

1 **VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES**
2 **TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD**
3 **SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING**
4 **JUNE 6, 2019**

5
6 **GOVERNANCE SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS:** George Tyler, Chair; Raj Chawla; Max
7 Levy.

8 **ADMINISTRATION:** Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager.

9 **OTHERS PRESENT:** Erin Fagnant, KSV; Bridget Meyer; Margaret Smith; Irene Wrenner;
10 Tucker Wright, KSV.

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12 **1. CALL TO ORDER**

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14 Mr. Tyler called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

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16 **2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

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18 **MAX LEVY MOVED AND RAJ CHAWLA SECONDED A MOTION TO ADD THE**
19 **FOLLOWING ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA:**

- 20
21 **1. A Brief Summary of the Essex Community Political Structure and the Challenges it**
22 **Poses for Consolidation**
23 **2. Essex Junction Trustees/Essex Town Selectboard Joint Governance Subcommittee**
24 **Report 4/9/19.**

25
26 **THE MOTION PASSED 3-0.**

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28 **4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

29
30 There were no comments from the public.

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32 **5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

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34 a. Planning for Public Engagement around Governance Change

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36 Ms. Erin Fagnant and Mr. Tucker Wright from KSV were present to begin developing a public
37 engagement plan to prepare for a governance change vote in November 2020. Both Ms. Fagnant
38 and Mr. Wright were familiar with the history in Essex with regard to merger efforts in the past.
39 KSV plans to offer surveys and focus groups, with the Governance Subcommittee (GS) acting as
40 a steering committee. Members discussed the desired extent of surveys and focus groups, as well
41 as timelines and process. Ms. Fagnant and Mr. Wright explained KSV's recommendation to
42 begin the process with a qualitative (80% ideal approval vote for 2020) public survey to help
43 identify the knowledge base of residents about governance, any challenges and any biases. Those
44 findings and findings from previous surveys would then be used as a facilitation guide for the
45 focus groups. Focus group discussions will be recorded on video and transcribed. The last step to
46 the process is a quantitative public survey that would identify and confirm the right options and

47 further feedback for the governance change vote in November 2020. Mr. Tyler felt the proposed
48 process from KSV embodied the intent of GS recent discussions. Members briefly discussed the
49 importance of educating the public before and throughout the process to ensure a good
50 understanding of the issue. Ms. Ann Janda was hired as a point person for the governance change
51 vote, and members discussed the possibility of her creating a website and other online resources
52 to objectively describe the governance structure today, efforts for merger in the past and what is
53 being proposed for the future and why. The members would like to meet with Ms. Janda and Mr.
54 Teich to discuss the extent to which she could complete these tasks. Mr. Wright confirmed for
55 Mr. Tyler that the length of time for the initial survey, focus groups and final survey was from
56 eight to 16 weeks, which would mean completion in the fall. Mr. Chawla was pleased with this
57 timing because the GS could then determine if it is going in the right direction. Mr. Wright and
58 Ms. Fagnant confirmed for the members that they would provide a very detailed outline of the
59 project, the phases and the feedback along the way. The ultimate goal for this effort is to warn a
60 presentation to the public at Town Meeting in March.

61
62 With regard to frequency of meetings with KSV, it was decided that if there is information for
63 the members to review, email will be used to distribute materials, but not for discussions. If there
64 are any substantial discussions or decisions to be made, they should meet. Mr. Wright explained
65 that sometimes they will need to meet weekly and other times meetings can be further in
66 between. Initially, Ms. Fagnant explained that they will draft a project plan in the next week or
67 two and should have a meeting at that point. Members will wait to hear from KSV and then warn
68 the meeting.

69
70 With regard to the scope of the project, members agreed with the recommended process of an
71 initial survey, focus groups and a final survey. With regard to focus groups, Mr. Tyler and Mr.
72 Chawla agreed that it may be difficult to have the business community as a focus group and that
73 residents and voters should be the target for those groups. Mr. Levy commented that the impact
74 on businesses needs to be considered, but the focus groups and survey should include the voters.
75 Mr. Tyler agreed that the opinion from the business community is important, but could be
76 realized through the Economic Development Commission, and members agreed. One question
77 that needed to be answered regarding focus groups, was how they will be structured. Mr. Wright
78 explained that there are pros and cons to special interest focus groups versus mixed focus groups.
79 When there is a consolidated group, then the community would know the opinion of that group.
80 On the other hand, a specific subset group can create a “group think” mentality versus individual
81 opinions. The number of focus groups also plays into how they could be structured to suit the
82 needs of Essex. The analyst from KSV, Mr. Dave Treston, who could not be at the meeting
83 tonight, could weigh in more on this issue at the next meeting. Mr. Tyler commented that the tax
84 structure in the community is such that there will be a difference in burden in order to reach tax
85 equity. He referred to the Agenda Addition that explains the political structure and the challenges
86 it poses for consolidation. Mr. Chawla wanted to make sure everyone felt comfortable expressing
87 their opinions during the focus group discussions. Mr. Tyler clarified for Ms. Bridget Meyer that
88 the survey and focus groups will help determine the basic structure of governance that will be
89 presented to the public at Town Meeting and proposed to the voters in 2020. Mr. Tucker
90 explained that the participation of residents in the process should be statistically significant to the
91 total population. Mr. Duggan commented that statistical significance is surprisingly low for
92 phase 1 (approximately 375 residents for 95% confidence).

93

94 With regard to the number of focus groups, Tier 2 of KSV's proposal recommends six focus
95 groups comprised of eight to 10 members. With regard to the structure of the focus groups, Mr.
96 Chawla suggested two from inside the Village, two from outside the Village and two mixed, and
97 members agreed. If there needs to be a shift at any point during the effort, KSV will inform the
98 GS.

99

100 It was confirmed that KSV will draft a scope and schedule, and will work with the staff and GS
101 to schedule an initial kick-off working meeting in one to two weeks to collaborate on questions
102 for the survey and a proposal to bring to the Selectboard and Trustees. It was confirmed for Mr.
103 Levy that the final reading of the survey would occur in the fall based on the KSV's Tier 2
104 proposal. It was confirmed for Mr. Chawla that the data video will be owned by the Town and
105 Village.

106

107 Ms. Irene Wrenner felt equal representation from inside and outside the Village was missing in
108 the proposal and should be acknowledged in this process. Mr. Tyler felt that the process will
109 uncover identity issues inside and outside the Village. Mr. Tyler reviewed the Agenda Additions
110 with Mr. Wright and Ms. Fagnant, which included the current governance structure. Contact
111 information was exchanged, and members and staff will wait to hear from KSV.

112

113 b. Discuss Communications Outreach Strategy

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115 The issue is for the GS to discuss a communications outreach strategy.

116

117 Mr. Tyler suggested a weekly column in the Essex Reporter written by different people from the
118 community highlighting information to the public about this issue. Mr. Levy suggested
119 addressing questions from the public as well. Members agreed with the first two columns being
120 written by staff to share the background and history of the governance structure and how it is
121 today. Mr. Chawla added that people should be encouraged to send questions, and he suggested
122 discussing a plan to moderate a Facebook page, which could also publish facts and answer
123 questions, without the ability for debate. Members discussed using Front Porch Forum to
124 communicate information with a link to the Essex Reporter. Members discussed creative ideas
125 such as inviting well-known people in the community to provide information on the topic and to
126 use a graphic that represents both communities as a way to catch people's attention. Ms. Meyer
127 requested there be a quick link to past articles available to the public. Mr. Duggan explained that
128 Ms. Janda will act as an organizer for outreach. Mr. Tyler expressed interest in an independent
129 site for this issue that could be found on both websites. Members agreed that the online outreach
130 needed to be monitored to avoid any political arguments. Ms. Meyer wanted a one click source
131 of information on this issue and stated that it was important for all the questions to get answered.
132 Members agreed that Mr. Teich and Ms. Janda could answer the technical questions, and then if
133 questions get political, those questions could be referred to the Selectboard (SB) and Trustees.
134 Ms. Wrenner was concerned with having a balanced perspective and checks and balances when
135 questions get political. She would like to avoid what happened with the recreation consolidation
136 effort. Members discussed the potential challenges with social media and decided to discuss this
137 further with Mr. Teich and Ms. Janda. Ms. Meyer was not for or against using social media, but
138 knew that there was a large population that used that form of communication. She stated that a

139 savvy person needs to manage it. She also noted that there are many different people who use
140 different forms of communication and suggested sending information via water or tax bills. Mr.
141 Levy wanted to check with the lawyer first before entertaining that idea.

142

143 Mr. Levy noted that it was important to go where the people are, like what the SB does during
144 outreach for Town Meeting and the Town budget. With regard to public forums and meetings
145 with local groups and organizations, members agreed those would occur later in the effort.
146 Members also decided to keep the June 20 subcommittee meeting unless they hear from KSV
147 sooner. Mr. Duggan will remind KSV that 48 hours is needed to warn a meeting.

148

149 c. Approval of Minutes: May 23, 2019

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151 **MAX LEVY made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to approve the minutes of May**
152 **23, 2019, as presented. The motion passed 3-0.**

153

154 **6. READING FILE**

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156 **7. ADJOURN**

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158 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and MAX LEVY seconded, to adjourn. The motion passed**
159 **3-0 at 8:31 p.m.**

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161

162 **Respectfully Submitted,**

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164 **Saramichelle Stultz**