

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION
GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING AGENDA**

Online & 75 Maple St.
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Thursday, March 27, 2025
6:30 PM

This meeting will be in-person at Essex Junction Recreation and Parks located at 75 Maple Street and available remotely. Options to join the meeting remotely:

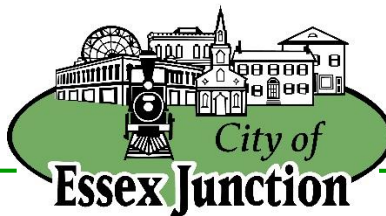
- **JOIN ONLINE:** [Join Teams Meeting](#)

1. **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** [6:30 PM]
2. **ADDITIONS OR AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA**
3. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
4. **REVIEW: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE PURPOSE STATEMENT**
5. **ELECTION OF OFFICERS: CHAIRPERSON, VICE CHAIRPERSON, SECRETARY**
6. **DISCUSS GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS TO EXPLORE**
7. **DISCUSS PLAN AND TIMELINE**
8. **IDENTIFY FUTURE MEETINGS**
9. **ADJOURN**

Attachments:

- Governance Committee Purpose Statement
- Governance Considerations to Explore
- Populations Chart
- Square Miles Chart
- City of Essex Junction Charter
- Burlington Neighborhood Planning Assemblies
- Essex Governance Group Final Report

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 Chairperson, 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 Chairperson. Regarding zoom participants, if individuals interrupt, they will be muted; and if they interrupt a second time they will be removed. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings of the Governance Committee, like all programs and activities of the City of Essex Junction, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the Essex Junction Recreation and Parks office at 802-878-1375 TTY: 7-1-1 or (800) 253-0191.



Governance Committee
Purpose Statement
Approved by the City Council: September 25, 2024

PURPOSE

Essex Junction is a welcoming community, home to a diverse population, including residents of all ages, ethnicity, nationalities, and backgrounds; and the City Council wishes to explore governance structures to ensure that voices are equitably represented at policy making tables. As such, the Governance Committee shall represent the best interests of the City and its residents by serving in an advisory capacity to the City Council for the purpose of studying governance considerations for the City such as, but not limited to, form of government, election of officials at-large or through wards or districts, governing body composition, term of office, term limits, and councilor compensation.

MEMBERSHIP

The City Council will appoint the members of the Governance Committee. Members shall be residents of the City of Essex Junction. The Governance Committee shall consist of up to 9 voting members to include two City Council members.

TIMELINE & TERM LENGTH

It is anticipated that the Governance Committee's work may result in recommended charter changes. The intent is to prepare these charter changes in time for them to be brought to the voters on the 2026 Annual Meeting ballot. Therefore, the work of the Governance Committee shall be complete and submitted to the City Council no later than November 1, 2025.

There may be additional work beyond this timeline to help with public outreach and engagement associated with any potential charter changes.

This will be a limited time Committee, to be established as soon as a minimum of 7 members can be appointed, and it will be dissolved upon completion of the work listed herein. Member terms shall be for the full length of time this time limited Committee is in existence.

OFFICERS

Officers of the Governance Committee shall be a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary. No two offices may be held by the same person. The officers shall be chosen at the first meeting of the Committee. The Chairperson shall preside at meetings of the Governance Committee. The Vice Chairperson shall fill in the duties for the Chairperson in their absence. The Secretary shall keep a record of the meetings in the form of minutes.

VOTING

Each member shall be entitled to one vote. Approval of any matter requires an affirmative vote from a quorum of the body which is established as a majority of the membership (4 if 7 members; 5 if 9 members).

MEETINGS OF MEMBERS

The Governance Committee shall meet as needed to achieve the work as stated herein within this limited time period; this may include sub-Committee work. A schedule should be established by the Governance Committee at it's first meeting.

All Governance Committee meetings, votes, and actions shall follow the laws of the State of Vermont. The Governance Committee is an advisory body.

Governance Considerations to Explore

Form of Government:

Current: Council-Manager

Council-Manager, Mayor-Council (Strong Mayor), Mayor-Council-Manager (Weak Mayor)

Council Composition:

Current: 5 Councilors; President selected by Councilors

Councilor Terms Length:

Current: 3 years

Councilor Term Limits:

Current: no term limits

Election of Officials:

Current: At-Large

At-large, districts/wards, hybrid

Council Compensation:

Current: \$1,500 per year

Council Meeting Frequency:

2 times per month

Neighborhood Assemblies

Other?

Municipality	Type	County	Population 2020	% vs Essex Jct
Burlington	City	Chittenden (seat)	44,743	323%
South Burlington	City	Chittenden	20,292	92%
Colchester	Town	Chittenden	17,524	65%
Rutland	City	Rutland (seat)	15,807	49%
Bennington	Town	Bennington (seat)	15,333	45%
Brattleboro	Town	Windham	12,184	15%
Essex	Town	Chittenden	11,540	9%
Milton	Town	Chittenden	10,723	1%
Hartford	Town	Windsor	10,686	1%
Essex Junction	City	Chittenden	10,590	0%
Williston	Town	Chittenden	10,103	-5%
Middlebury	Town	Addison (seat)	9,152	-14%
Springfield	Town	Windsor	9,062	-14%
Barre	City	Washington	8,491	-20%
Montpelier	City (capital)	Washington (seat)	8,074	-24%
Winooski	City	Chittenden	7,997	-24%
Barre	Town	Washington	7,923	-25%
Shelburne	Town	Chittenden	7,717	-27%
St. Johnsbury	Town	Caledonia (seat)	7,364	-30%
St. Albans	Town	Franklin	6,988	-34%
St. Albans	City	Franklin (seat)	6,887	-35%
Swanton	Town	Franklin	6,701	-37%
Northfield	Town	Washington	5,918	-44%
Lyndon	Town	Caledonia	5,491	-48%
Morristown	Town	Lamoille	5,434	-49%
Waterbury	Town	Washington	5,331	-50%

Municipality	Type	County	Population 2020	Land Area (Sq Mi)	% vs Essex Jct
Swanton	Town	Franklin	6,701	61.67	1201%
Milton	Town	Chittenden	10,723	60.89	1185%
St. Albans	Town	Franklin	6,988	60.53	1177%
Colchester	Town	Chittenden	17,524	58.57	1136%
Morristown	Town	Lamoille	5,434	51.68	990%
Waterbury	Town	Washington	5,331	49.76	950%
Springfield	Town	Windsor	9,062	49.44	943%
Hartford	Town	Windsor	10,686	45.88	868%
Shelburne	Town	Chittenden	7,717	45.07	851%
Northfield	Town	Washington	5,918	43.63	820%
Bennington	Town	Bennington (seat)	15,333	42.5	797%
Lyndon	Town	Caledonia	5,491	39.82	740%
Essex	Town	Chittenden	11,540	39.32	730%
Middlebury	Town	Addison (seat)	9,152	39.22	727%
St. Johnsbury	Town	Caledonia (seat)	7,364	36.74	675%
Brattleboro	Town	Windham	12,184	32.41	584%
Barre	Town	Washington	7,923	30.72	548%
Williston	Town	Chittenden	10,103	30.58	545%
South Burlington	City	Chittenden	20,292	29.58	524%
Burlington	City	Chittenden (seat)	44,743	15.49	227%
Montpelier	City (capital)	Washington (seat)	8,074	10.25	116%
Rutland	City	Rutland (seat)	15,807	7.68	62%
Essex Junction	City	Chittenden	10,590	4.74	0%
Barre	City	Washington	8,491	3.98	-16%
St. Albans	City	Franklin (seat)	6,887	2.03	-57%
Winooski	City	Chittenden	7,997	1.51	-68%

The Vermont Statutes Online

The Statutes below include the actions of the 2024 session of the General Assembly.

NOTE: The Vermont Statutes Online is an unofficial copy of the Vermont Statutes Annotated that is provided as a convenience.

Title 24 Appendix: Municipal Charters

Chapter 4: City of Essex Junction

Subchapter 1: INCORPORATION AND POWERS OF THE CITY

§ 101. Corporate existence retained

Notwithstanding the provisions of any other municipal charter, the inhabitants of the Village of Essex Junction, within its corporate limits, shall be a municipal corporation by the name of the City of Essex Junction. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 102. General powers; law

Except as modified by the provisions of this charter, or by any lawful regulation or ordinance of the City of Essex Junction, all provisions of the statutes of this State applicable to municipal corporations shall apply to the City of Essex Junction. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 103. Specific powers

(a) The City of Essex Junction shall have all the powers granted to cities and municipal corporations by the Constitution and laws of this State together with all the implied powers necessary to carry into execution all the powers granted, and it may enact ordinances not inconsistent with the Constitution and laws of the State of Vermont or with this charter.

(b) The City of Essex Junction may acquire real and personal property within or without its corporate limits for any municipal purpose, including storm water collection and disposal; waste water collection and disposal; solid waste collection and disposal; provision of public water supply; provision of public parks and recreation facilities; provision of municipal facilities for office, fire protection, and police protection; provision of public libraries; provision of public parking areas; provision of sidewalks, bicycle paths, and green strips; provision of public roadways; provision of public view zones and open spaces; and such other purposes as are addressed under the general laws of the State of Vermont.

(c) The City of Essex Junction may acquire such property in fee simple or any lesser interest or estate, by purchase, gift, devise, lease, or condemnation and may sell, lease, mortgage, hold, manage, and control such property as its interest may require.

(d) The City of Essex Junction may exercise any of its powers or perform any of its functions and may participate in the financing thereof, jointly or in cooperation, by contract or otherwise, with other Vermont municipalities, the State of Vermont, any one or more subdivisions or agencies of the State or the United States.

(e) The City of Essex Junction may establish and maintain an electric power system and regulate power line installations; provided, however, that the City shall have no authority under this charter that conflicts with that authority granted to the Public Utilities Commission or any other state regulatory agency. The City of Essex Junction may also establish a telecommunications system and an enterprise to deliver Internet or broadband services.

(f) In this charter, mention of a particular power shall not be construed to be exclusive or to restrict the scope of the powers that the City of Essex Junction would otherwise have if the particular power were not mentioned. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 104. Reservation of powers

Nothing in this charter shall be so construed as in any way to limit the powers and functions conferred upon the City of Essex Junction and the City Council by general or special enactments in force or effect or hereafter enacted, and the powers and functions conferred by this charter shall be cumulative and in addition to the provisions of such general or special enactments. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 105. Form of government

The municipal government provided by this charter shall be known as council-manager form of government. Pursuant to its provisions and subject only to the limitations imposed by the State Constitution and by this charter, all powers of the City of Essex Junction shall be vested in an elective City Council, which shall enact ordinances, codes, and regulations; adopt budgets; determine policies; and appoint the City Manager, who shall enforce the laws and ordinances and administer the government of the City. All powers of the City shall be exercised in the manner prescribed by this charter or prescribed by ordinance. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 2: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

§ 201. Powers and duties of governing body

(a) The members of the City of Essex Junction City Council shall constitute the legislative body of the City of Essex Junction for all purposes required by statute and, except as otherwise provided in this charter, shall have all the powers and authority given to and perform all duties required of City legislative bodies or Councils under the laws of the State of Vermont.

(b) Within the limitations of the foregoing, the City of Essex Junction Council shall have the power to:

(1) Appoint and remove a City Manager and supervise, create, change, and abolish offices, commissions, or departments other than the offices, commissions, or departments established by this charter.

(2) Appoint the members of all boards, commissions, committees, or similar bodies unless specifically provided otherwise by this charter.

(3) Provide for an independent audit by a certified public accountant.

(4) Inquire into the conduct of any officer, commission, or department and investigate any and all municipal affairs.

(5) Exercise every other power that is not specifically set forth herein but that is granted to councils or legislative bodies by the statutes of the State of Vermont. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 202. Governing body; composition and terms of office

(a) There shall be a City Council consisting of five members.

(b) All members shall reside within the boundaries of the City of Essex Junction to be elected by the qualified voters.

(c) The term of office of a City Councilor shall be three years, and terms shall be staggered. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 203. Vacancy in office

In case of a vacancy of a Council seat, the vacancy shall be filled by the City Council until the next annual election pursuant to subsection 204(c) of this charter. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 204. Election of governing body officers

(a) The terms of the officers shall commence on the first day of the month following the month of election. At the first meeting of the month following the annual City meeting, the Council shall organize and elect a President, Vice President, and Clerk by a majority vote of the entire Council and shall file a certificate of the election for record in the office of the City Clerk.

(b) The President of the Council, or in the President's absence the Vice President, shall preside at all meetings of the Council and shall be recognized as the head of the City government for all ceremonial purposes.

(c) In the event of death, resignation, or incapacity of any Council member, the remaining members of the Council may appoint a person to fill that position until the next annual election. Incapacity shall be determined by a vote of the Council. Incapacity shall include the failure by any member of the board to attend at least 50 percent of the meetings of the board in any calendar year. At the next annual election, the vacancy shall be filled and the person so elected shall serve for the remainder of the term of office. In the event the Council is unable to agree upon an interim replacement until the next annual City election, a special election shall be held forthwith to fill the position.

(d) In the event that a Councilor is no longer a resident of the City prior to the expiration of the Councilor's term, the Councilor's office shall be deemed vacant. The Council may appoint a person to fill the vacant office until a successor can be elected at the next annual election. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 205. Compensation

(a) Compensation paid to the Council members shall be set by the voters at the annual meeting, with a minimum of \$1,500.00 a year each. Council members' compensation must be set forth as a separate item in the annual budget presented to the meeting. Council members may choose to forgo the compensation or a portion of the compensation.

(b) The City Council shall fix the compensation of all appointees and the City Manager. The Council shall review, approve, and ratify any collective bargaining agreements, which may be negotiated or fixed by the Manager or their designee. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 206. Conflict of interest; prohibitions

(a) Holding other office. No Council member shall hold any City employment during the term for which they were elected to the Council, unless allowed by State statute. A Council member may be appointed to represent the City on other boards except as pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2647.

(b) Appointments and removals. Neither the legislative body nor any of its members shall in any manner dictate the appointment or removal of any municipal administrative officers or employees whom the manager or any of the manager's subordinates are empowered to appoint. The legislative body may discuss with the Manager the appointment, performance, and removal of such officers and employees in executive session.

(c) Interference with administration. Except for the purpose of inquiries and investigations under subdivision 201(b)(4) of this charter, the legislative body or its members shall deal with the municipal officers and employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the Manager solely through the Manager, and neither the legislative body nor its members shall give orders to any such officer or employee, either publicly or privately. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022; amended 2023, No. M-18 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 13, 2024.)

§ 207. Governing body; meetings

As soon as possible after the election of the President and Vice President, the Council shall fix the time and place of its regular meetings, and such meetings shall be held at least once a month. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 208. Special city meetings

Special City meetings shall be called in the manner provided by the laws of the State, and the voting on all questions shall be by the Australian ballot system. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 209. Council meetings; procedure

(a) The Council shall determine its own rules and order of business.

(b) The presence of three members shall constitute a quorum. Three affirmative votes shall be necessary to take binding Council action.

(c) In accordance with Vermont's Open Meeting Law, the Council shall keep minutes of its proceedings. The journalized minutes shall be a public record.

(d) All meetings of the Council shall be open to the public unless, by an affirmative vote of the majority of the members present, the Council shall vote that any particular session shall be an executive session or deliberative session in accordance with Vermont's Open Meeting Law. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 210. Appointments

The Council shall have the power to appoint the members of all boards, commissions, committees, or similar bodies unless specifically provided otherwise by this charter. The terms of all appointments shall commence on the day after the day of appointment unless the appointment is to fill a vacancy in an office, in which case the term shall commence at the time of appointment. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 211. Additional governing body provisions

(a) No claim for personal services shall be allowed to the officers elected at the annual meeting, except when compensation for such services is provided for under the provisions of this charter or by the general law.

(b) The Council may authorize the sale or lease of any real or personal estate belonging to the City. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 3: OTHER ELECTED OFFICES

§ 301. Brownell Library Trustees

There shall be a five-member Board of Library Trustees who shall be elected to five-year terms using the Australian ballot system. Only qualified voters of the City of Essex Junction shall be eligible to hold the office of elected library trustee. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 302. Moderator

The Council shall appoint a Moderator who shall preside at the next City Informational Meeting. The term of Moderator shall be one year. Only qualified voters of the City of Essex Junction shall be eligible to hold the office of Moderator. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022; amended 2023, No. M-18 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 13, 2024.)

Subchapter 4: CITY MEETINGS

§ 401. City meetings and elections

(a) Annually on or before January 1, the Council shall set the date of the next annual meeting, at which time the voters shall vote for the election of officers, the voting on the City budget, and any other business included in the warnings for the meetings.

(b) Provisions of the laws of the State of Vermont relating to the qualifications of electors, the manner of voting, the duties of elections officers, and all other particulars respective to preparation for, conducting, and management of elections, so far as they may be applicable, shall govern all municipal elections, and all general and special meetings, except as otherwise provided in this charter.

(c) The election of officers and the voting on all questions shall be by Australian ballot system. The City Clerk and Board of Civil Authority shall conduct elections in accordance with general laws of the State. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022; amended 2023, No. M-18 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 13, 2024.)

Subchapter 5: ORDINANCES

§ 501. Adoption of ordinances

Ordinances shall be adopted in accordance with State law pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §§ 1972–1976, with the additional requirements noted in this subchapter. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 502. Public hearing

(a) The Council shall hold a minimum of one public hearing prior to the adoption of any ordinance.

(b) At the time and place so advertised, or at any time and place to which the hearing may from time to time be adjourned, the ordinance shall be introduced, and thereafter, all persons interested shall be given an opportunity to be heard.

(c) After the hearing, the Council may finally pass the ordinance with or without amendment, except that if the Council makes an amendment, it shall cause the amended ordinance to be published, pursuant to subsections (a) and (b) of this section with a notice of the time and place of a public hearing at which the amended ordinance will be further considered, which publication shall be at least three days prior to the public hearing. The Council may finally pass the amended ordinance or again amend it subject to the same procedures as outlined herein. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 503. Effective date

Every ordinance shall become effective upon passage unless otherwise specified. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 504. Rescission of ordinances

All ordinances shall be subject to rescission by a special or annual City meeting, as follows: If, within 44 days after final passage by the Council of any such ordinance, a petition signed by voters of the City not less in number than five percent of the qualified voters of the municipality is filed with the City Clerk requesting its reference to a special or annual City meeting, the Council shall fix the time and place of the meeting, which shall be within 60 days after the filing of the petition, and notice thereof shall be given in the manner provided by law in the calling of a special or annual City meeting. Voting shall be by Australian ballot. An ordinance so referred shall remain in effect upon the conclusion of the meeting unless a majority of those present and voting against the ordinance at the special or annual City meeting exceeds five percent in number of the qualified voters of the municipality. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 505. Petition for enactment of ordinance; special meeting

(a) Voters of the City may at any time petition for the enactment of any proposed lawful ordinance by filing the petition, including the text of the ordinance, with the City Clerk. The Council shall call a special City meeting (or include the ordinance as annual meeting business) to be held within 60 days after the date of the filing, unless prior to the meeting the ordinance shall be enacted by the Council. The warning for the meeting shall state the proposed ordinance in full or in concise summary and shall provide for an Australian ballot vote as to its enactment. The ordinance shall take effect on the 10th day after the conclusion of the meeting, provided that voters, constituting a majority of those voting thereon, shall have voted in the affirmative.

(b) The proposed ordinance shall be examined by the City Attorney before being submitted to the special City meeting. The City Attorney is authorized, subject to the approval of the Council, to correct the ordinance so as to avoid repetitions, illegalities, and unconstitutional provisions and to ensure accuracy in its text and references and clarity and precision in its phraseology, but the City Attorney shall not materially change its meaning and effect.

(c) The provisions of this section shall not apply to any appointments of officers, members of commissions, or boards made by the Council or to the appointment or designation of Council, or to rules governing the procedure of the Council. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 6: CITY MANAGER

§ 601. Manager; appointment and hiring

The Council shall appoint a City Manager under and in accordance with Vermont Statutes Annotated. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 602. Powers of Manager

(a) The Manager shall be the chief administrative officer of the City of Essex Junction. The Manager shall be responsible to the Council for the administration of all City of Essex Junction affairs placed in the Manager's charge by or under this charter. The Manager shall have the following powers and duties in addition to those powers and duties delegated to municipal managers under the Vermont statutes.

(b) The Manager shall appoint and, when the Manager deems it necessary for the good of the service, suspend or remove all City of Essex Junction employees, including the Treasurer, and other employees provided for by or under this charter for cause, except as otherwise provided by law, this charter, collective bargaining unit contracts, or personnel rules adopted pursuant to this charter. The Manager may authorize any employee who is subject to the Manager's direction and supervision to exercise these powers with respect to subordinates in that employee's department, office, or agency. There shall be no discrimination in employment, in accordance with applicable State and federal laws, including 21 V.S.A. § 495. Appointments, lay-offs, suspensions, promotions, demotions, and removals shall be made primarily on the basis of training, experience, fitness, and performance of duties, in such manner as to ensure that the responsible administrative officer may secure efficient service.

(c) The Manager, or designee, shall direct and supervise the administration of all departments, offices, and agencies of the City of Essex Junction, except as otherwise provided by this charter or by law.

(d) The Manager shall recommend hiring of a City Attorney with Council approval and shall hire special attorneys as needed.

(e) The Manager or a staff member designated by the Manager shall attend all Council meetings and shall have the right to take part in discussion and make recommendations but may not vote. The Council may meet in executive session without the Manager for discussion of the Manager's performance or if the Manager is the subject of an investigation pursuant to subdivision 201(b)(4) of this charter.

(f) The Manager shall see that all laws, provisions of this charter, and acts of the Council, subject to enforcement by the Manager or by officers subject to the Manager's direction and supervision, are faithfully executed.

(g) The Manager shall prepare and submit the annual budget and capital program to the Council.

(h) The Manager shall submit to the Council and make available to the public a complete report on the finances and administrative activities of the City of Essex Junction as of the end of each fiscal year.

(i) The Manager shall make such other reports as the Council may require concerning the operations of the City of Essex Junction's departments, offices, and agencies subject to the Manager's direction and supervision.

(j) The Manager shall keep the Council fully advised as to the financial condition and future needs of the City of Essex Junction and make such recommendations to the Council concerning the affairs of the City of Essex Junction as the Manager deems desirable.

(k) The Manager shall be responsible for the enforcement of all City of Essex Junction ordinances and laws.

(l) The Manager may when advisable or proper delegate to subordinate officers and employees of the City of Essex Junction any duties conferred upon the Manager by this charter, the Vermont statutes, or the Council members.

(m) The Manager shall perform such other duties as are specified in this charter or in State law or as may be required by the Council.

(n) The Manager shall fix the compensation of City employees.

(o) The Manager shall recommend appointment of the City Clerk annually, with Council approval. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 603. Manager; removal; hearing

The Council may remove the Manager from office for cause in accordance with the following procedures:

(1) The Council shall adopt by affirmative vote of a majority of all its members a preliminary resolution that must state the reasons for removal and may suspend the Manager from duty for a period not to exceed 45 days. Within three days after the vote, a copy of the resolution shall be delivered to the Manager.

(2) Within five days after a copy of the resolution is delivered to the Manager, the Manager may file with the Council a written request for a hearing; the hearing shall be in a public or executive session by choice of the Manager. This hearing shall be held at a special Council meeting not earlier than 15 days nor later than 30 days after the request is filed. The Manager may file with the Council a written reply not later than five days before the hearing.

(3) The Council may adopt a final resolution of removal, which may be made effective immediately, by affirmative vote of a majority of all its members at any time after five days from the date when a copy of the preliminary resolution was delivered to the Manager, if the Manager has not requested a public hearing, or at any time after the public hearing, if the Manager has requested one. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 604. Vacancy in office of City Manager

The Manager, by letter filed with the City Clerk, may appoint a staff member to perform the Manager's duties in the event of the Manager's absence due to disability, incapacitation, or vacation unless the Manager has previously appointed a staff member as assistant manager or deputy manager, who would automatically assume the Manager's responsibilities in the Manager's absence. If the Manager fails to make such designations, the Council may by resolution appoint an officer or employee of the City to perform the duties of the Manager until the Manager is able to return to duty. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 7: BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

§ 701. Board of Civil Authority

The Board of Civil Authority shall be defined by 17 VSA § 2103(5). (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 702. Board of Abatement of Taxes

The Board of Civil Authority shall constitute a Board of Abatement as provided by law. The Board of Abatement shall meet and discharge its duties as required by the applicable statutory provisions. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 703. Planning Commission

There shall be a Planning Commission, and its powers, obligations, and operation shall be under and in accordance with Vermont Statutes Annotated, as amended, and members will be appointed by the City Council from among the qualified voters of the City. Members of the Commission shall hold no other City office. The City Council shall have the authority pursuant to 24 V.S.A. § 4323(a) to set the terms of the Planning Commission members. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 704. Development Review Board

A Development Review Board shall be established, and its powers, obligations, and operation shall be under and in accordance with Vermont Statutes Annotated, as amended, and members will be appointed by the City Council for terms of three years from among the qualified voters of the City. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 705. Brownell Library Trustees

The Brownell Library Board of Library Trustees that holds office at the time of enactment of this charter shall serve until their terms are completed. Any existing policies of the Library Trustees at the time of the enactment of this charter shall become the policies of the new Brownell Library Board of Trustees. The five permanent, self-perpetuating Library Trustees shall function in accordance with the terms of the Brownell Trust agreement dated May 25, 1925. The Library Trustees shall have the authority to establish any new policy for the operation of the Library or repeal or replace any existing policy and shall otherwise act in conformance with the Vermont statutes. Notwithstanding the forgoing, the Library is required to follow all financial and personnel policies adopted by the City Council. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 8: ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS

§ 801. Personnel administration and benefits

(a) The Manager or the Manager's appointee shall be the personnel director. The Manager shall maintain personnel rules and regulations protecting the interests of the City and of the employees. These rules and regulations must be approved by the Council and shall include the procedure for amending them and for placing them into practice. Each employee shall receive a copy of the rules and regulations when the employee is hired.

(b) The rules and regulations may deal with the following subjects or with other similar matters of personnel administration: job classification, jobs to be filled, tenure, retirement, pensions, leaves of absence, vacations, holidays, hours and days of work, group insurance, salary plans, rules governing hiring, temporary appointments, lay-off, reinstatement, promotion, transfer, demotion, settlement of disputes, dismissal, probationary periods, permanent or continuing status, in-service training, injury, employee records, and further regulations concerning the hearing of appeals.

(c) No person in the service of the City shall either directly or indirectly give, render, pay, or receive any service or other valuable thing for or on account of or in connection with any appointment, proposed appointment, promotion, or proposed promotion. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 802. Real estate assessor

There shall be either a real estate Assessor who is a certified real estate appraiser or an independent appraisal firm, headed by a certified real estate appraiser, appointed by the Manager that shall carry out the duties of assessor in the same manner and be subject to all of the same liabilities prescribed for listers under the law of the State of Vermont in assessing property within the City of Essex Junction and that shall establish the grand list thereof and shall return such list to the City Clerk within the time required by State statute. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 803. Appraisal of property

Appraisals shall be reviewed periodically and kept up to date. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 804. Appraisal of business property for tax purposes

Appraisal of business personal property shall be in accordance with the provisions of 32 V.S.A. § 3618, as the same may from time to time be amended, provided that all business personal property acquired by a taxpayer after September 30, 1995, shall be exempt from tax. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 805. Purpose

The purpose of appointing an Assessor is in lieu of the election of listers. The City shall be governed by, and each taxpayer shall have rights granted by, the applicable State statutes concerning real and personal property taxation, appeal therefrom, and other statutes concerning taxation. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 9: BUDGET PROCESS

§ 901. Fiscal year

The fiscal year of the City shall begin on the first day of July and end on the last day of June of each calendar year. The fiscal year shall constitute the budget and accounting year as used in this charter. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 902. Annual municipal budget

With support from the finance department, the Manager shall submit to the Council a budget for review before the annual City Meeting or at such previous time as may be directed by the Council. The budget shall contain:

- (1) an estimate of the financial condition of the City as of the end of the fiscal year;
- (2) an itemized statement of appropriations recommended for current expenses, and for capital improvements, during the next fiscal year, with comparative statements of appropriations and estimated expenditures for the current fiscal year and actual appropriations and expenditures for the immediate preceding fiscal year;
- (3) an itemized statement of estimated revenues from all sources, other than taxation, for the next fiscal year and comparative figures of tax and other sources of revenue for the current and immediate preceding fiscal years;
- (4) a capital budget for not fewer than the next five fiscal years, showing anticipated capital expenditures, financing, and tax requirements; and
- (5) such other information as may be required by the Council. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 903. Governing body's action on budget

The Council shall review and approve the recommended budget with or without change. The budget shall be published not later than two weeks after its preliminary adoption by the Council. The Council shall fix the time and place for holding a public hearing for the budget and shall give public notice of the hearing. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 904. Budget meeting; warning

- (a) The Council shall hold at least one public hearing at least 30 days prior to the annual meeting to present and explain its proposed budget and shall give a public notice of such hearing.
- (b) The Manager shall, not less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting, make available the Council's recommended budget and the final warning of the pending annual meeting.
- (c) The annual City report shall be made available to the legal voters of the City not later than 10 days prior to the annual meeting. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 905. Appropriation and transfers

(a) An annual budget shall be adopted at the City Meeting by the vote of a majority of eligible voters by Australian ballot in accordance with section 401 of this charter. If, after the total budget has been appropriated, the Council finds additional appropriations necessary, the appropriations shall be made and reported at the next City Meeting as a specific item. The appropriations shall only be made in special circumstances or situations of an emergency nature. No specific explanation need be given for any normal annual operating expense in any office, department, or agency that may be increased over the budget amount by an amount not more than 10 percent of the office's, department's, or agency's budget.

(b) From the effective date of the budget, the amounts stated therein, as approved by the voters, become appropriated to the several agencies and purposes therein named.

(c) The Manager may at any time transfer an unencumbered appropriation balance or portion thereof between general classifications of expenditures within an office, department, or agency. At the request of the Manager, the Council may, by resolution, transfer any unencumbered appropriation balance or portion thereof within the Council budget from one department, office, or agency to another.

(d) Notwithstanding the above, no unexpended balance in any appropriation not included in the Council budget shall be transferred or used for any other purpose. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 906. Amount to be raised by taxation

Upon passage of the budget by the voters, the amounts stated therein as the amount to be raised by taxes shall constitute a determination of the amount of the levy for the purposes of the City in the corresponding tax year, and the Council shall levy such taxes on the grand list as prepared by the assessor for the corresponding tax year. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 10: TAXATION

§ 1001. Taxes on real property

Taxes on real property shall be paid in equal installments on March 15 and September 15. The Council shall send notice to taxpayers not less than 30 days prior to when taxes are due. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1002. Penalty

An additional charge of eight percent shall be added to any tax not paid on or before the dates specified in section 1001 of this charter, and interest as authorized by Vermont statutes. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1003. Assessment and taxation agreement

The Council is authorized and empowered to negotiate and execute assessment and taxation agreements between the City and a taxpayer or taxpayers within the City of Essex Junction consistent with applicable requirements of the Vermont Constitution. This section shall not be construed to supersede any provision of State law relating to the education property tax. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 11: CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

§ 1101. Capital programs

(a) Preparation of capital program. The Manager shall prepare and submit to the Council a capital program at least three months prior to the final date for submission of the budget.

(b) Contents. The capital program shall include:

(1) a clear general summary of its contents;

(2) a list of all capital improvements that are proposed to be undertaken during not fewer than the next five fiscal years, with appropriate supporting information as to the necessity for such improvements;

(3) cost estimates, method of financing, and recommended time schedules for each such improvement; and

(4) the estimated annual cost of operating and maintaining the facilities to be constructed or acquired.

(c) Revision. The information required by this section may be revised and extended each year with regard to capital improvements still pending or in process of construction or acquisition. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 12: AMENDMENT OF CHARTER AND INITIATIVES

§ 1201. Governing law

This charter may be amended in accordance with the procedure provided for by State statutes for amendment of municipal charters. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

Subchapter 13: GENERAL PROVISIONS

§ 1301. Savings clause

Repeal or modification of this charter shall not affect the validity of a previously enacted ordinance, resolution, or bylaw. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1302. Severability

The provisions of this charter are declared to be severable. If any provisions of this charter are for any reason invalid, such invalidity shall not affect the remaining provisions, which can be given effect without the invalid provision. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

§ 1303. Superseding language

The City of Essex Junction shall be formed notwithstanding the following language (“Notwithstanding the provisions of any other municipal charters, territory within the corporate limits [of the Town of Essex] shall not be annexed to or become a part of any other municipal corporation except by annexation procedures as set forth in the statutes of the State of Vermont.”) contained in chapter 117, section 101 of this title. (Added 2021, No. M-10 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. July 1, 2022.)

City of Burlington – Neighborhood Planning Assemblies

NPA – General Information

How they Work

Bylaws

Each Neighborhood Planning Assembly has its own set of bylaws or guidelines. Although most meetings work in the same general way, the bylaws provide rules for the way that decisions are made and recorded.

Membership

Membership is open to all residents of a Ward. To become a member, an interested resident must attend a meeting of the Neighborhood Planning Assembly.

Steering Committees

Each Neighborhood Planning Assembly has a steering committee that is elected by the membership at large. The members of this committee are responsible for scheduling the meetings, setting the agendas, moderating the meetings, and making sure that everyone who wishes to, has an opportunity to speak. Steering Committee members also serve as contacts with City departments and other Neighborhood Planning Assemblies. The Steering Committee is responsible for recording the minutes of each meeting so that they are available for public inspection. Steering Committee members are elected by the Neighborhood Planning Assembly and generally serve for a one-year term.

Agendas

Agendas are established and set by the Steering Committee with the participation of Neighborhood Planning Assembly membership. Any member of a Neighborhood Planning Assembly may request that an item be placed on the agenda for discussion. Open forum time is set aside at each meeting for members to freely express their views and concerns about the assembly or topics of public interest.

City of Burlington Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO)

The Community and Economic Development Office in City Hall is responsible for displaying and maintaining NPA public records. NPA Steering Committee send CEDO their meeting agenda and meeting minutes to be warned and publicly posted to comply with Open Meeting Law.

If you have any questions please contact NPA@burlingtonvt.gov or contact the CEDO Front Desk at 802-865-7144 or cedofd@burlingtonvt.gov.

What They Do

Each of Burlington's neighborhoods has its own unique history, resources, and problems to be solved, and the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies reflect this diversity. Because many of the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies grew out of existing neighborhood groups, each has a different character and a different approach to resolving issues. However, the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies share the power and the resources of their members and the ability to involve people in the process of City government.

As active members of the Neighborhood Planning Assembly, residents have the power to influence public policy and work with others to bring about changes in the neighborhood and City.

Resolutions

NPAs influence public policy in several ways. One way NPAs express their sentiments and concerns about particular issues is in the form of resolutions. These resolutions are then distributed to the Mayor, City Councilors and appropriate City departments and commissions, ensuring that elected officials know what residents are thinking about particular issues before they make decisions. Neighborhood Planning Assembly resolutions are shared with Steering Committee members of other Neighborhood Planning Assemblies in order to keep each other informed about their opinions on issues or projects of public concern.

Community Development Block Grant fund allocation

Neighborhood Planning Assemblies also participate directly in the allocation of federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds by electing representatives to sit on the CDBG advisory board. CDBG funds are used to support many critical human services, housing, and neighborhood community development needs related to issues of poverty.

Presentation Requests

To request a formal presentation with the NPAs on their agendas:

1. [Download the NPA Presentation Request Form \(DOC\)](#), and fill out the form. Note: All NPA meetings have a public comments section to make short announcements that don't require a presentation request.
2. Send the presentation form via email directly to the Steering Committee members of the NPA you would like to present to (email contacts are located in the corresponding Ward pages)
While the NPAs encourage presentations, other agenda items and prior commitments for time may restrict them from adding additional presentation requests. They will make every effort to put you on their agenda if time permits. Please be patient and understanding if they are unable to accommodate you for the requested date or time. Thank you!

Essex Governance Group Report Executive Summary, February 2015

In fall, 2014, the Essex Governance Group explored with residents ways Essex can continue to improve civic engagement and governance, with a focus on budget decision-making and voting. Through a community-wide survey and public forum, EGG identified a number of strong themes. EGG findings and recommendations are briefly summarized below. For more information please see the full report at www.heartandsoulofexsex.org

FINDINGS

1. More Effective Communication is Needed

Citizens want Essex leaders and staff to communicate with them in ways that are more:

- Explicit, clear, and open
- Proactive, with information well in advance of decisions
- Online, with a more active web presence
- Innovative in using a variety of media
- Direct, responsive, and accountable
- Two-way, with respectful exchanges

2. Inclusion is Critical

Citizens are concerned about low turn-out both at town meeting and local ballot voting. Many reported feeling barriers to participation.

3. High-Quality, Informed Decision Making is Greatly Valued

Citizens value face-to-face decision making. They appreciate hearing directly from leaders, and want the community to be informed and engaged.

4. Essex Could Create its Own Model

Participants in EGG forum and survey are open to creating a new model for local democratic decision making, choosing the elements that work best for Essex.

5. Residents Value the Power and Immediacy of Direct Democracy

Citizens value their power at town meeting, and want to be able to see the clear, immediate results of their participation.

6. Same Day Voting, and a Call for Simplicity

Each spring, Town residents vote three separate times (Village residents five times). Citizens would like all votes on local issues to occur on the same day.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Launch Proactive Communication Program

Adopt an Essex Public Engagement Protocol, train and affirm expectations of staff, revamp website, and host informal community meetings.

B. Empower Neighborhoods

Create Neighborhood Assemblies to serve as official advisors to the municipality.

C. Switch to Enhanced Town Meeting / Australian Ballot Hybrid

Enhance Town Meeting with improved participation options. Citizens would continue to have the power to amend the budget unless Town Meeting attendance is below a specific level.

The final budget would be voted by Australian ballot 45 days after Town Meeting. Additional changes: ballot would include a survey for citizen comment; Town Meeting date would be changed so as not to coincide with school break.

D. Institute Same-Day Voting

Create a staged plan to combine voting dates, and combine Town/Village Meeting dates

ESSEX GOVERNANCE GROUP PARTICIPANTS

THANK YOU! The Essex Governance Group was made up of a dedicated group of volunteers, many of whom contributed dozens of hours of their energy and expertise to this effort. The facilitators wish to thank them for their energy, expertise, collaborative spirit and commitment to community. The following people attended one or more of the series of Essex Governance Group meetings between August and December, 2014:

Bob Bates
Dorothy Bergendahl
Andrew Cimonetti
Ben Gilliam
Tim Kemerer
Ron Lawrence
Max Levy
Brad Luck
Deb McAdoo
Greg Morgan
Toni Morgan

Roberta Penchina
Bruce Post
Pam Schirner
Gabrielle Smith
Elaine Sopchak
Saramichelle Stultz
Liz Subin
Jess Wisloski-Martin
Irene Wrenner
Vanessa Zerillo

Special thanks to EGG's "Essex Democracy and You" small-group facilitators:
Annie Davis • Tina Logan • Brad Luck • Stephanie Ratte • Gabrielle Smith • Elaine Sopchak • Saramichelle Stultz • Liz Subin

EGG Co-Facilitators and Report Co-Authors:

Susan Clark is a community facilitator focusing on community sustainability and engagement. She is coauthor of *Slow Democracy: Rediscovering Community, Bringing Decision Making Back Home* (Chelsea Green, 2012, with Woden Teachout), and *All Those In Favor*, a book about Vermont town meetings (RavenMark, 2005, with Frank Bryan). She has taught community development at the college level for ten years, and serves as town meeting moderator in Middlesex, Vermont.

Susan McCormack works side by side with organizations and communities to engage people in productive conversations that lead to change. She serves as a Senior Associate with Everyday Democracy and the Community Liaison for Creating Community Solutions, part of the National Dialogue on Mental health. She recently co-coordinated the Heart & Soul of Essex, a two year citizen led initiative funded by the Orton Family Foundation to identify shared community values, foster collaboration among two linked municipalities and increase civic participation.

Essex Governance Group Final Report

February, 2015

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1. Essex Governance Group (EGG) Report: Executive Summary

In fall, 2014, the Essex Government Group explored with residents ways Essex can continue to improve civic engagement and governance, with a focus on budget decision-making and voting. Through a community-wide survey and public forum, EGG identified a number of strong themes. EGG findings and recommendations are briefly summarized below. For more information please go to www.heartandsoul.org

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Participants in EGG forum and survey are open to creating a new model for local democratic decision making, choosing the elements that work best for Essex.

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Each spring, Town residents vote three separate times (Village residents five times). Citizens would like all votes on local issues to occur on the same day.

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B. Empower Neighborhoods

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C. Switch to Enhanced Town Meeting / Australian Ballot Hybrid

Enhance Town Meeting with improved participation options. Citizens would continue to have the power to amend the budget unless Town Meeting attendance is below a specific level. The final budget would be voted by Australian ballot 45 days after Town Meeting. Additional changes: ballot would include a survey for citizen comment; Town Meeting date would be changed so as not to coincide with school break.

D. Institute Same-Day Voting

Create a staged plan to combine voting dates, and combine Town/Village Meeting dates.

2. Introduction

Essex Governance Group: How We Got Here

The Essex Governance Group (EGG) is a project supported by the Town of Essex, Heart & Soul of Essex, and the Orton Family Foundation.

The project was initiated in summer, 2014, when a group of residents concerned about low turnout at Town and Village annual meetings approached the Town Selectboard and Village Trustees about moving budget approval from the traditional Town/Village Meeting format to Australian ballot (ballot-box voting). This group, calling itself “Budget to Ballot” (B2B) pointed out that median voter turnout at Town Meeting since 2005 is 1.5% of registered voters (it’s 1.9% for Village Meeting). Median voter turnout for Australian ballot voting after Town Meeting during this same period was 8.9% (8.3% for the Village). The group requested that the Selectboard help Essex move toward a combined town meeting/Australian ballot system (with a proposed budget figure determined at town meeting, and final approval of budget decided by Australian ballot), and that the Towns’ ballot voting and the three Town-related school budget votes all occur on the same date.

Both the Selectboard and the Trustees agreed that the issues raised by B2B were important, and that’s when Heart & Soul of Essex was brought on board.

Heart & Soul of Essex, a multi-year community effort supported by the Orton Family Foundation, has the goals of engaging community members in dialogue, creating a vision based on what people are saying, and activating community members to take action towards that vision. During Essex’s two-year Heart & Soul community planning process, “Community Connections” emerged as one of six core values of Essex. Heart and Soul participants have extensive experience convening community conversations, and agreed to help engage the community on this question. With funding from the Town of Essex, Heart & Soul of Essex and the Orton Family Foundation, facilitators Susan Clark and Susan McCormack were hired to co-facilitate the effort.

Heart & Soul members joined with members of the B2B group, town and village officials, and interested residents to carry out this work. The newly formed Essex Governance Group (EGG) met throughout the fall to plan and implement a community exploration about decision-making and voting on the budget in Essex. The exploration included a community-wide survey and forum. This report summarizes the results of those efforts.

EGG Report Scope

EGG's findings and recommendations are offered with the understanding of the report's scope and limitations.

- *Time Frame:* The group was charged with completing its work within a four-month time-frame, including planning and carrying out the group's goals and activities, and processing and reporting findings. Limitations of both time and staffing necessarily circumscribed the project's scope.
- *Research Tools:* The EGG Survey and Forum participants were self-selected and likely represented more highly engaged citizens (from all perspectives). While the Survey Monkey tool protects against multiple responses from the same computer, there is no way of knowing whether anyone repeated the survey using multiple devices. Not surprisingly, the online Survey had over seven times the participation of the Forum (450 compared with approximately 60). Even given these limitations, the thoughtful comments recorded through both the Survey and Forum reveal important patterns and offer valuable insights about residents' concerns.
- *Town and Village:* In most cases, the EGG research did not differentiate between citizens' experience in the Town and the Village. While some survey comments reflected specific feelings about Town and Village governance, most data was collected about "Essex" in general.
- *Citizen Focus:* Just as the 6/2014 Morris and Carr "Shared Services" Assessment focused on an internal (staff) perspective, EGG's work focused on Essex residents at large. EGG benefitted from active participation by the Selectboard, Village Trustees and even one School Board member, and the facilitators were also grateful for valuable interviews with the Town/Village Manager, Assistant Manager, and Town Clerk. While the EGG project did not have the capacity to conduct interviews with additional Town and Village staff, this report is offered with appreciation for the knowledge and professionalism of both the Town and Village staff. We hope that through its emphasis on citizen collaboration, this report will support and enhance their important work.
- *Process:* EGG participants agreed on a decision-making protocol, and decisions were made by this protocol. Given their busy lives, not all participants were able to attend all meetings; however, all meetings were reported via email so those who could not attend could weigh in on decisions. The EGG report is the best representation of the group's consensus the facilitators could create given these limitations.

3. Context: “What Time Is It”?

Bill Grace of the Center for Ethical Leadership notes that when working for positive change, it is important to ask “What time is it?” What is the context in which we find ourselves, and what factors will affect our work?

What time is it in American communities?

The big picture is important. Across the U.S., in the aftermath of the “Great Recession,” citizens are struggling economically. Simultaneously they are also struggling democratically, with public confidence in government hitting all-time lows. As federal programs are cut, communities are trying to determine how to do more with less—less money, and less of the citizen confidence they’ve long relied on.

At the same time, citizens’ expectations about decision-making are rapidly changing. Today’s citizens are web-savvy, and possess an extraordinary ability to research issues and self-organize more effectively than at any point in history. The Internet and the “Open Source Revolution” have created dramatic changes in both the business and non-profit worlds, and citizens are now developing a different view of leadership in the public sphere as well. Reliance on “experts” is giving way to decentralized, bottom-up strategies that reward innovation and information sharing. Increasingly, citizens expect to be treated as collaborators, and appreciate systems that look less like a hierarchy and more like a wiki.

The answer emerging in many communities—and now being brought forward as “best practice” by leaders in public administration—is to use creative methods for engaging citizens in decision making.

The National League of Cities represents 19,000 cities, towns and villages across the U.S.; at its recent annual conference, fully one-third of its “Leadership Training” workshops involved “public engagement.” The International City/County Management Association conference recently featured an entire track on “engaging citizens,” and a third of their university workshops related to public engagement. And at the 2012 American Society for Public Administration conference, the major gathering of all public administration schools in the country, the conference theme was “Redefining Public Service through Civic Engagement.”

Through a combination of process tools (outreach, more creative meeting structures, targeted power sharing, etc.) and technical tools (online communication, increased access to information), communities are redefining their local democracy for the 21st Century.

Essex, like every other community, must find the unique recipe that suits it best.

What time is it in Essex?

Essex finds itself in a time of significant change. EGG members created a list of some of the activities affecting citizens in Essex—some positive, some deeply challenging.

- **Shared Services:** The 6/2014 Morris & Carr Shared Services Report suggested a number of significant changes to the way the Town and Village work. Town and Village leaders and staff are working hard to take appropriate action, most immediately in the area of Public Works. Meanwhile, some citizens are expressing concerns about what the changes will mean (“is it a pseudo-merger?”). They wonder how to have a voice in the process.
- **Budget Hits:** The 2010 Census showed that incomes in some neighborhoods dropped 10%, and many Essex residents are expressing concerns about taxes and the cost of living. At the same time, Essex Rescue, the VNA and Winooski Valley Park District are just a few of the organizations likely to ask for increased financial support from the community.
- **Significant development:** Residents will experience the complications of construction in the next several years including the Crescent Connector (federal project), repaving Route 15 (state project), bike lane/sidewalk expansion on Pearl Street, and a new bike path by the train station. The Town has set aside \$1.5 million to renovate 81 Main Street. In the private sector, there will be construction of a major new building at 5 Corners, and new housing developments happening outside the Village with implications for traffic, town character open space, schools, etc.
- **School system concerns:** Like other Vermont communities, Essex is facing changing demographics and rising per-pupil costs. A study of consolidated governance is being discussed.
- **IBM / Global Foundries:** Residents are waiting to see what changes may occur with the shift in this major local employer.
- **Planning:** Village officials, with assistance of Heart & Soul of Essex and urban designer Julie Campoli, are carrying out “Design Five Corners,” a strategic planning effort to enhance the physical quality and economic vitality of Essex Junction’s Village Core.
- **Heart & Soul:** The Essex Heart & Soul process recently wrapped up its two-year visioning process. Essex has an immediate opportunity to build on this work, as well as take advantage of the citizen-facilitators trained through Heart & Soul. The Heart & Soul Board and participants are working to maintain momentum, and determine how best to implement the vision that Essex residents communicated.

- **Community Calendar:** One of the newest projects of Heart & Soul is an online centralized calendar of all community events. Ideally this will help all sectors plan and communicate more effectively. www.essexcalendar.org

It is in this complex environment that the Essex Governance Group launched its work.

4) Essex Governance Group: Purpose and Process

Essex Governance Group participants determined the following priorities:

EGG Purpose

Engage people in a conversation about ways Essex can continue to improve civic engagement and governance.

EGG Goals

1. LEARN what motivates and/or prevents people from participating
2. INFORM people about Essex's current governance system
3. GATHER ideas from people about potential improvements
3. CREATE a set of recommendations to help the community improve governance and increase civic participation

EGG Scope / Focus

- Form of town meeting & village meeting (e.g traditional floor meeting, representative town meeting, hybrid, etc.)
- Voting options for town and village budgets and other issues (e.g. floor vote, Australian ballot)
- Ways to increase informed civic engagement in town

Note: The group agreed that while the following topics may arise in our discussions and we must understand the relationship between these and our work, the group would *not* focus on:

- Town-Village merger
- School governance and funding structure
- Forms of governance outside of town/village structure (city, etc.)

EGG Timeline

1. Convene organizing committee - August 2014
2. Planning - June through early September 2014
3. Outreach - August thru October 2014
4. Conversation - late October 2014
5. Synthesis - November 2014
6. Report due - end of year 2014

EGG Proposed Outcomes

1. Deepen citizen engagement and understanding around governance
2. Activate citizens to participate in the civic life of Essex
3. Identify top priorities for improvements in governance and/or civic participation
4. Report back to the community (elected officials and the public) with a set of recommendations for improving governance and/or civic participation in Essex

EGG Research

In order to help the community have an informed discussion, and for use by the Town/Village on their websites and other citizen education, EGG participants researched the following:

1. Voting statistics
 - Essex voting rates for national elections vs. other VT communities
 - Percentage of voters who vote in local ballot-box elections in Essex vs. comparable places
 - Essex voting on national issues vs. local Australian ballot voting
2. Essex Voting schedule
3. Structure of municipal bodies in town/village/school systems
4. Budget overview
5. Citizen opportunities to participate in decision-making
6. A Brief History of Essex's Government (why it's set up with Village, Town)
7. Discussion materials on Town Meeting, Australian Ballot, Representative Town Meeting, NH hybrid system

Outreach Tools

1. Community-Wide Survey

EGG issued an online survey during October. Over 450 residents of Essex Town and Village participated in the survey, and provided a great deal of information about current voting and civic engagement.

Survey Goals:

- Learn what motivates and prevents people from participating
- Assess people's level of interest in governance issues
- Identify community values/priorities regarding governance and civic participation

2. Community Forum

On Saturday, November 8 EGG hosted an interactive "Essex Governance and You" community forum (noon-4:00). It was attended by about 60 leaders and residents from both the Town and Village.

Forum Goals:

- Share and discuss the results of the community survey

- Identify key priorities and generate suggestions to strengthen civic participation/community voice
- Inform people about Essex's current governance model and share stories about other governance models
- Gather feedback about potential governance changes

Forum Process: Led by facilitators Susan Clark and Susan McCormack, the Forum was a chance for EGG members to share and discuss the results of the survey with the community. Forum participants also learned about current governance in the Town and the Village, and then spent time weighing the benefits and challenges of four different voting methods: Town Meeting and Australian Ballot, which are currently in use in Essex; Representative Town Meeting, which is used in Brattleboro, VT and in Massachusetts; and a Meeting-Ballot Hybrid approach used in New Hampshire ("SB2"). (See Appendix "Four Approaches" document.) After working in small groups, the participants came together and shared their favorite ideas for encouraging more citizen participation in local voting. Based on the survey results, they also brainstormed ways to build on Essex's high level of community mindedness, and ways to increase transparency in municipal government.

5) Essex Democracy: Data and Infographics

The Essex Governance Group asked itself, “What do people need to know in order to have a productive conversation about Essex governance?” Below are highlights from the Nov. 8 “Essex Democracy and You” forum presentation answering this question.

“If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday.” Pearl Buck

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ESSEX TOWN AND ESSEX JUNCTION....

HOW WE CAME TO BE.



June 7, 1763—Town of Essex, a 36 square mile area, was chartered by Gov. Wentworth of NH Province by power granted to him by King George III.



1783—Permanent settlement in Essex began.



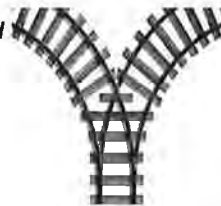
1786—First Town Meeting with a population of 772 (26 families). Citizens voted to create a tax to repair the roads.

1801—School districts formed; Village area named School District #1 (aka “Hubbells Falls School District”)



1850— Railroad arrived, known as Painesville (named in honor of Gov. Paine), which subsequently created greater population density.

1853—Vermont Central Railroad and Vermont/Canada Railroad “junctioned” its lines.



1862—Railroad station officially re-named Essex Junction



1893 - School District #1 (area of 4.6 sq. miles around the train station) added another layer of government, in addition to the Town government, by legislative approval known as the Village of Essex Junction for “voluntary taxation with added necessary services of a densely populated area” (Frank Bent, 1963). Owners of less developed farmland did not have to pay for the services they didn’t need. This taxation structure has been in place ever since.

(Fig. 1)

History and Demographics

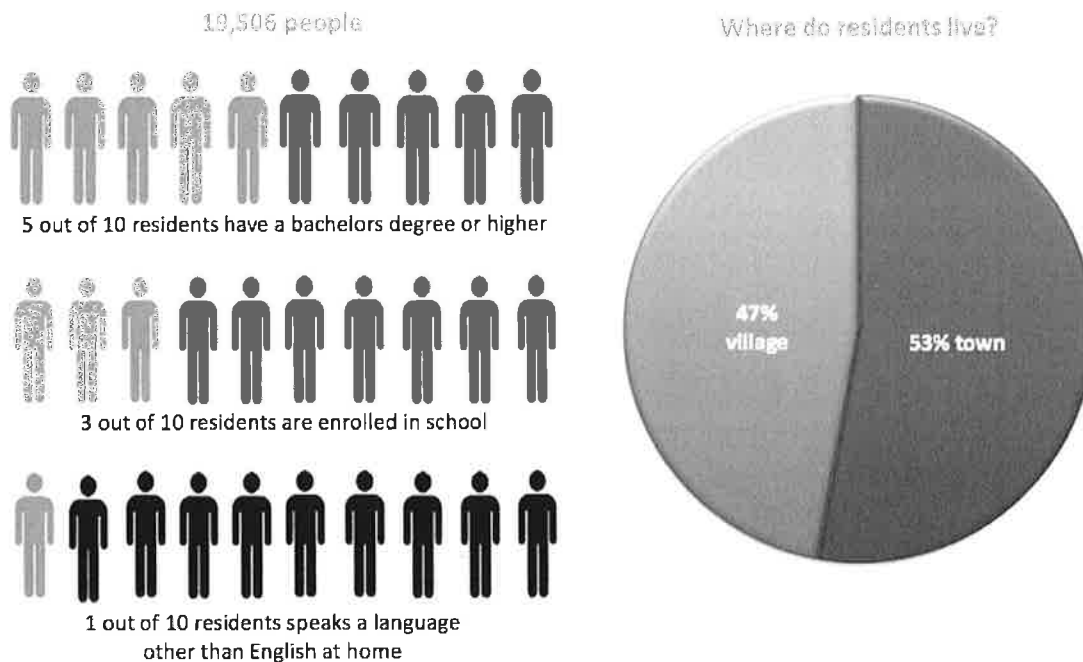
We began with the basics, offering a brief history of the Town/Village relationship (Fig. 1, above). We also included a map of Essex that indicated the boundaries of the Village and Town, reminding participants that people who are residents of the Village are also residents of the Town.

Essex's population is now close to 20,000, with a well-educated and increasingly diverse citizenry split almost evenly between Village and Town (Fig. 2, below).

WE ARE ESSEX



ESSEX IS THE STATE'S 2nd LARGEST TOWN AND IS MORE EDUCATED AND DIVERSE THAN VT AS A WHOLE.



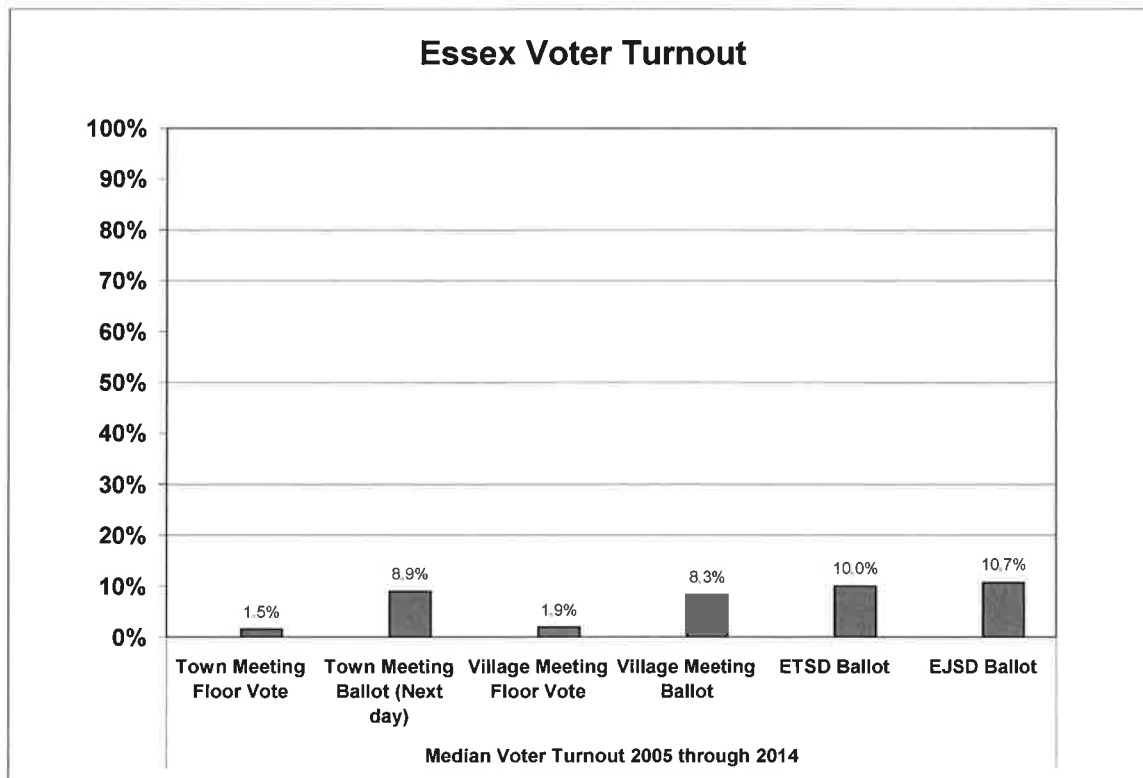
(Fig. 2).

Town Meeting and Ballot-Box Voting

Figure 3 (below) shows the range of Essex voter turn-out on local issues.

- Essex's votes on the Town and Village budgets occur at town meeting, face-to-face deliberative gatherings. The median voter turnout for the Town Meeting between 2006-2014 was 1.5%. At the Village Meeting, the median turnout was 1.9%.

- Essex also votes on some Town and Village issues by Australian ballot. The median voter turnout between 2006-2014 for these ballot-box votes was 8.9% (Town) and 8.3% (Village).
- Essex votes on school budgets by Australian ballot. The median voter turnout between 2006-2014 for these ballot-box votes was 10% (Essex Town School District) and 10.7% (Essex Junction School District).



(Fig. 3)

Essex's Numbers in Perspective

It is important to look at Essex's voting data in perspective.

- Even in the important and exhaustively publicized U.S. presidential elections, across the country voter turnout hovers at about 55% of eligible voters. Meanwhile, turnout is even lower on local issues: in elections for city council, mayors, and local bond issues across the country, participation seldom exceeds 25%, and is often dramatically lower—in the single digits.

- Research on Vermont's traditional, face-to-face town meetings (see *Real Democracy* by Frank Bryan) reveals two key facts about town meeting attendance, both of which are relevant to Essex:

Size matters. Vermont is the second most rural state in the nation, with well over half of its population living in towns of under 2,500. In small towns, town meeting attendance often reaches 30% or higher. However, across Vermont, town meeting consistently achieves higher per capita turnout in small towns than large ones. Recent data from meetings held between 1999–2011 shows town meeting attendance statewide averaged 13.1 percent, and analysis shows that increasing town size accounts for over half of the decline in town meeting attendance since 1970.

Essex is the largest town in Vermont still to govern through a traditional floor meeting.

Issues matter. The “Essex Voter Turnout” chart shows median attendance, which means that half the meetings have above this attendance, half below. Median (rather than mean) attendance is helpful because it doesn’t skew the number by averaging in unusual highs or lows in attendance. However, it is important to note that like every other town, Essex does see spikes in attendance.

For instance, in 2010 in the Village, attendance more than doubled with 4.2% coming out for that meeting. In 2005, the Essex Town School District ballot box voting spiked to 16.5% and the Essex Jct. School District had over a 24% turnout. In 2008, almost 53% of the Towns’ registered voters turned out to vote on the Town Meeting ballot. If Essex follows the patterns of other Vermont towns, then it was a controversial or especially interesting or compelling issue that drew the larger number of voters to participate. This is useful information when considering how to improve public engagement.

How does Essex’s turnout compare with other towns?

Fig. 4 (below) shows that Essex voter turnout for *national elections* in November compares favorably with that of other cities and towns in the area.

In contrast, Fig 5 shows Essex’s ballot-box voting on *local issues* compared with other Vermont towns. Knowing that population can affect participation, EGG chose the largest communities in Vermont for comparative data. The Chittenden County town of Shelburne (18th largest) is also included for comparison.

As this chart shows, Essex’s ballot box voting on local issues is comparatively low. This seems to indicate that Essex’s town meeting attendance is not the only issue. Even when voting by ballot, Essex has room for improvement in engaging citizens in local issues.

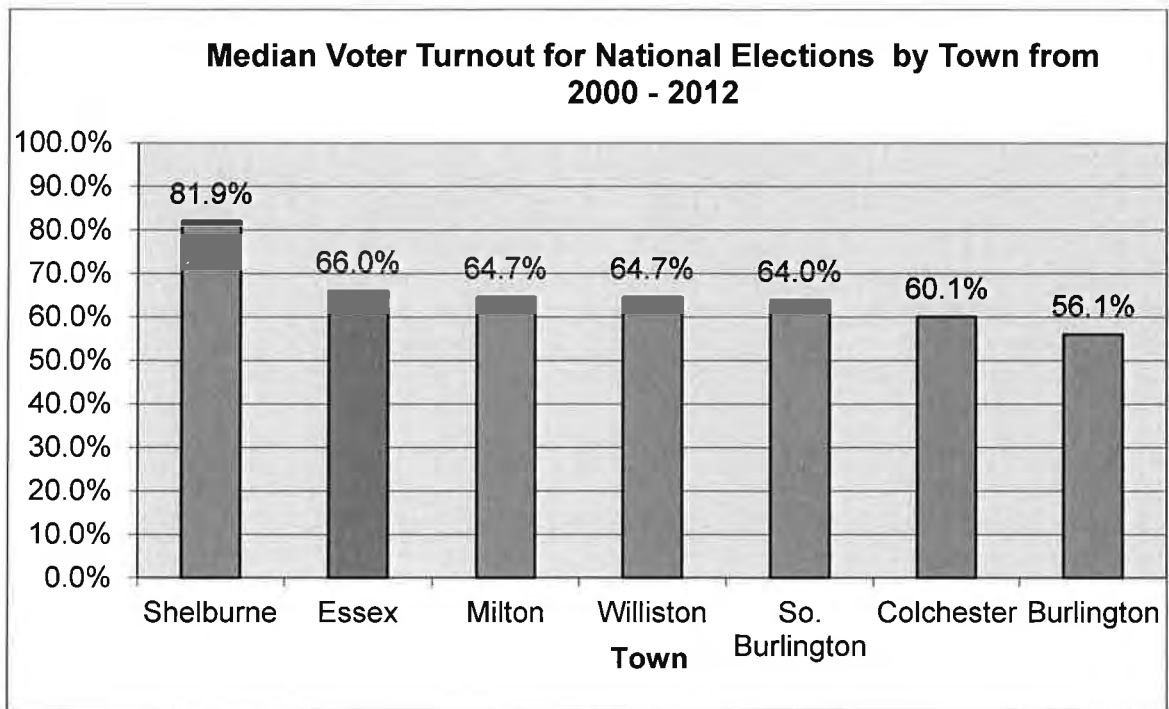


Fig. 4

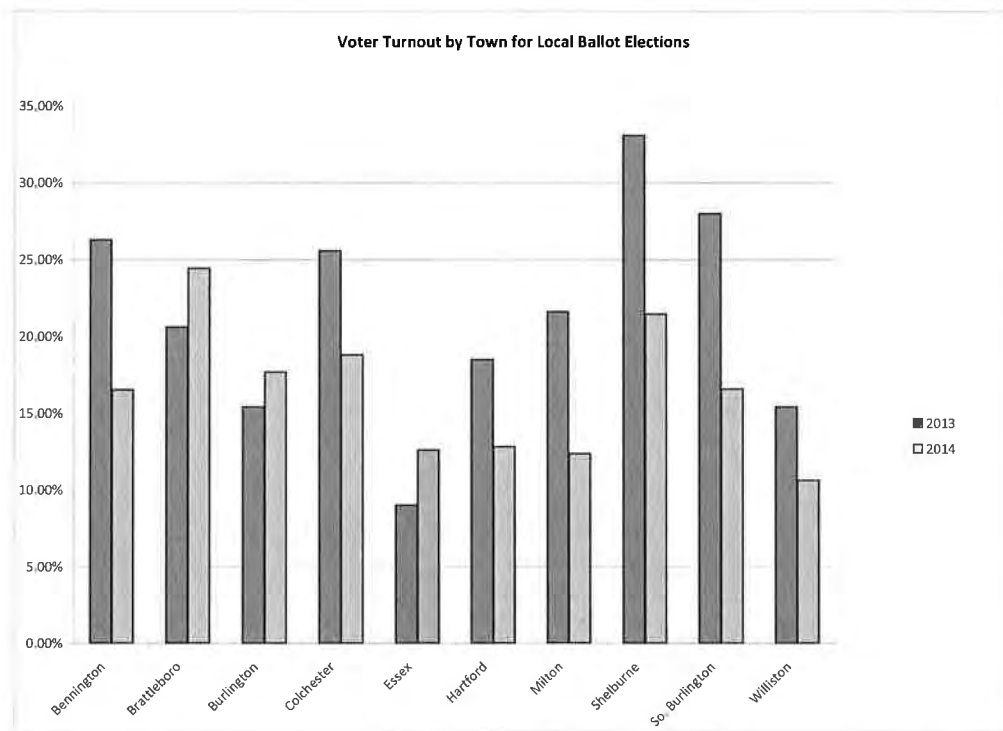


Fig. 5

The Role of the Essex Voter in Local Budget Decisions

Figure 6 (below) shows the two key roles for Essex voters in local budget decision:

- Electing the Selectboard and Village Trustees, who, in their executive branch roles, work with the staff to propose a budget; and
- Deliberating on, potentially amending, and voting on the budget at Town or Village Meeting. In this role citizens are, on issues of governance and finance, the legislative branch of local government.

In addition, citizens can participate in a range of ways including serving on committees, attending public meetings, and contacting local officials.

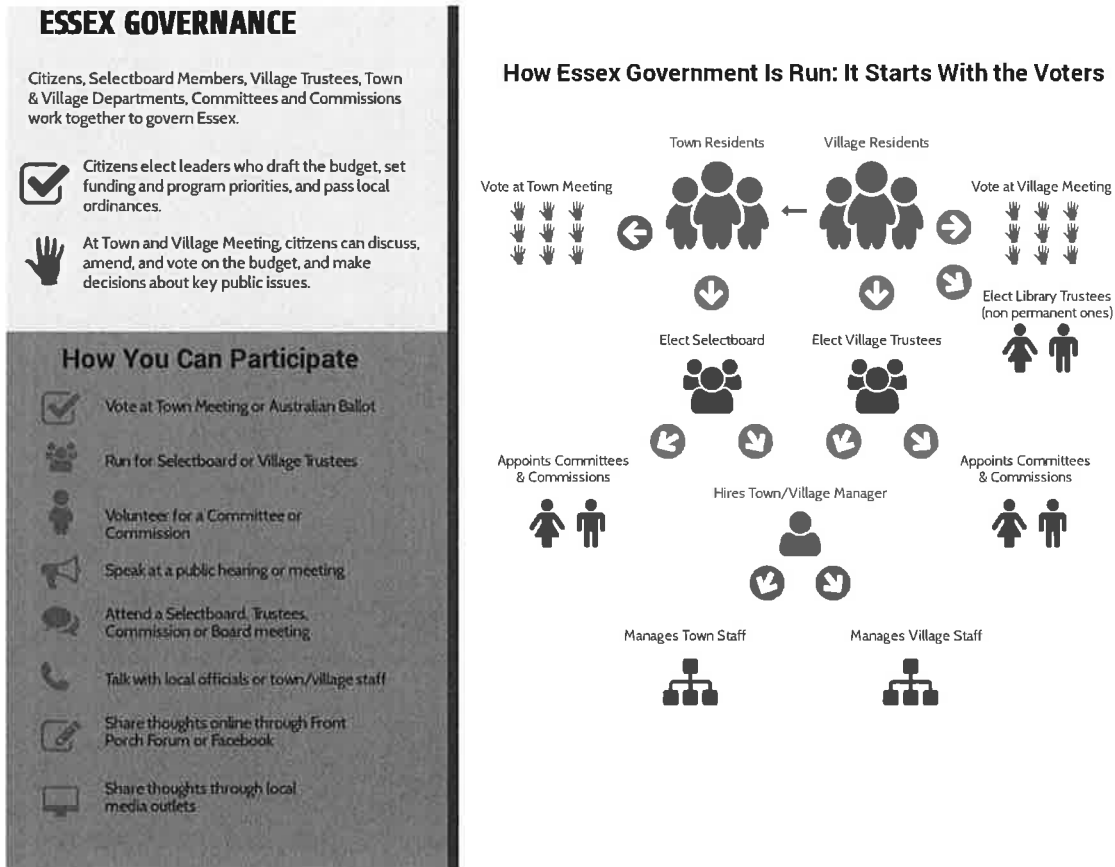


Fig. 6

Figure 7 (below) offers additional information on Essex voting. Of particular note, Essex has an unusually high number of local votes each spring. Including Town Meeting and Village Meeting, Essex residents currently vote on five separate budgets: Town Municipal; Village Municipal; Village Schools (K-8); Town Schools (K-8); and Essex High School and Center for Technology–Essex (9-12)—a total of three votes for Town residents, five for Village residents.

Essex votes on over 80% of local spending by ballot.

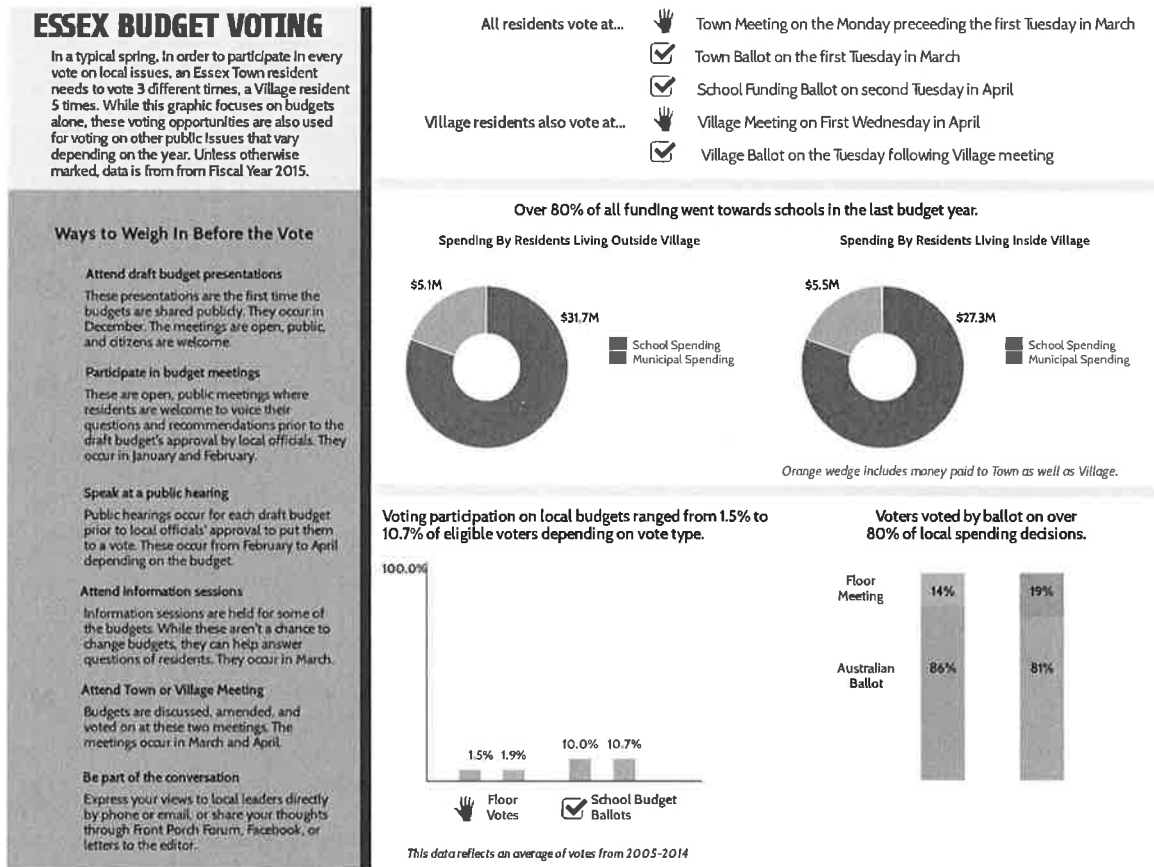


Fig. 7

Does Essex's system present any barriers to voting and participation? To learn what motivates and prevents people from participating, assess people's level of interest in governance issues, and to identify community priorities regarding governance and civic participation, EGG launched a community-wide survey about local democracy.

6) EGG Survey

Survey Highlights

1. Over 450 Essex residents answered the survey.
2. Results indicate that respondents participate in our community and feel local decisions are important.
3. Even among this engaged group, many don't attend town meeting or vote in local elections.
4. Respondents identified several barriers to participating.
5. Several strong themes emerged, including the desire for more collaboration, transparency and inclusion.

Figure 8 depicts key findings from the EGG Survey.

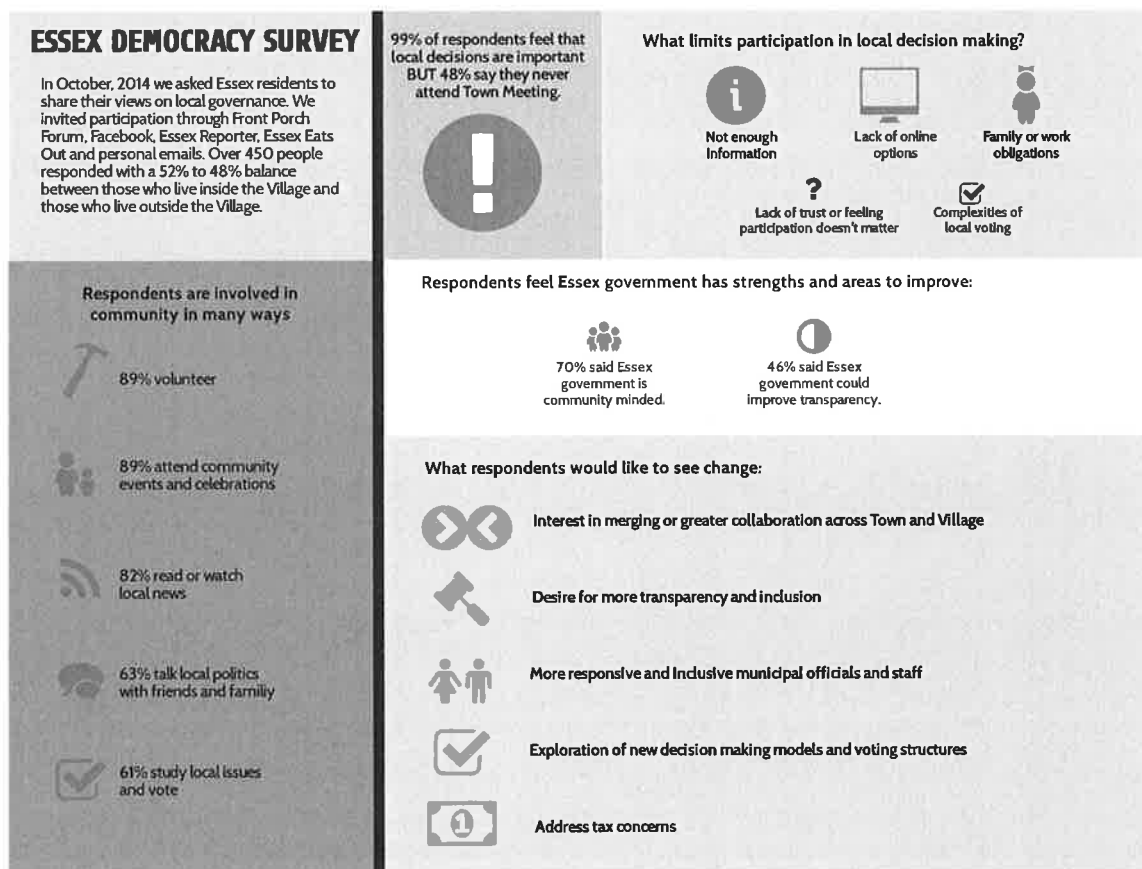


Fig. 8

Detailed Survey Findings

1. Over 450 Essex residents answered the survey.

- This online survey was fielded between October 6-26, 2014.
- It was publicized through Front Porch Forum, Facebook, personal e-mails from EGG committee and their networks, posters, and the *Essex Reporter*. Volunteers also attended Essex Eats Out and provided paper copies.
- 456 people filled out the survey.
- Respondents were self-selected, providing a non-scientific “snapshot” of community.
- Participation was representative across Town and Village (47% and 51%)
- Most respondents were between the ages of 35-64 (over 70 %). There were 48 respondents under age 35 (12%), and 61 over age 65 (15%).
- More women than men filled out survey (59% women, 39 % men).
- 92% identified as white - 4% people of color.
- Most people who filled out the survey had an income between \$50,000 and \$125,000 (56%). 16% had income under \$50,000.
- 6% of survey respondents reported that they had graduated from high school, 34% graduated from college, 41% graduated from graduate school.

2. Respondents do participate in our community, and feel local decisions are important.

- A strong majority of respondents are engaged with local issues (not surprising since this was a self-selected group). 89% volunteer, 82% read or watch local news. A majority of people (over 60%) talk local politics and study local issues
 - Respondents said they want to be informed and shape community decisions. They feel a sense of responsibility to the community.
 - Respondents are more likely to participate in informal ways (volunteering, celebrations, community meetings) rather than formal ways (serving on a board, attending town meeting, voting).
 - 99% of respondents feel that local decisions are somewhat or very important.
 - Respondents seem more motivated by their caring about the community (83%) and feeling of responsibility towards the community (68%), than by a desire to restrain spending (22%) or keep tabs on local officials (37%).
 - 40% say there are no barriers to participation (which indicates that 60% perceive some barriers).

3. Even among this engaged group, many don't attend town meeting or vote in local elections.

- 48% say they never attend town meeting.
 - People who never go to town meeting cite similar barriers to people who sometimes or always go to town meeting.
 - The majority of people who never go to town meeting do volunteer (70%) but at a lower rate than people who attend town meeting (89%)
- Respondents who never go to town meeting vote **somewhat less** in national elections than those who attend town meeting (85% sometimes or always vs. 96% sometimes or always).
- Respondents who never go to town meeting vote **a lot less** in local elections (57% sometimes or always vote vs. 94% sometimes or always vote).
- Respondents who never go to town meeting feel much less sense of responsibility for community than those who do attend (55% vs. 80%).
- This is especially true for young people (ages 18 - 34). Young people participating in the survey express similar motivations and barriers to participation as all ages, with a few differences:
 - The opportunity to shape the future is a stronger motivator for young people than for all ages (77% vs. 58%).
 - Lack of information and online opportunities is a bigger barrier for young people (info. 54% vs. 32%).
 - Two places where there are big gaps in participation between young people and everyone else is voting and going to town meeting.
 - 28% of young people say they study issues and vote vs. 60% of all respondents.
 - 78% young people never attend town meeting vs. 48% of all respondents.

4. Respondents identified several barriers to participating.

(Respondents could choose as many as applied, so percentages do not add up to 100%)

- No barriers (40%)
- Lack of information (32%)
- Lack of online opportunities to participate (23%)
- Some people express lack of trust and feeling that participation won't make a difference (11% and 13%)

- Multiple votes and confusion about voting was a barrier for some but not many (10% or under)

5. Several strong themes emerged, including the desire for more collaboration, transparency and inclusion.

- Two values stood out well above the others when respondents were asked what local government does well, and where there is most need for improvement:
 - 70% of respondents say “Community minded” is a strong value of local government
 - 46% say “Transparency” is the area most in need of improvement
- When asked in an open-ended question what change people would most like to see, five key ideas show up in the data
 - **A) Interest in merger and/or more collaboration (96 mentions)**
 - merge town and village
 - increase collaboration
 - improve planning processes
 - **B) Desire for more transparency and inclusion (48 mentions)**
 - Communication & Engagement
 - More proactive and innovative ways to share information, including the use of technology and online platforms
 - More opportunities for shared decision-making
 - More opportunities to leverage the skills and expertise of community members
 - **C) More responsive and inclusive leadership (23 mentions)**
 - Concerns that elected, appointed officials and/or staff may have priorities that are not aligned with the community
 - Sense that leaders are not listening or responsive to the diversity of opinions and voices in the community
 - **D) Exploration of new decision making models and voting structures (34 mentions)**
 - suggestions for different models of governance
 - interest in moving voting to Australian ballot along with comments about streamlining voting processes
 - **E) Address tax concerns (24 mentions)**
 - Interest in lowering taxes
 - Streamline and unify town and village as a way to lower taxes

While all of these results are worthy of attention, only the middle three were within EGG's defined scope of work. The November 8th forum provided an opportunity to discuss these key priorities:

- Desire for more transparency, inclusion and responsive leadership
- Interest in new models of decision making & voting structures (i.e. the four approaches to town meeting voting; see Appendix).

7. EGG Findings

The following is a summary of EGG's combined findings from the October Survey and November 8 Forum.

1. More Effective Communication is Needed

Communication is the most prominent strand running through the Essex Governance Group's findings.

When identifying barriers to participation in Essex, survey respondents named "lack of information" most often (32%), and "lack of online opportunities to participate" second most often (23%). Even though 82% of survey respondents said they read or watch local news, many did not feel they were getting the information they wanted in order to participate.

When respondents were asked about how government most needs to improve, "Transparency" was named most often (46%).

At the Nov. 8 EGG Forum, small-table discussions were asked to shed more light on the meaning of "Transparency" in Essex. A number of important themes emerged, as discussed below. The theme of communication re-emerged repeatedly under other topics throughout Forum discussions.

Participants identified several key aspects of communication needs:

A. Explicit Communication

Participants asked for more accurate, clear, and open communication. This area was identified separately by all six small groups. Examples included timely and clear explanation on government minutes and agendas so that a person who did not attend the meeting would understand what happened; clearer numbers around total impact of tax bills; and clarity around how citizens can access information.

B. Proactive Communication

Participants at all six tables used terms like "intentional outreach," "finding ways to connect with citizens," and "being forthright with significant changes in advance." At the end of the Forum, the small groups were asked for their "top ideas," and three fell into this category, asking leaders to *go out to the people* with new, innovative outreach.

C. Online Communication, Open Data

It is no surprise that Essex, long-time home of IBM, is also home to many tech-savvy citizens with high expectations for online communication. All six tables named this as a priority. Four of the groups' "top ideas" called for a stronger web presence.

Participants indicated interest in all of Essex's data being open to the public, with two "top ideas" naming Burlington's Open Data Initiative as a model. Of the two Forum

participants who offered ideas of “what I’d like to do now,” one volunteered to host a conversation about how to strengthen Essex’s online communications.

D. And Beyond Online

Participants expressed concern that government reach out in other ways (not all residents use the internet). Strengthening collaboration with the media was mentioned. Some noted that local press coverage needs improvement.

E. Direct Communication with Leaders, Accountability

Participants value responsiveness: the ability to communicate one-on one with their leaders, and for town officials and staff to provide information directly to citizens. This was named as an advantage of traditional town meeting, the hybrid model, and representative town meeting, and a disadvantage of ballot-box voting. They also called for accountability measures, such as tracking of suggestions and complaints to ensure that communication is honored.

F. Active Listening: Responsive, Respectful, Engaged Communication

Both leaders and citizens value productive two-way engagement. Participating leaders described the value of “knowing our constituents”; meanwhile, citizens asked for “open-minded listening,” and for leaders to be “receptive to ideas and input from community.”

2. Inclusion is Critical

The majority of survey respondents (almost 60%) indicated that they felt barriers to participation in local elections and decision making.

As stated above, the most often-cited barriers related to communication. Many survey respondents also cited family or work obligations as limiting their participation. Respondents indicated a mix of other reasons, including not feeling their participation matters, not trusting the system, and confusion about voting.

Those who participated in the Forum expressed strong concerns about the **inclusiveness** of Essex’s system. All six tables listed multiple issues regarding inclusion, with a heavy emphasis on the drawbacks of town meeting and the relative merits of Australian ballot voting, including parallel advantages of the hybrid option since it includes Australian ballot. Participants expressed concerns about intimidation at town meeting due to complicated rules/procedures, TV cameras, and loud or impolite people. They cited a variety of advantages offered by Australian ballot including absentee ballot, voting by mail, and 12-hour voting.

Participants voiced worries about **low numbers** in both voter turnout and meeting participation. Some expressed concern that the hybrid method (SB2) would depress town meeting turnout even further.

Participants also called for more **demographic diversity** in participation, including socio-economic, cultural, geographic, and age diversity. Youth was of particular concern. The EGG Survey revealed that young respondents (ages 18-34) were significantly less likely to vote and attend town meeting than older residents. One Forum group's "top idea" was to help youth become more involved, engaged and informed.

3. High-Quality, Informed Decision Making is Greatly Valued

In addition to ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to participate and vote, Forum participants emphasized that decision-making processes must be of high quality.

The advantages of **deliberative decision making** were raised at all six tables. Traditional town meeting was especially named as offering the opportunity to exchange ideas, hear new opinions, and correct misinformation. However, town meeting was also criticized as potentially causing hasty decision making. Participants expressed some frustration with town meeting management.

Another key element identified at all Forum tables, in keeping with earlier concerns about communication, is the need for **informed and engaged voters** and citizen education. Informed participation was cited as an advantage of town meeting and representative town meeting, while participants bemoaned the lack of participation at informational meetings before Australian ballot voting. They cited the lag-time between discussion and voting as a potential advantage of the hybrid method.

High-quality decision making also means balanced participation, and all tables mentioned uneasiness with the possibility that **special interest groups** could hijack a process.

In another commentary on the importance of methodology, participants saw the choice of decision-making models as a potential element in **building community** (cited as an advantage of town meeting not seen with Australian ballot), or in dividing it (representative town meeting's need for new districts was seen as potentially fractious).

Most tables indicated that a key element of community-minded governance is **balance**: weighing the desires of the few with the needs of the whole, and making decisions based on the greatest long-term good.

Efficiency was also a concern, with most tables naming **costly re-votes** as a down-side to Australian ballot.

4. Essex Could Create its Own Model

A significant number of Forum comments centered on alternative models for democratic engagement.

Of particular interest was the idea of representing citizens at the neighborhood level. Most tables named creating stronger neighborhoods, grassroots efforts or “hyper-local” emphasis as an advantage of the representative town meeting model. Two of the six tables named **Neighborhood Assemblies** such as those used in Burlington as one of their “Top Ideas.”

Most tables suggested **creative improvements** in the existing system. One group wondered whether instead of focusing on dramatic changes in voting, Essex should improve the existing system through technology and other participatory techniques. Another noted that the town selectboard is already making improvements but it will take time to see changes.

Other suggestions included:

- Reducing re-votes (for instance, by having a “no” vote automatically revert to the current budget).
- Improving town meeting participation by changing the time of town meeting, issuing specific invitations, and otherwise reducing barriers.
- One “Top Idea” was using technology (e.g. Skype) to allow remote meeting attendance/participation.
- Providing a way for voters to give specific feedback to leaders after ballot-box voting. One group’s “Top Idea” was to allow citizens to give budget feedback by incorporating a survey into the ballot.

All six tables named two-way communication between municipal leaders/staff and residents as an important **alternative to formal hearings/meetings**. “Build bridges, not walls” was one comment; another was “lots of avenues for two-way communication in a user-friendly form.” Several groups called for more topical community forums such as those hosted by Heart and Soul. (In Forum evaluations, when asked “How helpful would it be to have more of these kinds of community conversations in Essex?” 81% of respondents said that it would be “helpful” or “extremely helpful.”)

Non-formal participation is an important element not only of community, but what local government means to citizens. When asked “how do you participate in our community,” survey respondents were more likely to participate in informal ways (volunteering, celebrations) than in formal ways (e.g. serving on boards).

However, when Forum participants were asked “What does government being community minded mean to you?” almost all groups named support of non-formal activities such as grassroots organizations, block parties, Farmer’s Market, and concerts. For many citizens, the border between informal “community” and formal “government” is fuzzy; these comments indicate that each side of the line can benefit from the energy of the other.

Four comments wondered whether Essex should consider a **city form of government**, with one group naming neighborhood assemblies reporting to a Mayor as a “top idea.”

5. Residents Value the Power and Immediacy of Direct Democracy

All six tables named **citizens' direct democratic power** as an advantage of traditional town meeting, such as the ability to amend. "Direct democracy: we are the legislators" was a repeated sentiment, and the lack of amendment power was cited as a downside of Australian ballot. "Adding a layer" between voters and their decision making was seen as a negative element of representative town meeting, with a fear of centralizing power to an elite few. Several named Vermont's long local tradition as a positive element of town meeting. At the same time, some complained that citizen power is actually *not strong enough* at town meeting; it's "hard to make real changes," and "amendment power is limited."

Most tables appreciated the **immediacy** of town meeting. "The work is done when the meeting is done" was a common sentiment. In contrast, the hybrid model creates a two-step process, and with Australian ballot, "a no-vote means a revote."

6. Same Day Voting, and a Call for Simplicity

In a typical spring in order to participate in every local vote, Town resident need to vote three different times, and Village residents, five times. Survey results indicated that while it wasn't the top concern, the complexities of voting were a barrier to participation. At the Forum, four tables offered comments indicating their interest in **same-day voting**. Two groups named same-day voting as one of their "Top Ideas."

Simplicity and clarity was a common thread in other areas, seen especially as an advantage of ballot-box voting. One group's "Top Idea" was "Simplify: Governance, communication, education (of municipal issues, budgets)."

All six tables expressed some trepidation about the **implementation** of one or more of the new decision-making models discussed. The hybrid (SB2) model raised the most apprehension about implementation, with representative town meeting a close second. Clearly, any changes should be made with caution, and with confusion and upheaval kept to a minimum.

8. EGG Recommendations

The Essex Governance Group recommends the following actions. They are intended as a “package.” In particular in the case of the first three recommendations, the success of each will be enhanced by the others. For those recommendations that cannot be acted on immediately, EGG recommends that Essex leaders commit to a timeline to move forward.

- A. Launch Proactive Communication Program**
- B. Empower Neighborhoods**
- C. Switch to Enhanced Town Meeting/Australian Ballot Hybrid**
- D. Institute Same-Day Voting**

A. Launch Proactive Communication Program

Essex residents value their government’s “community minded” nature, and have expressed a strong desire for more two-way communication with leaders and staff. Ideally proactive communication does not need to add to the overall workload of officials and staff, but instead can enable leaders to succeed at existing tasks more effectively with the understanding and active support of the public.

Action steps:

1. Public Engagement Protocol

Create, adopt and implement an Essex Public Engagement Protocol for use by all departments (see sample protocol from Portland, Oregon in Appendix). The protocol allows staff and community members to implement appropriate public engagement for each municipal project.

2. Training

Train current municipal leaders and staff in best public engagement practices, to ensure that proactive citizen participation is a meaningful part of everyone’s job.

3. Hiring and Performance Expectations

Incorporate public engagement skills and expectations into all municipal job descriptions, hiring expectations, and performance reviews.

4. Website

Revamp websites and link Town/Village online presence, based on citizen and staff input

5. Informal Meetings

Convene quarterly, informal get-togethers for residents to meet with elected municipal officials and staff. Bring the meetings to places where people may already be gathered (e.g. a bar, a school play, a community event).

B. Empower Neighborhoods

While Essex residents want to improve inclusivity, many also value face-to-face, deliberative decision making and direct democracy. The immediacy of local decision making is inspiring to youth, and local issues like parks interest young families. Devolving power on specific planning and budgeting decisions to the neighborhood level would build on Essex's "small town feel" and community engagement while bringing in new participation. (Burlington's Neighborhood Planning Assemblies may be a useful model.)

Action step:

1. Create Neighborhood Assemblies

Create Neighborhood Assemblies to make recommendations on neighborhood and municipal issues (such as planning, development, lighting and safety). The Assemblies would serve as official advisors to the municipality (in alignment with the recommended public engagement protocol—see recommendation A-1 above). Invite leaders to attend Neighborhood Assemblies.

C. Switch to Enhanced Town Meeting/Australian Ballot Hybrid

After considering a variety of options for deliberating and voting on budgets, EGG recommends changes that incorporate participants' strong interest in inclusivity while building on Essex's robust community-mindedness. The proposed hybrid model is purposefully paired with a powerfully enhanced town meeting, with the goal of protecting it from the reduced participation often experienced in New Hampshire's larger hybrid (SB2) towns. A minimum attendance requirement ensures that amendments can not be made by a tiny minority. Changes (especially to the charter) should be carefully coordinated to create the least confusion for Essex citizens.

Action steps:

1. Upgrade the current Town Meeting to an "Essex Democracy Day"

Essex Democracy Day would have the elements of the current Town Meeting, but with improved participation options (e.g. could include remote town meeting participation), and also could include a congress of Neighborhood Assemblies, a facilitated community forum on a key issue, and a dinner and celebration.

2. Amendment Requirement

If attendance at Town Meeting is high enough (equal to or greater than the median town meeting attendance during the past 10 years from 2005 through 2014), citizens attending that Town Meeting will continue to have the power to amend the budget. This meeting determines the final budget number to be sent to the voters of Essex for

approval by Australian ballot. (Note: if attendance is below this percentage, then that particular year's Town Meeting would be informational only, with no power to amend.)

3. Amended budget voted on by Australian ballot

Final budget is sent to voters of Essex for approval by Australian ballot vote, to be held 45 days after Town Meeting.

4. Survey included with ballot

A survey should be included with the ballot, to allow residents the opportunity to offer comment.

5. Town meeting date

Change the date of town meeting so it doesn't happen right after school break.

D. Institute Same-Day Voting

In a typical spring in order to participate in every vote on local issues, Town residents must vote three different times, and Village residents five times. Complexities of local voting were named as a barrier to participation. Forum participants also expressed concern that each individual vote does not convey the overall impact of their property tax. Because Essex's voting involves five separate municipal units and separate municipal clerks, this change must be made with careful, coordinated planning. It will increase work for local clerks' office, and so will require additional staffing to ensure that that they can maintain their traditionally high standards and low incidence of voter problems.

Action step:

1. Create a staged plan to combine voting dates and Town/Village Meeting dates.

Over a specified time, institute same-day voting with all budgets voted on the same day. (This is not a proposal for a single ballot; voters would receive multiple ballots.) This process would also include combining Town and Village Meeting dates.

9. Conclusion

By inviting residents to reflect on concerns about voting and decision-making around the municipal budget through this EGG process, the Town, Village and Heart & Soul of Essex have collaborated with community residents to uncover multiple pathways for building the capacity of our community to engage residents in meaningful ways and incorporate their voices in important decisions about our future.

When Essex embarked on the Heart & Soul process several years ago, the goal was to identify a set of shared values. Six core values emerged, and during this process, it was also discovered that the Heart & Soul of Essex was filling an important gap as a convener (of public conversations), a connector (connecting citizens with local government, building relationships among Town and Village staff and other community organizations), and a champion (ensuring community values are incorporated into decision making). The recommendations from the EGG report actually offer a road map for building these roles into the fabric of our community's public life. This alignment is an unexpected but promising outcome of the work of the Essex Governance group.

The Essex Governance Group respectfully offers EGG's Findings and Recommendations to the Essex Selectboard and the Essex community as a whole. We hope the community's voice is heard through the Findings, and that the EGG Recommendations will serve as a useful guide for action.

Essex leaders are in a position to strengthen the civic life of the community, and hundreds of residents have expressed their interest and support for improvements. The time is right. The Essex residents who contributed to EGG's work stand ready to help.

10. Appendices

Appendix A: Portland, Oregon Participation protocol

Appendix B: Survey results, coded (link)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1bMuzDpTcC-3ntXqXuAYbU6AxiGv2c8DNuNRSjuJfPOg/edit?usp=sharing>

Appendix C: Forum agenda and "Four Approaches"

Appendix D: Forum small-table results, coded

Appendix E: List of EGG Participants, Facilitator/Author Bios

Public Involvement Toolkit



November 2006

**Submitted by:
The Mayor's Bureau Innovation Project #9:
Public Involvement**

Eileen Argentina and Jo Ann Bowman, Co-Chairs

Guidelines for Using this Toolkit

Introduction

The Bureau Innovation Project #9 team, an initiative of Mayor Potter that began in June 2005, developed this toolkit. A team made up of both city staff and public members developed the tools based on research and discussion of models from around the world. It was important to the team to develop a model that would be easy to apply to all city bureaus and create consistent expectations for the public, yet not limit the creativity or flexibility of public involvement staff.

Before the Toolkit:

Before a public involvement staff person starts using the toolkit, there are activities that should normally occur in the overall public involvement project. The Process Overview demonstrates a typical public involvement process¹. More about general steps and guidance for performing public involvement is available in the City of Portland's Outreach and Involvement Handbook, the third edition of which will incorporate the Toolkit.

First, project managers – be they public involvement staff, general project managers, or consultants – should perform, at the very least, an assessment of the project or initiative that includes the following:

- An environmental scan for related mandates, plans and other directives that may have bearing on the project,
- An initial stakeholder assessment, including considering whether this project may disproportionately affect a particular community or traditionally underrepresented community.
- A review of the goals and purposes of public involvement for the project, and
- An evaluation of resources available for the public engagement component of the project.

Once this preliminary review is complete, the toolkit can be drawn upon to further define the public involvement approach most suited to the particular project. The toolkit can also be used multiple times throughout the span of a project to assess options in a project's phases or to reassess in the event that circumstances change or modifications are needed.

How to use the Toolkit:

This toolkit is designed to be used, ideally with participation from a representative stakeholder group, to assess the optimal approaches and methods for engaging the public in a project or initiative. It is applicable to development and planning projects as well as policy explorations and general public education.

¹ Appendix A, page 4 of Toolkit

Consisting of a series of questions intended to clarify public interests and needs in the engagement process followed by a spectrum of approaches matched with tools and methods, this toolkit can help with identification of prospective options. Used with a stakeholder group, it can also help develop early public commitment to project success as public members participate in the development of the public process. The suggested steps for using the toolkit are as follows.

The Facilitated Stakeholder Meeting:

Step 1: Asking the Questions

Once an environmental assessment (see above) has been completed, convene a stakeholder meeting. Bringing together stakeholders with diverse perspectives and interests helps insure that the resulting involvement will respond more readily to community needs and values.

Referring to the list of questions², pose each question and allow all participants to answer the question in turn. If the group is very large, dividing into multiple small groups of 6-10 is recommended. As participants answer the question, the facilitator should place a check mark in the appropriate box. When all participants have answered, the facilitator moves on to the next question and each subsequent question in turn.

The facilitator should take care to ensure all voices are heard and that no answers are discussed or judged during this process. It is a free-flowing question and answer period, and all answers are equally valid.

Step 2: Assessing the Answers

Once all the questions have been answered in this manner, after thanking participants for their input, the facilitator should get agreement that the next step is to assess the group's general majority view on each question. The facilitator assessing the answer patterns, averaging them to determine a probable midpoint, and then affirming this with the group can informally accomplish this. Another option is to assign a number value to each answer and then average the answers for a mathematical average.

Step 3: Overall Scoring or Scale Assessment

After each question has been assessed and the average answer plotted, the facilitator should work with the group to come up with an overall score or location on the scale for the project. Some answers may seem to have opposing scales for this purpose. It is better not to focus on this, but to work with the group to determine a general rating or characterization of the project that will help point to the type of engagement and tools of engagement are warranted.

The questioning exercise can result in multiple positive outcomes. The facilitator, who is likely the public involvement manager for the project, will have a much better sense

² Appendix B, page 5 of Toolkit

of stakeholder views and issues. If the outcomes of the questions conflict with the limitations of mandates driving the project, this early warning system will help daylight potential sources of conflict so they can be dealt with early on. In addition, engaging stakeholders in discussing the community interest and positions regarding the project can result in early education as well as participation.

Step 4: Using the Spectrum

Once the project assessment using the questions is complete, the group can turn to the spectrum³ to discuss levels and methods of engagement. Usually, the facilitator will suggest a “landing place” for the project on the spectrum based on the question discussion, the question-by-question scores, and the overall score or outcome.

The group should discuss and come to agreement on the level of public involvement dictated for the project by the assessment. The ultimate choice need not conform directly with the “score” from the questioning exercise. It is important that the level of involvement take account of the answers to the questions but also other associated factors of the project – mandates, timelines, resources, geographic scope, etc.

Step 5: Determining the Appropriate Tools and Methods

Once the group has agreed where the project falls on the spectrum and understands the purposes and roles associated with the result, the facilitator can lead a discussion of likely tools and methods⁴ for ensuring public engagement at the determined level. This is the point in the exercise where stakeholder participation can be particularly effective in providing insights of which project staff may be unaware and in matching tools and methods to the community in which the engagement is to take place.

What Follows:

Putting the toolkit to use early in a project is an important step in developing a public involvement plan. Following these initial planning steps, staff should develop a public involvement plan that includes timelines, goals, benchmarks, and a detailed budget for the project’s involvement components. Common steps following the toolkit exercise are:

- Complete and gain approval for the public involvement plan
- Share the plan with your initial stakeholder group and incorporate feedback
- Launch and implement the plan
- Evaluate and revisit the plan as warranted
- Ensure evaluation of the plan’s success, especially with the initial stakeholder group
- Assess and report on successes and lessons learned

³ Appendix C, page 6 of Toolkit

⁴ Appendix D, page 7 of Toolkit

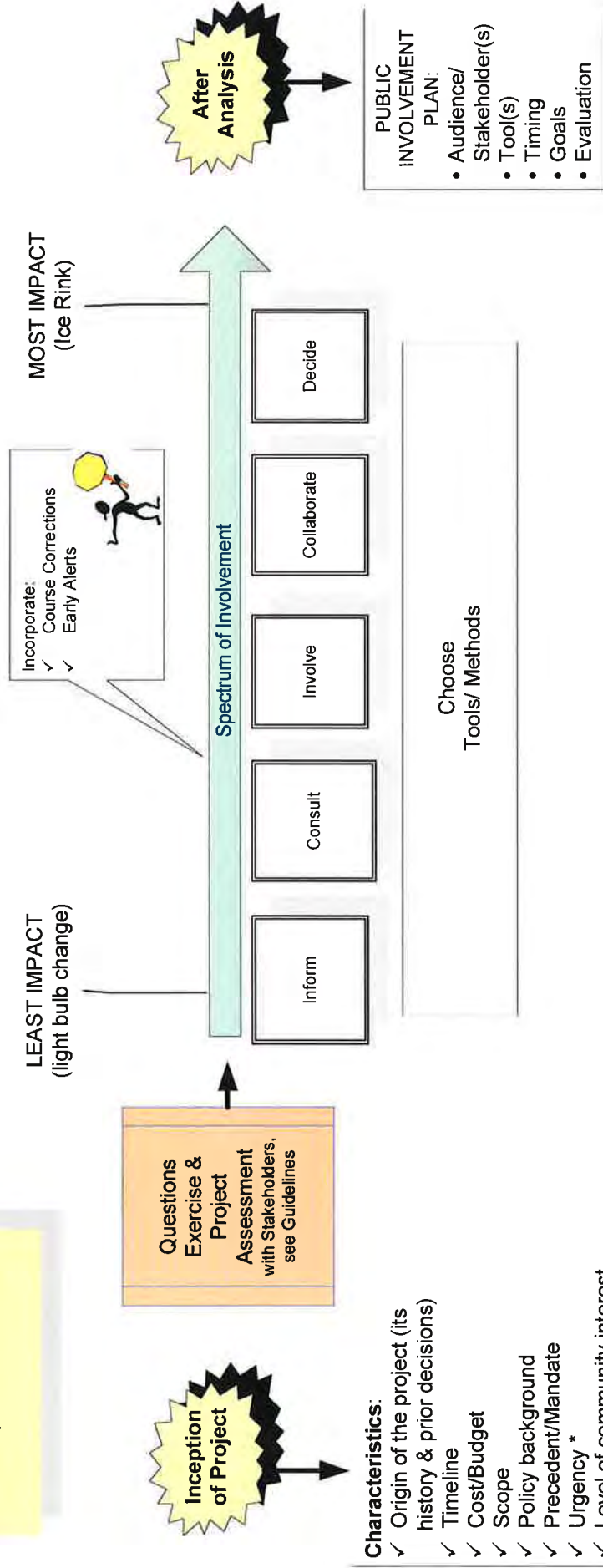
Additional Resources

1. Outreach and Involvement Handbook
(<http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=98500>)
2. IAP2 website (www.iap2.org)

APPENDIX A PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT TOOLKIT, PROCESS OVERVIEW

NOTES:

- ✓ This model should apply to any project, no matter where it comes from
- ✓ Assumption: process should be able to deal with 90% of the issues that come up

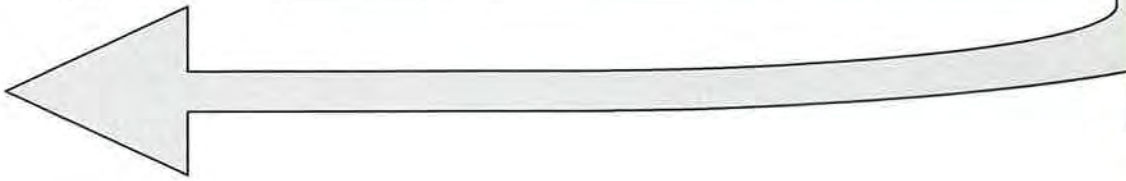


* perhaps hardest to identify due to limiting factors

Levels of Impact

Assessment Questions	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
1. What is the anticipated level of conflict, opportunity, controversy, or concern on this or related issues?					
2. How significant are the potential impacts to the public?					
3. How much do the major stakeholders care about this issue, project, or program?					
4. What degree of involvement does the public appear to desire or expect?					
5. What is the potential for public impact on the proposed decision or project?					
6. How significant are the possible benefits of involving the public?					
7. How serious are the potential ramifications of NOT involving the public?					
8. What level of public participation does Council and/or bureau directors desire or expect?					
9. What is the possibility of broad public interest?					
10. What is the probable level of difficulty in solving the problem or advancing the project?					

DRAFT Public Participation Spectrum



Level:	Public Participation Goal:	The City will:	Tools* to Consider:	The Community:
Decide	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.	<i>Implement what the public decides.</i>	#5 Committees #6 Feedback Mechanisms #8 Community Driven & Organized #9 Techniques & Methods	<i>Decides</i>
Collaborative	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	<i>Partner with public in each aspect of decision.</i>	#6 Feedback Mechanisms #8 Community Driven & Organized #9 Techniques & Methods	<i>Partners</i>
Involve	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	<i>Work with the public to ensure that their concerns are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</i>	#5 Committees #6 Feedback Mechanisms #7 Formal Hearings/Forums #8 Community Driven & Organized	<i>Participates</i>
Consult	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.	<i>Keep the public informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</i>	#3 Events/ Meetings #5 Committees #6 Feedback Mechanisms #7 Formal Hearings/Forums	<i>Contributes</i>
Inform	To provide the public with balanced & objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, and/or solutions.	<i>Keep the public informed.</i>	#1 Information/ Notification #2 Publications #3 Events/ Meetings #4 Community Education	<i>Learns</i>

*Refer to “Public Involvement Tools, by Category” on the next page for the full list of techniques.

Adapted from IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum (www.iap2.org)
DRAFT – October 2006 – Bureau Innovation Project # 9, City of Portland

**Increasing Level of
Public Involvement**

Public Involvement Tools, By Category – BIP #9

#1 Information/ Notification	#2 Publications	#3 Events/ Meetings	#4 Community Education	#5 Committees	#6 Feedback Mechanisms	#7 Formal Hearings/ Forums	#8 Community Driven & Organized	#9 Techniques & Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisements • Advertisements, Newspaper Inserts • Advertisements, Transit Ads • Bill Stuffer • Clerical Information Contact • Email • Info Centers & Field Offices • Information Hot Line • Information • Repositories • Media: Comics, Community Media/Cable Access, Feature Stories, Podcasting, Radio, TV • News • Conferences • Postcards • Press Releases • Soap Box • Staffed Displays • Tabling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brochures • Fact Sheets • Issues Papers • Mailings • Newsletters • Reports • Review Drafts • Websites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Fairs • Community Forums • Design Charrettes • Door to Door/Canvass • Field Trip • Groundbreaking Ceremonies • Meetings with Existing Groups • Meetings, Virtual • Neighborhood Walks/Strolls • Open Houses • Roadshow • Summits • Tours • Open Houses • Virtual Open Houses • Web-based Meetings • Workshop, Computer-Facilitated • Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings to Neighborhood & Community Organizations • Brown Bags • Door to Door/Canvass • Panels • FAQ's • Field Trip • Media: Feature Stories & Editorials • Speakers Bureau • Staffed Displays • Tabling • Trainings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Committees • Citizen Juries • Commissions & Boards • Established Groups & Committees • Expert Panels • Task Forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment Cards • Community Feedback Board • Door to Door/Canvass • Fishbowl's • Focus Groups • Handheld Voting • Interviews • Large Group Study • Media, Blogs • Online • Testimony • Polling: Computer-Based, Deliberative • Response Sheets • Surveys: Exit/Follow-up, In Person, Intercept, Internet, Mailed, Telephone • Tabling • Virtual Room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Forums • Online Testimony • Public Hearings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coffee Klatches/ House Parties • Community Facilitators • Form New Community Group • Meetings, Community Initiated • Small Grants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus Building Techniques • Deliberative Dialogue • Design Charette • Future Search Conference • Network with Leadership (esp. cultural groups) • Open Space Technology • Outside Consultant/ Facilitator • Popular Education • Role-playing • Samoan Circle • Study Circles • Technical Information Contact

Dine & Discuss: Essex Democracy & You

Essex High School • Saturday, November 8, 2014

W*elcome to today's conversation! Essex residents agree: Community connections are important to us. We like to get together with our neighbors, volunteer, and stay informed. We also want to have a say in public decisions. But what is the best way to engage Essex citizens in decisions that affect them?*

Currently, citizens decide and vote on the municipal budget during the town and village annual meetings. Today's forum provides an opportunity to explore this and other approaches to decision making and voting. We'll also share the results of our recent survey. You'll see what motivates our participation in Essex democracy -- or what prevents it. Recent survey respondents also named important governance values. What do you think? Can we do better? And if so, how? We welcome your ideas! Thanks for coming and for being a part of this important discussion.

Your neighbors on the Essex Governance Group

Forum Agenda

Noon	Welcome & Introductions
12:25	Lunch
12:45	Setting the Context <ul style="list-style-type: none">· How it Works: Overview of Essex's Local Government Structures· Community Voices: Overview of <i>Essex Democracy and You</i> Survey Results
1:30	Table Conversations <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Exploring Four Approaches to Local Decision-Making and Voting· Sharing Ideas to Strengthen Civic Participation
3:30	Celebration <ul style="list-style-type: none">· "Greatest Hits" from Table Conversations· Door Prizes!
4:00	Adjourn

Supported by Town of Essex Selectboard • Heart and Soul of Essex • The Orton Family Foundation. Visit www.heartandsoulofexsex.org following the forum for additional information.

Approach One:

Traditional Town / Village Meeting

O*verview:* Since before the state's founding, Vermont's townspeople have governed themselves by town meeting—face-to-face deliberative decision making. Essex residents value community, and want institutions that help increase trust, connection, and volunteerism—and town meeting, proponents say, is one of them. Town meeting is an important training ground for citizen leadership. It helps residents understand government, hear the complexity of viewpoints, and weigh trade-

offs. Here, citizens can discuss and make amendments to the budget. Elected leaders and staff can explain their work, hear our concerns, and citizens can hold them accountable. Town meeting isn't a ballot box. For decisions regarding governance and finance, it is the town's legislature, and every participant is a legislator. When controversial issues arise, people value having this system where they can come together, deliberate, and make real changes on issues they care about.

Necessary steps? No action needed, since this is Essex's current system. However, supporters say improvements could strengthen this model. The Village has recently reinstated a community dinner and offers childcare, and is considering moving to a Saturday meeting. Other possibilities include: improving privacy by allowing written comments and using in-meeting paper ballots; making meeting information more accessible; and increasing outreach and civic education.

Trade-offs

- Because citizens have the power to change (amend) items at town meeting, the wording and dollar amounts are not finalized until the vote of the people at the meeting. For this reason, absentee ballots cannot be printed ahead of time. This leaves out anyone who cannot attend the meeting.
- Participating in town meeting is a challenge for anyone who fears public speaking, or is intimidated to express new or unpopular views in public. Diverse cultural, educational, or socioeconomic backgrounds can make speaking up even more difficult.
- Essex is the largest town in Vermont to govern through a traditional town meeting. Large towns generally get lower per capita meeting turnout, and Essex's median attendance hovers below 2%. Even though town meeting is open to all, the final result could be affected by an unrepresentative minority of voters. This can cause dispute about meeting outcomes or create cynicism about government.

Approach Two:

Australian Ballot

Overview: Many Vermont towns have switched to ballot box or “Australian ballot” voting for their budget or for all town issues. Some believe Essex should do the same. Essex has gotten too big for town meeting, they say, pointing to the small percentage of voters participating in town and village meetings. Weeknight meetings are challenging for working people, and evening or weekend meetings are difficult for elderly people and

families with young children. Essex should remove all obstacles to participation, and do everything possible to allow citizens from every walk of life to vote. This means giving people the privacy of a voting booth and offering all-day voting. Australian ballot also means Essex could offer absentee voting to people who are ill, or out of town due to work, school, or serving in the military.

Necessary steps? Change the Town and/or Village charter to adopt Australian ballot.

Trade-offs

- Through deliberation, citizens have the opportunity to change other people’s minds, and they might hear new arguments and change their own minds. However, ballot-box voting lacks the educational benefit of public give-and-take. Very few people attend the informational meetings that precede Australian ballot voting.
- With Australian ballot, voters give up the power to amend the budget. Instead of deliberation and amendment, citizens are limited to saying “yes” or “no” to proposals handed down to them by leaders.
- Voters may defeat the budget while giving leaders no clear directions on what changes they want. This means one or many costly re-votes. Often turn-out is lower for each successive re-vote, which is less democratic.

Approach Three:

Meeting-Ballot Hybrid (NH/SB2)

O*verview:* In New Hampshire, over 60 towns have adopted “SB2” (named after Senate Bill #2 that created it). Under this system, each spring towns hold a “deliberative session” where voters can discuss and amend the budget. About a month later, this budget is voted on by citizens at the ballot box (absentee ballots are available). Supporters say SB2 is the

best of both worlds, allowing for a face-to-face deliberative town meeting, but also the fairness of a ballot-box budget vote for everyone. SB2 was adopted in many NH towns when it was put in place in 1995, primarily in the larger towns in southern NH, although in recent years the number of towns adopting it has leveled off. It has never been used in Vermont.

Necessary steps? Change the Town and/or Village charter to adopt this system.

Trade-offs:

- Its detractors argue that SB2 is actually the worst of both worlds—all the problems associated with town meeting, combined with the disadvantages of Australian ballot.
- Knowing that they will be able to vote on the budget by ballot, even fewer voters may attend the town meeting. A 2012 study of 27 sample New Hampshire SB2 towns showed that half of them had voter attendance of below 2% at their deliberative session, with large towns (over 2,000 voters) having attendance as low as 0.4%.
- Lower attendance can leave the budget even more vulnerable to manipulation by fringe interest groups. Instead of the budget crafted over time by town leaders and staff, the final budget sent on for public approval can include changes made by a tiny number of voters. This can create frustration for both local officials and ballot-box voters.

Approach Four:

Representative Town Meeting

(Brattleboro model)

O*verview:* Every Town Meeting Day in Brattleboro, voters go to the polls and elect 155 neighbors to represent them at Brattleboro's annual town meeting, which is held three weeks later. Representative Town Meeting (RTM) features the fairness of the ballot box—voters elect representatives to speak for them (absentee ballots are available). RTM also features the benefits of a deliberative floor meeting. Empowered citizens give the issues direct public scrutiny, and local officials hear from, and respond directly to,

community members. As towns grow, many voters may find the details of governance less relevant. With RTM, neighbors with the most interest in local issues can be elected by voters to speak for them. Representatives are elected from districts within the town (Brattleboro is divided into three districts), and during the year, town meeting representatives can hold district meetings to discuss issues with citizens. Used in Brattleboro since 1960, RTM is also widely used in Massachusetts.

Necessary steps? Change the Town and/or Village charter to adopt Representative Town Meeting.

Trade-offs

- With Representative Town Meeting, citizens can still attend town meeting and speak, but they no longer have a direct vote on the issues. They elect people to represent their views. However, if citizens do not agree with an RTM decision, there is a five-day window in which they can petition for a town-wide vote.
- RTM may create more work for local staff. Staff has to prepare detailed packets of information before the meeting, and staff has to keep track of which seats are up for election and who is running.
- Essex would need to create new Representative Town Meeting districts, which could confuse voters.

Essex Governance & You Forum, 11/8/14 Small Group Work, Coded by Topic

COLOR KEY: Table number: Facilitator/Recorder

*Asterisks = all colors/tables represented in this category

“Group’s Top Idea” = every group was asked at the end of the forum to name its 1-2 top ideas.

These are identified and sorted here by category.

RED: Table 1 (Gabrielle)

BLUE: Table 2: Tina Logan (incl. Kimberly Gleason’s notes)

PURPLE: Table 3: Annie Davis

GREEN: Table 4 (Stephanie Ratte, Elaine Sopchak)

BROWN: Table 5 (Brad Luck)

ORANGE: Table 6 (Sam)

BLACK: “Top Idea” Group source unclear

1) COMMUNICATION (110)

***EXPLICIT COMMUNICATION – ACCURATE, CLEAR, HONEST (25)**

(CM) Explicit - share accurate information, clear, honest

(CM) More explanation of agendas and minutes

(CM) Clear numbers around our total tax bills

(CM) Communication improved to be more clear and given in context

(TR) Improve meeting minutes and agendas to be more informative and reader-friendly to those not a part of that committee or commission

(TR) Residents would know who to ask

(TR) Residents would understand what they have the right to know (vs. privacy, legal restrictions, etc.)

(CM) Communication is better

(CM) Making local government information more complete, timely, and explanatory

(TR) More access to information

(TR) Fewer back room deals being cut

(TR) Executive sessions limited to lawful purposes

(TR) We might have less cynicism

(TR) Stop inside and back-room deals.

(CM) Have comprehensive meeting minutes timely published

(CM) Have all town meetings recorded and available in various mediums

(TR) Clear statement of total impact of the taxes on the ballot

(TR) Restructure our selectboard meetings [minutes?] so there was more discussion of what is discussed – after each agenda item

(TR) True meeting means decisions not made in advance, people’s voices are heard

(TR) Gov’t elected officials consistent in message

(TR) Joint meeting minutes – more detailed

(TR) Allowed to look at everything government does

(And more Transparency...)

(CM) transparent

(CM) More thorough and transparent communication

(CM) Transparent to community

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Reducing perception of pre-meeting deals/agreements

***PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION (17)**

(-AB) People not always aware of how to find information or become more educated. It's complicated in Essex.

(CM) More access to public meetings that are well publicized

(CM) Proactive explanation of current or upcoming issues, concerns (cited emails from Irene Wrenner as helpful)

(CM) More timely communication outreach

(TR) Increased awareness, engagement and finding ways to connect with citizens

(CM) Government should push information to residents rather than a pull for information from residents.

(TR) Better pre-event coverage.

(-TM) People don't know about it

(CM) Intentional outreach and communication

(TR) Any changes proposed to Planning Commission is mailed to the neighborhood affected—general notice is not enough

(Pking lot): TM NOT the only place for people to provide opinion. Gov't needs to offer more opportunities to do so.

(CM) Village weekly e-newsletter

(TR) Gov't officials being forthright with significant changes in advance

(CM) Accessibility and ease of consuming information

(CM) Outreach: More innovative ways, more outreach

(CM) Grassroots efforts – go to where people are

(TR) Sending press releases / "civic book"

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Tell people about government events/issues ahead of time, using many means, so citizens can provide input before decisions are made. Example, Saxon Hill

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Civic "Cliff Notes"

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Leaders going to the people – new, innovative outreach

***ONLINE COMMUNICATION (16)**

(CM) Improve website/s

(TR) More available data (open data)

(TR) Improve and increase IT capacity

(TR) Merge services and websites

(CM) Posting documents / information

(CM) Modernizing to [have] more online access to increase civic participation

(TR) Online profiles

(CM) Using social media like Front Porch Forum and Facebook to communicate within the and across neighborhoods.

(CM) Information on Facebook, website, and Front Porch Forum

(TR) Open data website like Burlington 2.0

(TR) Drill-down details website

(TR) Web links to minutes, agendas, background info, posted on front page of municipal and school sites

(TR) Online meeting participation – dialogue – two-way communication

(CM) One website and/or link to each other (Village/Town)

(CM) Increase technology access to links better

(CM) Village weekly news – make links work! Social media

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Open Data Initiative (like Burlington's) – on website, good reporting in town papers, transparency

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Web site improvement, links between Town/Village sites, Internet total presence

I'LL DO IT NOW: Help improve web presence (Ron)

GROUP'S BEST IDEA: Open data. Data driven, tracking, FAQ, better agendas/minutes clearly understood by residents. Burlington model—look at their website

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Prominent display on homepage of minutes, agendas, videos, and background info for schools and municipality. Greater detail than just minutes and agendas.

***DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH LEADERS (11)**

(-AB) Don't always know "why" if a budget is defeated.

(-AB) No feedback for why it failed

(-AB) When a budget fails, it doesn't tell the board why

(-AB) It doesn't provide a means for the community to guide the board or provide public recommendations.

(+TM) Elected officials can understand why people are unhappy/want change

(+TM) Hear from elected and municipal officials

(-AB) No feedback to elected officials

(+SB2) Town officials chance to provide info before ballot voting

(+RTM) More like to talk with rep informally, who can then act formally

(+TM) Residents and leaders [can get] clarification

(-AB) Reps don't get feedback

RESPONSIVE REPS, REPRESENTATIVENESS (7)

(+RTM) Have a rep to call directly.

(+RTM) Potentially easier and more responsive than current representation.

(+RTM) Lets people feel confident someone who's really interested represents them

(+RTM) We can't all be everywhere and be well informed – good to have some who can represent

(+RTM) Meetings with representatives

(+RTM) Can choose someone with same agenda

(+RTM) Increase diversity of opinions—better representation across the town

OUTREACH, MEDIA (BEYOND "ONLINE") (8)

(-AB) Local press is problematic. Can't be relied upon for complete and "objective" information

(CM) Don't miss connecting with and providing information to those who are off-line. Capture these residents through other means, for example, Essex Eats Out. Remember that not everyone has access to technology.

(TR) Old and new means of communication done better.

(TR) A more robust relationship with Channel 17 for resident subscription

(TR) YouTube channel

(TR) Vibrant local newspaper that would cover local issues of importance with thoroughness and accuracy

(TR) Have citizens tell elected officials how else to communicate to them beyond what is happening now

(CM) Flyers

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: open data on website, also good reporting in town papers, transparency

GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPONSIVENESS, AVAILABILITY (10)

(CM) Being accountable and owning the response

(CM) Responsive

(CM) Available and "findable" by residents. This can be hard with volunteer leaders.

(CM) Known process for resident calls, emails – how are responses handled? Better tracking and accountability

(TR) More tracking (complaints, concerns, ideas from residents)

(TR) Add a section to the five year plan that would specifically tie an outcome to this Forum - the Town would develop a plan to improve transparency based on the priorities from this forum.

(TR) residents would have answers to all of their questions

(CM) Honoring what the community means and what they say

(CM) When people voice their opinions, the elected officials follow through

(CM) Try to put residents first

LEADERS ENGAGED WITH COMMUNITY (6)

(CM) Being engaged with the community

(CM) informed

(CM) observant, paying attention

(CM) Knowing our constituents

(CM) Officials / leaders are accessible

(TR) In France neighborhood meeting with mayor there on street corner. Use that as a model

LISTENING, RESPECT, WELCOMING (10)

(CM) willing to listen to diverse points of view and to all constituents.

(CM) Listening

(CM) Showing respect to the "little people" by treating them as equals or better.

(CM) A culture of acceptance, mutual respect and openness

(CM) Community engagement in the form of mutual respect between community members and municipal staff (Good staff management within local government makes a difference)

(CM) Being open-minded

(CM) Receptive to ideas and input from community

(TR) Gov't officials listening to constituents

(CM) Feeling welcome to go to public meetings

(CM) Better spaces and environment at public meetings

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Show respect to all citizens/residents when they come to a meeting so that they are/feel heard.

2) INCLUSION, NUMBER/DIVERSITY OF VOTERS/PARTICIPANTS (70)

***INCLUSION (32)**

(-TM) Some do not have tolerance to listen to group-specific agendas.

(+AB) Most available

(+SB2) Input more possible than Town Mtg

(-TM) Freezes people out; impractical, not inclusive

(-TM) Only informative to those who attend

(-TM) Inaccessible – no absentee ballot

(+AB) Convenient, accessible to all

(+AB) Multiple modes/ways to place vote (early by mail, visit clerk, ballot box)

(+AB) Privacy

(+SB) Allows absentee ballot

(-RTM) Possibility of alienation of those interested in participating if their representative is their only vote

(-TM) there are barriers to attending such as time, other job and family commitments

(-TM) It doesn't capture all voters' viewpoints.

(+AB) Allows accessibility to voting through absentee, 12-hour voting

(-TM) Not democratic (if you can't be there)

(-TM) Barriers: time, format, public speaking

(+AB) Include everyone who wants to vote

(+SB2) Includes everyone who wants to vote

(+SB2) Opportunity for more community participation

(CM) All voices heard, not just the usual suspects

(-TM) Essex population becoming more transient—is town meeting best format for them?

(-TM) Must be present to win

(-TM) Those who don't feel comfortable don't go

(+AB) Absentee (example, those in Army)

(+AB) 12 hours to vote

(+SB2) Win-win – best of TM and AB –[Still opportunity for input but] everyone can go to polls

(+SB2) More inclusive

(-TM) Limits access to voting for many people

(-TM) Negativity to final vote if they weren't able to participate

(-TM) Doesn't encourage all types of people to speak

(+AB) More inclusive for residents

(+AB) Increases opportunity

***NUMBER OF VOTERS/PARTICIPANTS (20)**

(-TM) Very small participation (many prefer not to be involved for a variety of reasons), but Essex has changed re: population

(+AB) Everybody can vote

(-TM) Low turn-out

(+AB) Potential to increase public participation

(-SB2) Towns with larger population—participation was lower in the meeting

(+RTM) Participation is higher

(+RTM) Australian ballot can still be permitted

(+AB) In theory, this method increases participation.

(+AB) Allows for consistent, habitual voting

(+SB2) Could give us the best of both worlds if we could get more voters to come?

(-SB2) Sounds like a good idea but does it bring out any more voters?

(+AB) Leads to increase in participation

(+AB) AB after TM for officers would bring more voters out for officials too

(-SB2) Statistics re: lower turnout at TM

(+RTM) More participation

(-RTM) Total number might end up less than current participation

(TR) Higher participation at gov't meetings

(+AB) Increases number of votes

(+SB2) Increases voter opportunity, Australian ballot

(-SB2) Fewer people go to deliberative session

DIVERSITY, DEMOGRAPHIC AND GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION, NEW RESIDENTS (12)

(CM) Have boards, committees, and commissions reflect the local demographic (more diversity)

(CM) Aware of socio-economic, cultural, diversity, age, etc.

(+RTM) Better geographic representation of population

(CM) Increase demographic participation

(CM) Getting our youth involved more, for their input on issues

(-TM) attendance is not a good representation of our town and village demographics.

(+AB) As our demographics change, minorities might feel more included and have the opportunity to be involved.

(-RTM) Would minorities be fairly represented?

(-TM) Hard for non-English speakers

(-TM) Lack of diversity

(CM) Welcoming new groups to our community

(CM) Explaining process of government when moving to community (Welcome Packet, civic "cliff notes")

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Getting our youth more involved, engaged, informed

INTIMIDATION (6)

- (-TM) interest groups can ... harass groups or individual attendees
- (-TM) Complicated rules / procedures
- (-TM) Intimidating
- (-TM) TV cameras—intimidating
- (-TM) People not always polite
- (-TM) Loud and passionate people are intimidating

3) QUALITY OF DECISION MAKING (76)

***DELIBERATION (20)**

- (+TM) Opportunity to correct misinformation
- (+TM) Dynamic with those present
- (+SB2) Better than Australian ballot because of interaction face to face (+TM) Face to face
- (+TM) Advantages of deliberative process among voters.
- (+TM) Hear other people's opinions
- (-AB) Not time deliberative
- (-AB) No conversation
- (+SB) Balance—deliberative (yet protects from small interest groups)
- (+RTM) May be more robust deliberative process
- (+TM) Lively debate
- (+TM) Coming together
- (+TM) Face-to-face with neighbors
- (-AB) No face-to-face (if only AB)
- (+TM) education occurs at the meetings-people come in, speak and learn, viewpoints are shared and new ideas are gained.
- (+TM) It is an exchange of ideas.
- (+TM) Your ideas are heard if you talk
- (+TM) Hear other opinions
- (+TM) Ability to discuss
- (+TM) Allows open dialogue between residents on particular line item
- (+SB2) Still have deliberative session

HIGH-QUALITY, RESPONSIVE DECISION MAKING (9)

- (-TM) Potential hasty decision making
- (-TM) Decision making becomes arbitrary
- (+AB) No arbitrary amendments in the moment
- (-SB2) More preparation involved with a shorter preparation period
- (+RTM) Potentially can handle more on the agenda
- (-TM) Need "Any Other Business" (AOB) agenda item
- (-TM) More than just budget
- (-TM) Success can depend on moderator managing civility
- (-TM) Last-minute snap decision for some

***CITIZEN EDUCATION / INFORMED & ENGAGED VOTERS (17)**

- (CM) More awareness for open discussions
- (TR) More education on public issues and around opportunities for public participation
- (-AB) Votes might not be educated even if more of the public votes.
- (TR) People feel engaged
- (-AB) Not enough attendance at info meetings
- (+SB2) Voice at meeting/people can learn more and vote later
- (+SB2) Delay gives time to give feedback
- (+RTM) More knowledgeable participants e.g. FPF
- (CM) Education, education, education
- (Prking lot): Frustration with school budget AB informational meetings – not enough turnout, not feeling effective
- (+TM) Educated participants
- (+TM) Watching
- (-AB) Voters wait until in the booth to consider question (uninformed)
- (CM) Increasing awareness
- (-AB) Doesn't solve problem of informed voters
- (Gen'l): Keep town meeting, but increase information to voters
- (Q): How to increase informed voters? How to get info out to voters?

***INTEREST GROUP/MINORITY RULE (12)**

- (-SB2) Fringe group can amend budget beforehand
- (-TM) Vocal minorities, "government by wisecrack"
- (+AB) Can't be captured by a fringe group
- (+SB) Balance—(deliberative) yet protects from small interest groups
- (-TM) interest groups can dominate the meeting
- (General question): How often do special interest groups influence the budget in a meaningful way?
- (-TM) Small minority can make changes
- (-RTM) Still potential for local minorities
- (-TM) Small/special interest groups amending
- (-SB2) Opportunity for manipulation by small group to get something on budget or to rally against ballot vote
- (+RTM) Equal voice—no small group take-over
- (CM) Not beholden to special interests

COMMUNITY-BUILDING vs. DIVISIVENESS (6)

- (+TM) Community building
- (CM) Act as common wheel
- (+TM) Opportunity to bring people together – not just about budget
- (-AB) Doesn't bring community together in a small-town way
- (-RTM) The need to create districts could be fractious.
- (-RTM) Could possibly cause more division and confusion in community

GOVERNMENT LONG VIEW, BALANCING NEEDS, FAIRNESS (7)

(CM) Proactive on issues related to the community

(CM) Putting long term interests of community ahead of short term interests (i.e. infrastructure, business competition, zoning/planning developments)

(CM) Balancing the desires of the few with the needs of the whole

(CM) Taking the long view

(TR) Fair and equitable distribution of resources and power

(CM) Makes decision on greatest long-term good

(CM) Embraces Heart & Soul values

COST OF RE-VOTES (5)

(-AB) A defeat at the polls could be very costly, back to the table

(-AB) Expense of re-votes

(-AB) 2nd and 3rd votes are expensive

(-SB2) Cost of additional votes

(-AB) Could drive up re-votes

4) NEIGHBORHOOD, DIY/LEGO AND OTHER MODELS (55)

NEIGHBORHOOD-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT/STRENGTH (11)

(+RTM) District meetings with representatives

(CM) Taking advantage of neighborhood planning councils / assemblies

(+RTM) This might draw people together in neighborhoods.

(+RTM) People would gather to discuss, meet, vote for representatives, and gather input from people.

(+RTM) Create stronger, more connected neighborhoods.

(+RTM) Representation from neighborhoods

(+RTM) Hyper-local issues get attention

(CM) Honoring neighborhoods

(TR) Neighborhood Assemblies

(+RTM) Representative of area/neighbors

(+RTM) Grassroots effort

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Neighborhood Assemblies

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Expanding and institutionalizing grassroots public participation. Burlington Neighborhood Planning Assemblies model, Neighborhood watch

DIY / LEGO, CREATIVE IMPROVEMENTS (16)

(+AB) Other vehicles exist for education or to convince others of issues

(+AB) Attendance perhaps [could be] increase[d] at informational meetings

(+SB2) Interaction can happen without this informally

(+AB) Means of providing feedback can be designed

(General question): What are some different hybrid models we could consider? Could we develop our own model/approach?

(General themes): We discussed the possibility of not making dramatic changes to our voting structure but instead making changes to our existing system through: Use of technology to include all residents by reducing barriers and expanding opportunities.

(-TM) Currently scheduled on the best day?

(TM General): Lots of opportunities to IMPROVE town meeting

(-AB) Assumption that an "no" = re-vote

(-AB) Y, N or keep current

(+SB2) There are examples in other states to observe

(Parking lot): Suggestion box during AB for why people voted no

(Pking): Skype informational meetings

(TM General): More personal invites to Town Meeting could help Get people there, like today's Forum

(TM General): Town Meeting – Australian system for revote so limit number of re-votes

(TR) Town SB is making improvements, but will take a while to see those changes

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Remote meeting attendance/participation (Skype)

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Budget feedback on the budget ballot: Cast vote and have space for a survey question

***2-WAY COMMUNICATION, CREATIVE FORUMS (12)**

(CM) multiple, diverse channels of two-way communication between municipal leaders and staff and residents

(CM) Forums (topical)

(CM) Public meetings/participation

(CM) Heart and Soul

(+SB2) Could there be multiple meeting times and venues in community to reach more voters?

(TR) Informal, regular means of 2-way communication

(CM) Maximize feedback from the community

(CM) Build bridges, not walls

(TR) Two-way communication vs. formal meetings

(TR) More community forum opportunities

(CM) Lots of avenues for two-way communication in a user-friendly form

(TR) Two-way communication

VOLUNTEERISM, COMMUNITY GROUPS, NON-FORMAL PARTICIPATION (12)

(TR) Volunteer opportunities would be easy to find

(CM) Grassroots organizations

(CM) Institutionalize events

(CM) Block parties

- (CM) Essex Independence Day / Charter Day
- (CM) Fewer vacancies on our committees
- (CM) Street party
- (CM) Farmers Market
- (CM) Parks & Rec
- (CM) Concerts
- (CM) Community calendar
- (CM) Grassroots effort, i.e. bike groups, Farmer's Market

OTHER MODELS (4)

Other models: Burlington (5th model?) - districts would need to be designated. How to become a city.

- (CM) Someone elected to have a vision, like a mayor
- (TR) Could an elected official, like a Mayor, improve accountability and transparency?
- (CM) Have a mayor and wards / districts for better governance
- GROUP'S TOP IDEA:** [Neighborhood Assemblies, break up communities into 100-120 homes as in Front Porch Forum.] These groups elect a representative to go to the Mayor and act as a board

5) DIRECT DEMOCRACY: POWER, IMMEDIACY (40)

*** CITIZEN POWER, DIRECT INDIVIDUAL AUTHORITY (23)**

- (+TM) Town Mtg as a vehicle to cut budget by general, with concerted effort
- (-TM) Hard to make real changes at Town Meeting
- (-RTM) Want to speak for oneself and not spoken for by rep
- (-RTM) Does not provide for individual engagement and participation
- (+TM) Close as you can get to democracy
- (-TM) Amendment power is limited
- (-AB) Can't amend the budget
- (-RTM) Removing one more step with individual authority
- (+TM) You can vote at the meeting
- (-SB2) It doesn't give voters a reason to come to town meeting because voting doesn't happen there.
- (-RTM) Constituents might strongly disagree with representative's viewpoints and voting.
- (+TM) Direct democracy: We are the legislators
- (+SB2) Keeps teeth in Town Meeting for amendments
- (-RTM) A level removed from voting
- (+TM) Ability to amend
- (-AB) Opportunities to question/challenge—no formal way
- (+SB2) Win-win – best of TM and AB --Still opportunity for input [but everyone can go to polls]
- (+RTM) Voice at table
- (-RTM) Additional layer of bureaucracy
- (-RTM) Defeats one person, one vote concept (on budget)
- (-TM) Feel like can't change much, can't say particularly where money goes
- (-AB) No opportunity for amendments

(-RTM) Adding a layer

CLIQUE ELITE (2)

(-RTM) Centralization of power to a certain few

(-RTM) Could result in a “Super Board” or clique-like environment.

IMMEDIATE RESULTS (10)

(+TM) Spontaneous problem solving that works.

(+TM) Immediate

(-SB2) Two-step process-more time consuming

(+TM) The work is done when the meeting is done

(-AB) The process has a non-finality to it. A no-vote means a revote.

(+TM) Meeting ends with a budget

(-AB) Process of info meetings very long timeline

(+TM) Budget done at end of night

(+TM) Impact a decision at last minute

(+TM) Approve budget that night

TRADITION (5)

(+TM) Huge VT tradition

(TM: unclear if this is a +, - or neutral) We are the largest “town” in Vermont.

(+TM) 250 year tradition unlike any other

(-AB) Ends town meeting possibly

(+TM) Tradition

6) SAME-DAY VOTING, SIMPLICITY, IMPLEMENTATION (35)

SAME DAY VOTING (8)

(CM) Have one day of voting for everything.

(+AB) Timing—could fit into school vote

(+SB) Timing could line up with school vote

(+AB) Tie in with school vote

(TR) Having all budget votes on same day

(-RTM) Doesn't change number of times to vote

(CM) Voting: Same-day voting – make it a more simple process

(Q): How to change number of votes!

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: Same day voting

GROUP'S TOP IDEA: One vote on one day for everything

SIMPLICITY/CLARITY, CONVENIENCE (10)

(CM) Simplify the structures for governance and communications

(-RTM) Confusion could lead to apathy

(+AB) Simplicity of Y/N

(+AB) Convenience

(+RTM) Less confusion

- (+AB) People are comfortable with it
- (+AB) Black and white results (clarity)
- (+SB2) Hear and discuss once, not at series of budget meetings
- (+AB) Simple and straightforward
- (-SB2) Voting a month later
- GROUP'S TOP IDEA:** Simplify: Governance, communication, education (of municipal issues, budgets)

IMPLEMENTATION CONCERNS & QUESTIONS (17)

- (+AB) Charter change not scary
- (-SB2) Look at Colchester model. Take care on number of charter changes.
- (-RTM) Hard pressed to find enough representative. How would that "look like" in Essex?
- (-RTM) Implementation more difficult and time consuming
- (-RTM) Drawing the districts could be a major issue? What criteria are used to draw the districts?
- (?RTM) How do/would districts get determined in a Representative Town Meeting approach?
- (-SB2) Implementation
- (-SB2) Does this need state law?
- (-SB2) What happens if budget fails? Another 2-meeting cycle? Just AB?
- (-SB2) Clarifications about implementation details very important for this group
- (-TM) If more people went, how long would meeting go?
- (Q): More info about Brattleboro model
- (Q): SB2 – Timeframe look like
- (-SB2) Sounds great but doesn't work
- (-RTM) Increase costs
- (-RTM) Unanswered questions to this approach
- (Q): How did Brattleboro come up with 155 reps in Approach 4?

7) ADDITIONAL TOPICS

VILLAGE-TOWN CONNECTEDNESS (7)

- (CM) Connecting different sections of our governance
- (CM) Town / Village collaborations
- (CM) Websites: similar look and feel for both communities (Village & Town)
- (CM) Town have same communications as Village

MORE WORK FOR MUNI STAFF (2)

- (-RTM) More work for municipal staff
- (-RTM) Extra staff work? (questionable for some)

SATISFACTION (1)

- (P'king): Why people aren't voting: Representative is doing their job (i.e. people aren't participating because they are satisfied)

FOUR DECISION-MAKING APPROACHES: DOT VOTING RESULTS

After the small-group discussions regarding the four decision-making approaches, Forum participants were asked to indicate their preferences about the decision-making methods by dot voting. Participants were asked to rank each method, “movie review”-style, from a low ranking of one star to a high ranking of four stars.

DOT RESULTS:	1 STAR	2 STARS	3 STARS	4 STARS
Town Meeting	22	10	12	9
Australian Ballot	11	18	15	9
Hybrid (SB2)	12	12	13	16
Representative TM	16	12	12	13

Although this is a relatively small number of votes (53) from a self-selected group of participants, a few patterns are suggested:

- Traditional Town Meeting had the most 1s (“very unfavorable”)
- Town Meeting and Australian ballot tied for the fewest 4s (“very favorable”)
- Hybrid had the most “very favorable”
- Representative TM had a relatively high number of 1s (“very unfavorable”), but also a relatively high number of 4s (“very favorable”)

Take-aways:

- Many Forum participants are dissatisfied with Town Meeting. However, not many participants see Australian ballot as the most appealing alternative. Many Forum participants seem interested in exploring other alternatives. The hybrid model garnered the most interest, and representative town meeting the second most.