

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE
FINAL**

August 22, 2019

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING
August 22, 2019**

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS: George Tyler, Chair; Max Levy, Raj Chawla, Andrew Watts

ADMINISTRATION: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Town Manager;
Ann Janda, Merger Project Planner

OTHERS PRESENT: Dave Treston, KSV, Margaret Smith, Irene Wrenner, Bruce Post, Mike Sullivan, Susan McCormack, Ken Signorello, Andy Suntup

1. CALL TO ORDER

George Tyler called the meeting of the Village of Essex Junction Trustees and Town of Essex Selectboard Subcommittee on Governance (hereafter referred to as “Subcommittee on Governance”) to order at 6:30 PM.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

There were no additions or changes to the agenda.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL

RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and ANDREW WATTS seconded, to approve the agenda of August 22, 2019 as written. Motion passed 4-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Andy Suntup asked if there is only going to be one proposal presented to voters. Mr. Tyler affirmed that there would be one proposal presented. Margaret Smith commented that parking availability at the Lincoln Hall location was difficult.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Presentation of focus groups results

Dave Treston presented a Powerpoint summary of the August 2019 Essex Resident Listening Sessions Findings. He began by informing the audience that the objective of the sessions was to hear from residents and gather general thoughts about potential merger by providing the group with information and then an opportunity to discuss. Mr. Treston said that the listening sessions were step two of three. The next step will be a quantitative survey. He noted that in nearly all of the conversations, the common questions were “Why now?” and “Why is this coming up again?”. Following the presentation, Mr. Tyler pointed out that the reason for the focus groups and survey is to put together a coherent plan by December or January. With the quantitative survey coming up next, the focus group listening sessions help the subcommittee to understand what questions should be a part of the upcoming survey.

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44 Mr. Tyler asked for questions for Mr. Treston from the subcommittee members. The
45 subcommittee members asked for Mr. Treston to elaborate on topics such as the impact of
46 merger on community development, phasing in taxes, but having representation on day one,
47 separation as an option, having a mayor and wards.

48

49 Mr. Tyler invited the audience to ask questions about the presentation from Mr. Treston. Ken
50 Signorello mentioned that a news article on the separation idea was presented on the last night of
51 the focus groups and said that the subcommittee should not discount the option. He added that
52 51 is a small number for focus group attendance. Ms. Wrenner asked Mr. Treston if
53 representation outside of the Village was a concern for the focus groups. Mr. Treston responded
54 that the tenor of the discussions was that the focus group participants recognized that the
55 community as a whole has concerns. Mr. Post commented that he listened to the presentations
56 and expressed thanks. He continued by saying that he was uncomfortable with a few phrases
57 used by focus group participants such as, “qualified to run”, of which the only qualification is to
58 be a resident. Mr. Post also mentioned the phrase, “quality of services” and that campaigns
59 should not be built around words that cannot be defined. He went on to comment that the
60 emergence of the ward idea is a real option and that special taxing districts needs to be fleshed
61 out. Susan McCormack introduced herself and her past work with the Heart & Soul project. She
62 asked Mr. Treston if there is an opportunity to expand or shift the materials presented for the
63 survey coming up. Mr. Treston responded, yes. Ms. McCormack suggested to include an option
64 to include numerous and robust wards since there seemed to be some energy in the focus groups
65 about this and it matches results from the Heart & Soul project. She went on to say that if the
66 mayor idea comes up more, it should also be considered an option and it would show that the
67 people in the groups were heard. Ms. McCormack commented that since the subcommittee
68 chose to frame the beginning of their research that merging is the right thing, she suggested some
69 options to manage that in a broader community such as including some of the people who
70 participated in the focus groups to assist the subcommittee with work such as drafting pros and
71 cons. Mr. Suntup stated that people will need to know before they vote what they are voting on
72 so that in a year, they will know what they are paying. Ms. Smith followed Mr. Suntup’s
73 comment by saying that in terms of taxation, people will need to know what they get for their
74 taxes and if services for daycare, pool, recreation are equal. Ms. Smith said that people will want
75 to see the numbers crunched. Mr. Tyler responded by saying that if taxes are phased in, the
76 legislature will require an explanation for the increases when merging to show that it is not to
77 impose a new tax, but to clarify how the budgets will be set.

78

79 Mr. Tyler asked Mr. Treston about next survey timeline. Mr. Treston stated that the current
80 schedule is to have a draft by August 29th and to reconvene the subcommittee on September 5th.
81 Mr. Tyler suggested that the subcommittee/staff come up with some specific questions
82 independently for the survey, then see where the overlap is. After a discussion regarding the
83 timeline and the target date to have the answers ready, the subcommittee decided to have all
84 questions submitted to Ann Janda. Ms. Janda will then forward the questions to Mr. Treston for
85 the next subcommittee meeting on September 5th.

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87 **b. Approve draft elevator speech about potential merger**

88 Mr. Tyler asked the subcommittee to review the draft elevator speech included in the meeting
89 packet. He informed the subcommittee that they would be approving as a draft to present to the
90 joint board and that it can be changed. The subcommittee made a few minor edits to the
91 language.

92

93 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion to approve the revised version of the draft elevator speech.**
94 **MAX LEVY seconded. Motion passed 4-0.**

95

96 **c. Approve updates to FAQs about potential merger**

97 Mr. Tyler requested the subcommittee review the FAQs and mentioned that there will be more
98 FAQs to come. The subcommittee offered some minor edits to the document.

99

100 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and MAX LEVY seconded to approve the FAQs document**
101 **with changes. Motion passed 4-0.**

102

103 **d. Discussion about Bennington special taxing district**

104 Mr. Tyler introduced materials he provided to the subcommittee regarding the Town of
105 Bennington, Vermont. He stated that Bennington had been a village in a town that merged in
106 1961. Bennington created a special district for downtown improvements. Mr. Tyler provided an
107 informational summary of a conversation with Stuart Hurd, the Bennington Town Manager.

108

109 **e. Approval of minutes:**

110 *August 2, 2019:*

111 **ANDREW WATTS made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to approve the**
112 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from August 2, 2019. Motion passed 4-0.**

113

114 **6. ADJOURN:**

115 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and ANDREW WATTS seconded, to adjourn the meeting.**
116 **The meeting adjourned at 9:08 PM.**

117

118 Respectfully Submitted,

119 Tammy Getchell

120 Recording Secretary

121

122 Approved this 5th day of September, 2019

123

124 **(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)**