \$29 each year for TOV. Assuming all of this but changing the grand list growth by 1.25%, which is the average TOV grand list growth for the past 3 years, the increase would be \$24 for a TOV taxpayer. She talked about what extent tax levy increases to budgets would play. Mr. Chawla asked for clarification on the impact of phasing in taxes versus an all-at-once shift. Ms. Macy discussed how different time frames for the merged tax rate could impact different levels of taxation. She said the average TOV taxpayer by the end of a 12-year phase-in, would pay about \$21,000 in taxes, versus without merger: by the end of the 12 years, the average taxpayer would pay about \$19,000 in taxes. She said yet unknown increases to the Grand List would help positively impact the tax rate growth over the 12 years.

Mr. Tyler requested time to explain the special taxing districts. Ms. Haney and Mr. Brown agreed that talking about the taxing districts was relevant to the 12-year phase-in discussion. Mr. Watts disagreed with the timing discussing the tax districts. Mr. Tyler said the Tax Districts were developed as strategies for preventing significant changes in levels of services and decreasing the tax impact of merger on the TOV. He also talked about how difficult it is to predict municipal tax rates into the future due to unforeseeable circumstances. Mr. Watts said he remembers

**SELECTBOARD & TRUSTEES
(DRAFT)**

January 25, 2021

159 amending language toward the beginning of merger discussions from “maintaining levels of
160 service” to “maintaining quality of service.” He said the special districts would lock TOV
161 neighborhoods out of receiving special services that could be helpful for everyone. He illustrated
162 this with sidewalk plowing examples. He said it is also unclear what amounts would be taxed for
163 the Sidewalk Districts. He said that because the boundaries for the sidewalk district are in the
164 charter, it may be possible to create a second TOV district but the amounts to be taxed would still
165 be unclear. Mr. Teich said he would clarify with Mr. Richardson if there was a way for the
166 sidewalk district to ever be expanded. Mr. Brown discussed how the process of charter change
167 could play a role in this. Mr. Watts expressed concern with the constitutionality of special Capital
168 District taxes on projects that everyone can use. He said that he does not disagree with the 12-
169 year phase-in, but he does disagree with the tax districts. Mr. Murray clarified with Ms. Macy that
170 the entire Town could vote immediately on the entire Town budget if merger is approved. He said
171 this is how voters can approve or not approve the services detailed in the budget.
172

173 Mr. Signorello requested Ms. Macy share the extra spreadsheet information she presented that
174 was not in the packet. He asked her to highlight the row that shows the cumulative tax increase
175 over 12 years if merger passes to verify the number. He said the Village budget was not voted in
176 by the Town and he thinks if a merger passes, the first budget vote should be interesting. He
177 thanked staff for their response to resident requests for the information Ms. Macy shared.
178

179 Ms. Cooper said she was uncomfortable with the amount of public use of the chat function in the
180 Microsoft meeting platform, despite people being asked to not use it for commentary. She
181 thanked the board members for staying focused and gracious nonetheless.
182

183 Ms. Dunn commented that she had previously understood that the tax districts could not change
184 but in this meeting, board members said the districts could change through a charter change
185 process. She said she was upset by this discrepancy.
186

187 Ms. Delphia thanked Ms. Macy for presenting a matter-of-fact, clear explanation of this topic,
188 inclusive of multiple perspectives and scenarios. She commended her on her expertise.
189

190 Ms. Wrenner questioned why the board members would want to set up special Tax Districts in
191 the charter if they may need to be changed down the road. She thanked Ms. Macy for her
192 presentation and asked for the extra spreadsheets to be shared with the public. She wondered if
193 Selectboard members had a chance to voice concerns about a memo put out by the Selectboard
194 Chair. She said the memo stated that cumulative merger tax information was false, but Ms.
195 Macy’s presentation included cumulative taxes that were similar to the \$2,000 being discussed in
196 the public. Ms. Haney said it was incorrect to have stated in this memo that the cumulative cost
197 was false and apologized for the error. She described the group effort of board members to draft
198 the memo and said she still has concerns that the way the cumulative tax increase is being
199 presented in public discussion, it may be leading people to think their taxes will be going up by
200 \$2,000 as soon as the merger passes, which she stressed is not the case.
201

202 Ms. Stultz thanked Ms. Haney for putting out the memo on Front Porch Forum which, she said,
203 provides an accurate representation of the merger tax structure. She wanted to clarify that an
204 average house in the Village currently pays a municipal tax of \$2,433 per year while the same
205 valued house in the TOV pays \$1,511, an almost \$900 difference. She calculated that over the
206 years, she thinks the cumulative extra cost she has paid in taxes as a resident of the Village has
207 been over \$2,000. She hoped TOV voters would consider that the cumulative TOV cost of \$2,000
208 over the 12 years is lower than how much a Village resident would pay cumulatively without
209 merger.
210

211 Ms. Smith asked what year IBM stopped paying taxes to the Village. Mr. Brown talked about how
212 GlobalFoundries pays property taxes on the property they own, and that IBM paid taxes to the
213 Town and the Village for as long as they owned that land. Mr. Kerin discussed the role a
214 machinery and equipment tax played and how it was phased out over 12 years. Mr. Tyler
215 explained tax fluctuations of IBM over 20 years. Ms. Smith said she thought more of IBM tax
216 money had been going to the Village than the TOV and wondered if this was true. Mr. Tyler
217 explained that IBM gave a higher amount of tax money to the Village school district than the TOV
218 school district, but the municipalities received equal amounts.
219

220 Mr. Watts shared the historical Town and Village Essex tax rates inclusive of school taxes. He
221 said that Village municipal and school tax rates (combined) have only been higher than TOV tax
222 rates since 1999. Mr. Murray said that the focus on tax rates should be on current municipal tax
223 inequities. Mr. Kerin talked about the challenge of trying to determine exact amounts of taxes and
224 budgetary figures into the future, not knowing what kinds of challenges Essex may face.
225

226 **c. Discussion on public outreach for merger vote (banners, websites, mailers, Teams**
227 **informational meetings, Town Meeting TV)**

228 Mr. Teich wondered what kind of outreach the board members would like to conduct, considering
229 the limitations of COVID. Ms. Haney suggested virtual conversations with board members online
230 and requested they sign up for dates. Mr. Franco suggested conducting a Dungeons and
231 Dragons themed conversation about merger with Mr. Murray to reach new demographics. Mr.
232 Murray agreed that a gaming/chat/hangout/virtual conversation would be a creative and good
233 way to reach people. Mr. Watts wondered who would determine if documents and content about
234 the merger are not biased. He also suggested they provide clarity on the question of what
235 services Village residents are currently getting for their Town taxes because of some of the
236 outreach on merger may have confused this point. Ms. Haney said the informational packet
237 planned to be sent to the public is going to the printer. She said she remembered KSV's
238 recommendation of putting forward accurate information and she believes the documents are
239 appropriate. Mr. Tyler pointed out the short timeline for information dissemination and sending
240 ballots.
241

242 Ms. Dunn said she had an issue with bullet point three of the suggested locations for the banners
243 because they are all in the Village. She suggested Mac's Market, Hannaford, and Price Chopper
244 locations also be considered. She said that at a recent school board meeting, school board
245 members were against the idea of voting for the school budget at the same time as the municipal
246 vote. Mr. Brown said the grocery store locations are private properties. Mr. Teich wondered if
247 paper flyers could be posted at these locations.
248

249 Ms. Cooper said that because the Selectboard and Trustees came together to put together a
250 charter for merger, it is not biased to present the charter for merger. She said she is glad the
251 conversation about where to get information is happening.
252

253 Ms. Wrenner said that she did not put out misleading information. Regarding the Selectboard
254 memo about serious misinformation, she requested a corrected memo be released. She said it
255 should include corrections to bullet points one and four and a statement that the error was the
256 Selectboard's, not hers. She suggested the Town Common and outside Memorial Hall be banner
257 locations to announce the vote. She acknowledged the amount of work that went into the merger
258 and wants people to see it transparently. She wondered what was added to the booklet that will
259 be mailed. Ms. Haney said the new pages included were the front and back covers.
260

261 Mr. Signorello agreed that a banner location outside of Memorial Hall is a good idea. He clarified
262 that even though the two boards each approved a plan of merger, they were not the same plan.

**SELECTBOARD & TRUSTEES
(DRAFT)**

January 25, 2021

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Mr. Certa agreed with suggestions that some banners be put up in the TOV.

Ms. Delphia said that because many informational methods being discussed are one-way messaging, the boards should consider in-person, socially-distanced opportunities for people to ask questions. Mr. Brown said in-person opportunities were not included because of COVID restrictions. Mr. Teich said school districts and the State have discouraged in-person gatherings.

Ms. Thibeault and Mr. Chawla suggested that people who do not have internet can access board members by phone. Mr. Chawla suggested email may also be a good option.

Mr. Murray clarified, based on his experience as a school board member, that the school board hopes the school budget and municipal votes will be the same day, but it is impossible this year.

Mr. Teich clarified that the banner locations were chosen based on high traffic visibility. He asked if the board would like to add more banners for TOV locations. Ms. Haney said banners could be at Fort Ethan Allen and Susie Wilson Road as well as at the locations suggested by the public.

~~d. **Consider approval of mailing ballots for Town and Village annual meetings**~~

This item took place as the second Business Item addressed on the agenda. (see above)

~~e. **Approve minutes: January 11, 2021 – Selectboard only**~~

This item took place as the first Business Item addressed on the agenda. (see above)

6. CONSENT ITEMS

~~a. **Approve minutes: January 11, 2021 – Selectboard only**~~

This agenda item was addressed as business item 5e.

7. READING FILE

a. Board member comments

- Mr. Teich said he is looking into whether the Senior Center can be used as a vaccination location. He said they are also considering ways to help seniors register for their vaccinations online and get to these appointments.

- Mr. Franco thanked Mr. Teich and staff for the amount of work they put in.

b. Elections Bulletin - Emergency Annual Meeting Legislation and Directive

c. Email from Rep. Marybeth Redmond

d. Chittenden County RPC January Newsletter

e. Howard Center Community Outreach FY21 Q1 Report

f. Village postcard mailer

g. Memo from Sarah Macy re: COVID Related Grant Initiative Recap

- Ms. Haney pointed out that this memo is about \$400,000 in funding received by Essex. She commended staff on their work for this funding. Mr. Teich also commended staff and pointed out the library's new pavilion and features.

h. Rebuttal to Town Meeting TV program originally aired Jan. 15

i. Upcoming meeting schedule

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION

a. *An executive session is not anticipated

An executive session did not take place.

9. ADJOURN

**SELECTBOARD & TRUSTEES
(DRAFT)**

January 25, 2021

315 **GEORGE TYLER made a motion, seconded by DAN KERIN, for the Trustees to adjourn the**
316 **meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:54 PM.**

317
318 **VINCE FRANCO made a motion, seconded by PATRICK MURRAY, for the Selectboard to**
319 **adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 5-0 at 8:54 PM.**

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321
322 Respectfully Submitted,
323 Cathy Ainsworth
324 Recording Secretary
325