

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING
May 13, 2019

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS: Raj Chawla, Andy Watts, Max Levy, George Tyler.

ADMINISTRATION: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager.

OTHERS PRESENT: Irene Wrenner

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. 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 7:01 p.m.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Mr. Duggan noted that staff received additional feedback on non-responses to the recent Request For Proposals (RFP) for a public engagement effort regarding potential governance changes, and would like to include it in Business Item #5.

MAX LEVY made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to include additional feedback in Business Item #5. The motion passed 4-0.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL

GEORGE TYLER made motion, and ANDY WATTS seconded, that the Subcommittee on Governance approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 4-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Ms. Wrenner stated that it is critically important that both the Town outside the Village and the Village be represented on this Subcommittee.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Selection of Chair and Vice Chair

Mr. Teich called for nominations for the Subcommittee on Governance Chair.

MAX LEVY nominated George Tyler for Subcommittee on Governance Chair, and GEORGE TYLER seconded the nomination. The nomination passed 4-0.

Mr. Tyler called for nominations for the Subcommittee on Governance Vice Chair.

GEORGE TYLER nominated Max Levy for Subcommittee on Governance Vice Chair, and ANDY WATTS seconded the nomination. The nomination passed 4-0.

b. Selection of the recording secretary

Mr. Tyler called for nominations for the Subcommittee on Governance Recording Secretary.

46 **GEORGE TYLER nominated Raj Chawla for Subcommittee on Governance Recording**
47 **Secretary, and MAX LEVY seconded the nomination. The nomination passed 4-0.**
48

49 **c. Schedule of future meeting dates**

50 The Subcommittee members discussed scheduling future meetings, and decided to hold meetings
51 on the following days, at 7 p.m.:

- 52 ▪ May 23, 2019
- 53 ▪ June 6, 2019
- 54 ▪ June 20, 2019
- 55 ▪ July 18, 2019

56
57 Additional meetings will be scheduled as needed.

58
59 **d. Identifying next steps for the Governance change initiative**

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61 Mr. Tyler began the discussion on next steps for the governance change initiative by noting that
62 formal bids on the RFP were not received, but that feedback was received on why no bids were
63 submitted. He also outlined the issues and potential roadblocks that would cause the public to
64 vote against a consolidated governance structure for the Town of Essex and Village of Essex
65 Junction. These issues include tax equity between the Town and Village, representation on
66 boards for the Town and Village, and issues of identity. He also outlined the timeline for
67 developing a consolidation plan/proposal, which would entail developing a proposal to refine the
68 charter between now and the end of the calendar year so that changes could be publicized and
69 circulated by spring/summer 2020 for a fall 2020 ballot vote.

70
71 Mr. Levy suggested that the previously released RFP could be broken up into smaller, more
72 specific tasks, such as survey development and educating and marketing the proposed changes to
73 the public, with staff completing some of these tasks and outside consultants hired to complete
74 others.

75
76 Members of the subcommittee agreed that survey data from the public would be vital to the
77 governance change initiative, that any surveys fielded could also be used as educational tools,
78 and that they should attempt to reach as many members of the public as possible.

79
80 Subcommittee members agreed that staff should be directed to identify potential candidates for
81 survey development by June, and that members of the subcommittee should think of survey
82 questions in the interim.

83
84 Mr. Chawla suggested that, in addition to surveys, holding focus groups would be another
85 valuable source of information on public sentiment. Focus groups could be better representations
86 of diverse demographics and communities within the Town and Village, and could also provide
87 more immediate and actionable data to inform governance change proposals. Mr. Teich
88 suggested that focus groups could help guide survey development as well, and that the results of
89 focus group discussions could be used to conduct larger, more targeted surveys. These could, in
90 turn help guide the Town and Village boards in their decision-making regarding consolidation
91 initiatives. Mr. Chawla emphasized that any focus groups be well-publicized and that they be

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92 accessible to all members of the community by holding them at various times (morning,
93 afternoon, evening) and locations that are on public transit routes. Mr. Duggan noted that the
94 Heart & Soul initiative conducted a network analysis to target segments of the communities for
95 participation in focus groups and events, and that something similar could be done to solicit
96 feedback for this initiative.

97

98 Mr. Levy suggested that survey development could occur in tandem with holding focus groups,
99 in order to use time most efficiently.

100

101 Next steps:

- 102 ▪ Staff will research firms that could recruit for and conduct focus groups for the initiative;
- 103 ▪ Staff will simultaneously research firms or organizations that could conduct surveys
104 regarding the initiative;
- 105 ▪ Subcommittee members will develop a list of priority questions for the focus groups prior
106 to the subcommittee's May 23 meeting;
- 107 ▪ Subcommittee members will develop a list of demographic areas and communities to
108 target with the focus groups and survey for discussion at the subcommittee's May 23
109 meeting.

110

111 Mr. Watts had a number of legal questions regarding whether tax districts can have their own
112 libraries, whether different water districts need separate governance, and voting procedures
113 around charter changes, noting that the state legislature is currently working to clarify language
114 in statute regarding process for charter changes in Bennington. Mr. Teich offered to pass Mr.
115 Watts' questions to Dan Richardson, the Town and Village's special counsel on governance.

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118 **e. Discuss financial plan for Governance change initiative**

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120 The Subcommittee briefly discussed the financial plan for the governance change initiative. Mr.
121 Tyler noted that the financial plan is currently in the process of being drafted, and that he will
122 direct staff to specifically look at the different water and sewer rates for the Town and Village,
123 based on interest from members at tonight's meeting regarding the differences between the two.

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125

126 **f. Approval of minutes: March 11, 2019**

127 **MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by GEORGE TYLER, to approve the**
128 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from March 11, 2019. The motion passed 4-**
129 **0.**

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132 **6. ADJOURN:**

133 **MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to adjourn the meeting. The**
134 **motion passed 4-0 at 9:05 p.m.**

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137 Respectfully Submitted,

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138 Amy Coonradt
139 Recording Secretary

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141

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143 Approved this _____ day of _____, 2019

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

DRAFT