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 7:02pm.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES
Mr. Tyler suggested changing the order of the agenda so that Business Item 5b would be discussed first and Business Item 5a would be discussed second. Other subcommittee members agreed and the order of the agenda was changed.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL
GEORGE TYLER made a motion, and MAX LEVY seconded, that the Subcommittee on Governance approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed 3-0 [Annie Cooper not present for vote].

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD
George Tyler noted that the charter change will be discussed during Item C.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS
a. Discuss and consider approving Q&A for water/sewer transition language:
Mr. Tyler noted that Andy Watts had had questions about water/sewer transition language and messaging around changes in tax rates. Mr. Teich clarified that the current proposal is that the Town and Village would both have their separate legacy systems for water and sewer, with their own rates and any associated debt. In the future, the systems could decide (with voter approval) to take on new debt, which would be shared between the two systems, and rates would eventually equalize. He further emphasized that only residents who are connected to the systems would pay for services from those systems.

Mr. Chawla suggested including language in the Q&A that explicitly states that only people who pay for water/sewer pay for the infrastructure and the services associated with them.

Ms. Cooper emphasized the importance of transparency and clear messaging to residents on the topic of the merger.
b. Discuss library proposal:
Christine Packard, Chair of Brownell Library Trustees, Bonnie Doble, Chair of the Essex Free Library Trustees, and Caitlin Corless, Director of the Essex Free Library were present to describe the role of their respective Boards of Trustees and how a merger could impact them.

Ms. Packard stated that the Brownell Library trust requires a Board of Trustees made up of permanent and elected members, which oversees library policy creation, fundraising, and budget oversight. Mr. Tyler noted that dissolving this board would require legal action, and that it has remained intact due to conditions in the library’s bequest.

Ms. Doble noted that the Essex Free Library is a municipal library, which is a town department and is bound by requirements in state statute. She added that the trustee are appointed by the Selectboard for 3-year terms and generally have the same duties as the Brownell Library trustees, in terms of policy-setting and fundraising.

Mr. Tyler noted that because of the board requirements for both libraries, a merger would pose no changes to the board structures of either entity and have relatively little impact on them.

Ms. Packard noted that the libraries have proposed to align applicable procedures and staff compensation where possible, to continue to realize cost savings.

c. Review and approve Subcommittee memo to Joint Boards:
Mr. Tyler outlined the recommendations for the merger proposal that would be given to the joint boards for their final approval, which included recommendations on a representation model, tax rate integration and reconciliation, and other transition language in the draft charter.

The subgroup discussed how the March 3 vote to approve the Town’s charter change to allow an even-number of Board seats split between the Town and Village would impact the recommendation within the proposal for a board with two Village, two Town, and three at-large seats. Mr. Tyler proposed putting this recommendation on hold pending a decision from the House Committee on Government Operations about whether an even-numbered representational board is feasible. Mr. Levy proposed that if the Government Operations Committee allows an even-numbered Board, the current recommendation should be modified to reflect an even-numbered board. Mr. Levy also cited concern that the legislature does not have a deadline for making that determination.

Mr. Tyler noted that the tax reconciliation section is still pending input from staff on which of the tax reconciliation models and associated financial figures should be included. He also noted that the section around community development and planning is still pending while the two planning commissions meet to discuss proposed language.

Ms. Cooper expressed concern about the amount of misunderstanding and confusion around the merger in both the Town and the Village, and strongly urged the Subcommittee to issue clear communication both on the merger proposal but also on what a separation scenario and associated costs could look like. Mr. Tyler suggested that that topic may be out of the purview of this subcommittee and that it may be more appropriate for the joint boards to discuss.
Ms. Wrenner echoed Ms. Cooper’s request to see costs for a separate-and-share option. She also urged the administration to listen to voters and consider all proposals, including those not touting the position of the establishment.

Mr. Sheldon, Ms. Wrenner, and Mr. Tyler discussed whether there was voter confusion at the polls. Mr. Tyler noted that there was some confusion about the charter change ballot question in the Village, but whether confusion impacted ballot results is speculation at this juncture.

d. Prepare draft transition provisions language for attorney review:
This item was discussed in Business Item 5c.

e. Set date for next Subcommittee on Governance meeting:
The next Subcommittee on Governance meeting date was tentatively set for March 26, 2020 at 7:00pm.

f. Approval of minutes

February 13, 2020:
RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and ANNIE COOPER seconded, to approve the Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from February 13, 2020 with the following modifications:
- Line 51: replace “relied” with “replied”.

Motion passed 4-0.

Reading file:
Mr. Watts had questions about the process for dissolving charters as the result of a merger vote. Other subcommittee members reached out to legislative counsel and were provided with clarification.

6. ADJOURN:

MAX LEVY made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to adjourn the meeting.
Motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:17pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Amy Coonradt
Recording Secretary

Approved this____day of_________, 2020
(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)