

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING
June 20, 2019**

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

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Margaret Smith, Irene Wrenner, Bruce Post, Betsy Dunn, Bridget Meyer, Dave Treston (KSV)

1. CALL TO ORDER

In the absence of George Tyler, Max Levy 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 7:00 p.m.

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 June 20, 2019 as written. Motion passed 3-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Ms. Meyer asked if Mr. Treston (of KSV) had received the Heart & Soul application, which gives good information about the layout of the Town and Village and historical context for the current merger efforts. She stated that she would be happy to forward the application to KSV. She additionally suggested that the focus group portion of this project could benefit from historical and contextual information as well, and further suggested that a fact sheet or a short video explaining this information could be helpful.

Irene Wrenner noted several inconsistencies between the draft survey and what had been discussed based on the meeting minutes from the previous meeting, which were discussed and clarified.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Review draft survey with KSV

The Subcommittee on Governance reviewed the draft survey produced by KSV, as well as feedback from committee members who were not able to attend the meeting. In addition to minor adjustments for typos or clarifying terms, the Subcommittee made the following substantive changes:

- Reorganized the survey to include background information prior to the first set of demographic questions.

- 47 - Recommended that a map including Essex neighborhoods and voting districts be
- 48 included as a reference document for respondents.
- 49 - Struck the question asking if respondents currently serve on any Essex boards. Board
- 50 members and Trustees will not take the survey.
- 51 - Rewrote the question asking respondents if they were aware that Town and Village
- 52 residents have separate governments and pay separate taxes. This question was rewritten
- 53 into five separate questions around this topic as an opportunity to educate respondents
- 54 regarding the current relationship between the Town and Village in terms of taxes and
- 55 governance.
- 56 - Added more examples of municipal services and departments that have already been
- 57 consolidated to the description/history section of the survey.
- 58 - Reworded certain terms to ensure maximum accessibility and readability of the survey.
- 59 - Adjusted all questions to require some kind of response in the free text boxes (no blank
- 60 responses).
- 61 - Struck the question asking about gender as not pertinent to the goals of the survey
- 62 - Adjusted references to the Town and Village to consistently read “Town of Essex” and
- 63 “Village of Essex Junction”.
- 64

65 Mr. Treston noted that the survey will be available online and Mr. Teich suggested that paper
66 copies also be available in specific locations, such as libraries and the senior center. Mr. Treston
67 also added that a QR code will be added to the paper copy of the survey, in case respondents
68 would like to scan it on their smartphones and take the survey that way.

69

70 **b. Schedule of upcoming meetings based on KSV timeline**

71 KSV, subcommittee members, and staff discussed scheduling upcoming meetings. Meetings
72 were scheduled for July 18 and July 26 (this will be a morning meeting).

73

74 *Public discussion:*

75 Ms. Meyer noted that many residents are not aware of current municipal arrangements and
76 structures and said it will be important to structure the survey to give enough information about
77 the current state in plain English. Mr. Teich replied that one of the goals of the survey is to use it
78 as an educational opportunity for the public in addition to soliciting feedback, and that staff will
79 include background and introductory information in the survey.

80

81 A resident noted that it may be important to add that current consolidation efforts are through
82 memoranda of understanding between the two entities and that they are not currently codified
83 into law and can expire.

84

85 Mr. Post emphasized the importance of educating the public about what a chartered municipality
86 would look like and how it would impact residents. He also noted that discussing a merger and
87 retaining separate identities simultaneously might be contradictory or confusing.

88

89 Ms. Wrenner requested that any merger discussion in the survey be referred to as a potential
90 merger. She also requested to clarify in the survey that the Town of Essex “may” be represented
91 by the Selectboard, due to the nature of at-large elections not guaranteeing an equal number of
92 Town and Village members on the Selectboard.

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94 Ms. Smith noted that the nature of the open-ended questions in the survey could be interpreted
95 subjectively by whomever is tasked with analyzing the surveys, and was reassured that KSV was
96 brought on as a set of outside, nonbiased consultants for this work for this reason.

97

98 **c. Update on merger website**

99 Mr. Duggan stated that staff had conducted research on developing a merger website. He stated
100 that Weebly is the most feasible platform on which to do so, since it is user-friendly and not
101 costly. Staff reserved three web addresses for the consideration of the Subcommittee on
102 Governance, and would like the Subcommittee to choose one of them for the merger website.

103

104 **ANDREW WATTS made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, that the Subcommittee**
105 **on Governance recommends that the merger website use the web address**
106 **“Essexmerger2020.org”. Motion passed 3-0.**

107

108 **d. Approval of minutes:**

109 *June 6, 2019:*

110 **ANDREW WATTS made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to approve the**
111 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from June 6, 2019 as written. Motion**
112 **passed 3-0.**

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114 *June 13, 2019:*

115 **ANDREW WATTS made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to approve the**
116 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from June 13, 2019 with Subcommittee**
117 **corrections. Motion passed 3-0.**

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119 The Subcommittee on Governance members suggested the following changes to the minutes:

120

- 121 • Line 127: change sentence to read “Mr. Watts would like to ask whether respondents
122 understand that paying fewer taxes may reduce access to some services.”

123

124 **6. READING FILE:**

125

126 **7. ADJOURN:**

127 RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and ANDREW WATTS seconded, to adjourn the meeting. The
128 meeting adjourned at 8:53pm.

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130

131 Respectfully Submitted,

132 Amy Coonradt

133 Recording Secretary

134

135 Approved this 18 day of July, 2019

136

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