



VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
Subcommittee on Governance
Special Meeting Agenda

2 Lincoln Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Friday, July 26, 2019
8:00 AM

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The Governance Subcommittee consists of two members of the Essex Junction Board of Trustees and two members of the Essex Selectboard. The members will not discuss or take action on any issue outside of the scope of the subcommittee and shall not act as the Town Selectboard or Village Board of Trustees at the meeting.

1. **CALL TO ORDER** [8:00 AM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
 - a. Review focus group discussion guide
 - b. Schedule future meetings of Governance Subcommittee
 - c. Approve minutes: July 18, 2019
6. **ADJOURN**

Members of the public are encouraged to speak during the Public to Be Heard agenda item, during a Public Hearing, or, when recognized by the Chair or President, during consideration of a specific agenda item. The public will not be permitted to participate when a motion is being discussed except when specifically requested by the Chair or President. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. Meetings, like all programs and activities of the Village of Essex Junction and the Town of Essex, are accessible to people with disabilities. For information on accessibility or this agenda, call the Unified Manager's office at 878-1341.

Certification: 07/24/2019

Memorandum

To: Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager

Cc: Ann Janda, Project Manager

From: Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager GSD

Re: Focus group discussion guide

Date: July 24, 2019

Issue

The issue is for the Governance Subcommittee to review and provide feedback on the draft Focus Group Discussion Guide.

Discussion

KSV has drafted a Focus Group Discussion Guide for the listening sessions happening on August 13-15. The Governance Subcommittee should provide feedback on the discussion guide. KSV will revise the discussion guide based on the feedback, and expects final approval by August 2.

A copy of the draft guide is attached. To help guide discussion amongst the subcommittee members, also attached are comments from the Governance Subcommittee members about the results of the first community survey on Governance Change.

Cost

N/a

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee review and provide feedback on the draft Focus Group Discussion Guide.



**Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction Merger
Focus Group Discussion Guide
July 24, 2019 – DRAFT**

The following discussion guide outlines the type of questions we plan to ask focus group participants. While this guide is structured and in the order in how we see the conversations unfolding, we will be nimble may shift the order of questions depending on participants' responses. Our goal is to touch on every question in this guide in all sessions, but timing may require us to skip some questions if necessary.

Focus Group Objectives:

- Gather resident feedback on three proposed operating options, including potential issues, perceived benefits, and recommended improvements to each option
- Determine whether revisions should be made to any of the options before gathering additional feedback
- Use feedback to inform the development of a survey that will be deployed to residents

Total Duration: 90 minutes

Notes on room set up:

- Participants will be sitting at a conference table or in a horseshoe shape facing toward each other with KSV moderator (Dave Treston) sitting in a central location
- Participants will have name placards in front of each other, with first names listed so moderator can call on participants to respond prompts
- Throughout the session, participants will be given visual/text stimuli to provide factual understanding of the current governance structure and to better evaluate proposed merger options

INTRODUCTIONS / RULES – 10 MINUTES

KSV introduction:

- My name is Dave Treston and I am with KSV (Kelliher Samets Volk) – a communications firm that conducts market research
- We're based in Burlington and none of our employees live in Essex, so we are an objective party in this conversation
- My role is to moderate tonight's discussion



- Joining me are [KSV colleague(s)] who are here to capture notes as I am leading the discussion
- You will notice there are no Essex government representatives here tonight. That's by design. Though they are interested in hearing what you all have to say about proposed merger options, they did not want their presence to distract from this conversation.

Ground rules:

- Please be kind and civil toward one another
- Try not to speak over one another – we'll call on you to respond to questions, and if you'd like to follow-up on someone else's response, please raise your hand and we'll call on you next
- We have a lot to get through in the next 90 minutes, so there may be some points where we will need to wrap up and move on to the next section
- We are recording the conversation, as you all know and agreed to, so that we can accurately capture and transcribe what is being shared. However we will remove all names from the transcripts so that your opinions will be anonymous when we share an output of our findings with Town of Essex Selectboard and Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees.
- With that in mind, feel free to share your honest and candid opinions. There are no "wrong" opinions, and we ask that you keep this all a judgment-free zone.

Participant introductions:

- Please (very briefly) introduce yourself by telling us:
 - Your name
 - Whether you live in the Town outside the Village or Village
 - How long you've lived in the community
 - Share what your favorite part of living in Essex is

Intro to conversation / set up:

- The topic at hand tonight is to discuss a potential merger of the municipal governments and functions of the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction
- The Town of Essex Selectboard, Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees, and the joint Governance Subcommittee want to gather thoughts on this topic from Essex residents outside of those that are relatively active in these conversations
- We'll describe and share some material that talks about the current structure so that everyone has a level of understanding about how ToE/VoEJ municipal business is conducted



- We'll share potential merger options that were devised by the Town of Essex Selectboard / Village of Essex Junction Governance subcommittee for the explicit purpose of gathering resident feedback
- Important note: these options are by no means “final” – they are just meant to be something more concrete and tangible for residents to react to, as opposed to saying “what do you think a potential merger could look like”
- The overall goal is to take the outputs from these conversations and the results of a future survey, to potentially put forward a merger proposal to be voted on in November 2020 – the result may even be “no merger” if that’s the feedback we hear in this process

EDUCATION / LEVEL SETTING – 5 MINUTES

Stimuli:

- *One-page description of current governance structure*
 - *Map/image that outlines Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction borders*
 - *Voting – how often each municipality votes and what they vote on*
 - *Representation – Selectboard is voted on by all Essex residents and they represent all of Essex, Board of Trustees is voted on by Village residents and they represent just the Village*
 - *Taxation structure – Village votes on and pays for Village-specific taxes in addition to Town taxes, Town outside the Village residents pay Town taxes but not taxes for Village-only functions*
- *Show a video instead? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6XoXi-Y88g>*
- *FAQ document (currently being developed by Ann, Greg, and others)*
- *List of Town/Village services – what is combined, what is currently separate*

Before moving on, is there anything you just read that you have questions about or would like clarified?

DISCUSSION OF MERGER OPTIONS – 50 MINUTES (25 minutes for each of the proposed merger options, 10 minutes for “status quo”)

Commented [GD1]: 60 minutes, or 20 minutes for each merger option?



Now we are going to share with you one of the proposed merger options, please take a look at this handout... [for each group, we will shuffle the order of Options 1 and Option 2 to minimize order bias, followed by talking about Status Quo as an outcome]

Stimuli:

One-page description for each Proposed Merger Option 1 and Proposed Merger Option 2 (we can just reference the “current governance model” stimuli when discussing “Status Quo”)

- *Description of overall governance structure (for example: X-member board with an elected mayor, X-member board with board-selected mayor/manager, etc.)*
- *Map of town with borders showing districts/wards, if applicable*
- *Representation: How it changes from current structure*
- *Overview of tax structure and potential impacts*
- *Services: What is consolidated, what remains separate (if anything)*
- *Voting: How often do residents vote and by which method (Town meeting, ballot vote)*
- *Definitions of terms, if necessary*

Questions to ask about Proposed Merger Options 1 and 2:

What information that you just read, if anything, needs clarification?

What are your first impressions of this proposed option?

How do you imagine your life as an Essex resident would be directly impacted if this proposed option were passed in a ~~Town~~community-wide vote? (Specify that participants should respond with how it impacts them personally, and not speak for other residents not in the room)

What are the strengths of this proposal? Why do you say that?

What are weaknesses or oversights with this proposal? Why do you say that?

Would you expect that the way in which you feel represented in the municipality would improve, stay the same, worsen, or are you not sure? Why do you say that? (“Representation” in the sense that someone is the government is voting on your behalf on the issues you care about most, could be issues specific to where you live in Essex)

What suggestions would you have that would improve how you are represented in the government?



Does this proposed option make it any more or less confusing (or about the same) in terms of how the municipality is governed and how you participate in government? Why do you say that?

Do you believe you would be more or less engaged in local government (or about the same) if this proposed merger were approved? By “engaged” we mean voting/participating on Town Meeting Day, participating in special elections, attending public meetings, etc.

Would you expect the way in which you benefit from the municipal services (ex. libraries, parks, fire department, public works, etc.) to improve, stay the same, worsen, or are you’re not sure? Why do you say that? [Probe on quality of services, accessibility of services]

Overall, how much are you in favor of this proposal, as written – very much in favor, slightly in favor, slightly not in favor, not at all in favor?

How would you imagine you would vote on this, as currently described – yes or no?

Is there anything you would change that would make this more favorable to you and thus change a possible “no” vote to a “yes” vote? If so, what? If nothing, why nothing?

Status Quo questions:

If the output of this research finds that Essex would be better off with the way things are today rather than merging the municipal governments, how would you imagine your life as a resident in Essex would be directly impacted?

What works well with this current structure?

What would you change, if you could?

Do you feel fairly represented with the current municipal government structure? Why or why not?

Do you find it difficult to be engaged in local government with the current structure? Why or why not?

Do you feel you get enough value out of the benefits, services, and municipal functions you pay for through your municipal taxes? Why do you say that? [Probe on quality, accessibility]



What would be the advantages of keeping status quo?

What would be the disadvantages of keeping status quo?

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS – 20 MINUTES

Identity

We want to ask about how a proposed merger may impact the “identity” of the Essex community, but first, we’d like to ask how you would define identity in this sense / what do you associate with the “identity” of this community? [Probe: name, history, culture, geographic features, demographics of community]

How would a proposed merger impact the “identity” of the Essex community? [Probe: Differences in impact whether Option 1 moves forward or Option 2 moves forward]

How important is it to retain aspects of the current identity? What, if anything, is important to retain?

How much of a sticking point would it be if the community changed names? [Probe: Essex Junction goes away or Town of Essex goes away]

Culture / Us vs. Them perceptions

We also heard in our research that there are cultural differences between the Village and the Town outside the Village. What do you all think? [Probe on us vs. them and if it exists, urban vs. rural characteristics]

What would be the impact on the culture(s) in the municipality if a merger were to go through? [Probe: Would the us vs. them mentality go away or would tensions be stoked? Differences in impact on culture with Option 1 or Option 2]

What could be done to ease any perceived or real tension between the two existing municipalities?

Timing



Would you be more likely to support a merger if there was a gradual transition over a period of a few years (tax rates change incrementally, services combined one-by one) or an immediate change (tax rates change immediately, all services combined immediately)? Why do you say that? [Probe: For a gradual transition, over how many years?]

WRAP-UP – 5 MINUTES

Is there anything we didn't discuss tonight that we should have?

Briefly – Is there anything else we need to be aware of as we continue to engage with residents on the topic of a proposed municipal merger?

Merger discussion next steps

- Presentation of listening session findings during public meeting on August 22 (time, location TBD)
- Survey to be launched September 18

Thank you all for your time and for sharing your thoughts about this topic!

Andy Watts comments on KSV initial governance survey summary report with questions for KSV, possible FAQ Topics and possible Focus Group questions

General

- 690 responses
- 60:40 TOV/Village
- 36:64 Kids/No kids
- Median age >55
- Median income \$150,000 - \$200,000
- 93% homeowners
- Knowledge of merger history correlates with age

Taxes (no surprises here)

- Top of list for comments
- Bigger concern for TOV
- 8-2 sees tax equity as a benefit

Voting

- The number of times we vote wasn't brought up by KSV (not all comments were included) but we have heard this as a significant concern in the past.
 - QUESTIONS FOR KSV; Were there comments about number of times residents vote? Can we ask about this in focus groups?
 - POSSIBLE FAQ TOPIC; Village residents vote one more time than TOV residents (Village Annual Meeting).
- NOTE: Some representation options make voting more complicated since Federal/State districts will remain in place (8-1, 8-2, 8-3) and any new districts may not be able to correspond exactly to existing districts.
 - POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS: Is increased voting complexity associated with adding districts acceptable?

Representation

- KSV recommends that we ask about specific representation models rather than asking open ended representation question.
 - At large
 - Proportional districts at/near current districts
 - Village/TOV
 - 8-1, 8-2, 8-3
 - Neighborhood based
 - Free-form
 - Other options?
- POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS: Is representation discussion about representation on Governance Sub-committee or final governance model or both?

Andy Watts comments on KSV initial governance survey summary report with questions for KSV, possible FAQ Topics and possible Focus Group questions

- POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS: Would proportional (district) representation increase or decrease “us vs them” concerns?
- POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCAL GROUPS: Would you expect better governance if you are represented by someone who lives near you or if elected officials needed to appeal to all voters in the municipality?
- POSSIBLE FAQ TOPIC: No Vermont Towns have proportional representation on their Selectboard. All are at-large. Only 4 Vermont cities have proportional local representation.

Merger Support

- 7 in 10 in favor but skewed by income and voting district
 - 8-1 is 76% in favor
 - 8-3 is 29% not in favor
 - Support correlates with income
- QUESTION FOR KSV: In the survey results, do income and voting district correlate?
- POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS: What issues are specific to 8-3?
 - Identity, loss of rural character
 - Representation
 - Paying for Village infrastructure
- 2 in 10 oppose

Identity

- 9% have a concern, largest in 8-3.
- POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS: Clarify what is meant by identity concern.
- POSSIBLE FAQ TOPIC: Federal/State voting districts are independent of merger. The Post Office is named by the Federal government and will most likely remain Essex Junction and, for most of us, our legal mailing addresses will most likely remain Essex Junction.
- POSSIBLE FAQ TOPIC: Town of Hartford example with 5 Villages, 4 Libraries, 5 cemeteries, 2 water districts, 2 sewer districts, 7 historic districts and 3 overlay planning districts governed by at-large Selectboard with 7 members. Two of the Villages are White River Junction and Queechee are well known.

Services

- Village worried about losing access to EJP programs, childcare, and pool.
- 8 in 10 support shared services
 - POSSIBLE FAQ TOPIC: Village charter specifies Library, Planning Commission and Zoning Review Board. All else is approved by Village Annual Meeting vote.
- Some preference to keep EJP, Fire and Brownell Library separate.
 - POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS (Village): Are you willing to spend more to keep EJP, Fire, Library separate?

Andy Watts comments on KSV initial governance survey summary report with questions for KSV, possible FAQ Topics and possible Focus Group questions

- POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS (Village): If Brownell is kept separate, would you be willing to allow Town residents onto Brownell Library Board of Trustees?

Questions

- What evidence is there that Village residents are more connected and involved? Should we keep saying this?
- Can we put a multi-year tax phasing plan in place given that budgets are approved annually?
- QUESTION FOR KSV: Report mentions concerns about Village “debt.” Were comments specifically about debt or about Village costs?
 - POSSIBLE FAQ TOPIC; Village debt will be retained by current Village property owners until paid off.
 - POSSIBLE QUESTION FOR FOCUS GROUPS: Can we clarify whether concern is Village debt or Village costs?

Misunderstandings

- Why do I pay taxes to the Town if I live in the Village?
- TOV is taxed without representation.
- New municipality could vote to build Essex to its borders.
 - Question: Are there protections in place already or could we include such to protect rural Essex identity/character?
 - POSSIBLE FAQ TOPIC: Rural Essex development protections (if they exist).

George Tyler Governance Subcommittee 7/23/19

Key Takeaways From the Survey

Taxes: The overwhelming majority of respondents were homeowners. The ratio of owners vs renters will likely change in the general election of 2020 but I think the trend will remain. We must therefore conclude that the redistribution of the municipal tax burden that would occur in a complete merger is the most significant challenge for any merger proposal. In an all-out merger of Town and Village general funds, homeowners in Districts 8-1 (where there is already significant opposition to merger) and 8-3 would not only get a tax increase but their Village neighbors would get a tax decrease, which is likely to exacerbate the 8-1 and 8-3 opposition to merger.

Efficiency/Duplication: 'Efficiency' was one of the top five major issues mentioned, and throughout the survey there are comments indicating expectations that merger will improve 'efficiency' and reduce 'duplication.' This is a false expectation. The underlying assumption in our consolidation effort is that present service levels will be maintained. Merger might require some administrative reorganization among departments, but there should be no expectation for significant cost savings. In fact, consolidation so far has actually increased some costs.

Focus Group Discussion Points

Taxes and Tax redistribution: Do people understand that all Town and Village property owners support the Town budget, but only Village property owners support the Village budget? Do they understand that a full merger means the Village's costs would now be distributed to all property owners? Do they understand that this would result in an overall tax increase for Town outside the Village property owners and a tax decrease for Village property owners? Does this change their opinion about merger?

Efficiency and Duplication: There's no duplication of essential services (fire, police, community development, management, finance, etc.). The only duplication is with non-essential services (library, recreation). There's no intention to eliminate either library, so the only possible area for gaining a modest degree of 'efficiency' and reducing 'duplication' is with the two recreation departments. Do people understand this? Does it change their opinion about merger?

Infrastructure and Development: Do people who live outside the Village wish to see the Town become more developed, like the Village? Or should development be confined to the Village and the New Town Center area? Are people aware that development is guided by zoning and planning regulations and that merger is likely to have little impact on community development. Does this change their opinion about merger?

Culture Clash and 'Us vs Them': Are people aware that the Essex Select Board and Essex Junction Trustees have been meeting regularly for the last few years? Are they aware that the Select Board and Trustees have collaborated on a number of initiatives, such as consolidating the municipal manager's office and other administrative services? Are people aware that the overall tone of Village-Town relations is collaborative and cooperative and that there's very little of the old 'Us vs Them' rivalry? Does this change their opinion about merger?

from

Max Levy

5e

Selectboard / Village Trustees Joint Meeting – July 24, 2019

- **Education module to include simple visuals (& possible videos) of current state of consolidation effort plus potential future governing models including any relevant available tax impact outlook**
 - List of departments that have already been consolidated
 - Consolidated via signed Agreements / Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)
 - List of departments that have not been consolidated
 - Bullet-pointed lists of potential benefits & perceived challenges of each type of governance model

- **Probe different governance models to understand pros/cons and preferences for type of representation**
 - Equal, at-large representation
 - Proportional representation with 2 or more districts
 - At-large, combination, etc.

- **Have residents examine proposed merger options to determine whether certain options do a better job of alleviating cultural tension than others do**

- **Understand what “identity” means to each focus group then probe the importance of preserving historical “identity” and how it may or may not complement a new, singular identity for the community.**

- **Probe the importance of what the merged community should be named**

Selectboard / Village Trustees Joint Meeting – July 24, 2019

- **Gauge preferences on the timeline for execution, should a merger occur**
 - Pull the Band-Aid off all at once?
 - Should tax equalization take place over a period of time?
 - If so, how long?

- **Town outside the Village focus groups should be sure to include a mix of both 8-1 and 8-3 residents**

- **Seek to understand how residents would prefer to be kept abreast of the merger discussion**
 - What method of communication
 - What information would be most valuable to them
 - Create workshops or other similar open forums, if community desires them

Raj Chawla, Trustee
Governance Subcommittee
July 22, 2019

I'm excited at the response rate for this survey (n=690.) With a 59% TOV and 40 % Village response rate, I think we can feel optimistic that we have a fair initial reading of how the community feels about moving forward. We can see that a majority of respondents can find something positive in merging. I do think there are some areas here that we should be very careful with, for instance the idea that image / identity is reported as not a priority for a majority of respondents. This will likely evolve into something quite important as the process progresses. And taxes are clearly an issue.

I look forward to combing through the qualitative results as I think those responses will prove valuable in terms of identifying areas for clarification or education. Addressing these areas should be a priority and should inform the direction for the focus groups.

The survey reports that 8 in 10 residents are aware of the makeup of the community and the characteristics of the TOE government compared to the Village government. I'm skeptical of this and think we should be careful acting on that assumption. The written responses will help us in this regard. There are numerous examples throughout the presentation that demonstrate a lack of understanding of how the community functions.

There is an interesting gradient that runs through the results, between the urban to rural (8-2, to 8-1 to 8-3). This could show up in conversations about appropriate representation in the merger discussions, in representation for the newly formed community etc. The middle 8-1 district (less urban, less rural) area has some particularly interesting trends. I think there is support for merger, perhaps including rec and library, but that could erode if assumptions of efficiency and cost savings fail to materialize and taxes increase for those TOV residents. There is a definite urban / rural divide though narrow support for this effort exists throughout the community.

More than half of all respondents felt that merger would result in cost reductions / efficiencies though we haven't presented anything that would prove that out and may not come to pass. A key strength is that 8 in 10 respondents think that shared services benefit the community. There seems to be confusion regarding duplication of services and residents report that they don't want to sacrifice services.

People report that all departments, including rec, libraries and fire should be consolidated though Village residents aren't as enthusiastic as those in the TOV. It will be interesting to tease this out in the focus groups. Are village residents nervous about access to EJRP? That is something we should explore if we are considering a special tax district for rec, libraries etc.

It will be interesting to see if this narrow support for merger remains once many of these issues are clarified for residents.

Memorandum

To: Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager
Cc: Ann Janda, Project Manager
From: Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager GSD
Re: Scheduling future meetings
Date: July 24, 2019

Issue

The issue is for the Governance Subcommittee to schedule future meetings.

Discussion

The Governance Subcommittee does not have any meetings scheduled after July 26.

Upcoming issues include the following:

- Drafting an elevator speech about governance change (DEADLINE: open-ended)
- Final review/approval of focus group discussion guide (DEADLINE: August 2, staff can give final approval based on July 26 comments)
- Presentation of focus group report (August 22)
- Review of draft of quantitative survey (DEADLINE: September 5)
- Final review/approval of quantitative survey (DEADLINE: September 13)
- Presentation of quantitative survey report (October 17)

Thursday evenings seemed to work well for night meetings. Meetings held during the day can be more flexible, since conference rooms are not booked for regularly-scheduled meetings.

Cost

N/a

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee scheduled future meetings.

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING
July 18, 2019**

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

ADMINISTRATION: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Ann Janda, Project Manager

OTHERS PRESENT: Margaret Smith, Irene Wrenner, Iris Banks, Kevin Collins, Bridget Meyer, Dave Treston (KSV)

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 6:58 p.m.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

There were no additions or changes to the agenda.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL

No vote was taken because the agenda was not modified.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

None at this time.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Review results of first survey about governance change

Dave Treston of KSV Marketing provided a summary of initial qualitative survey results, first detailing the characteristics of the sample of respondents. There were 690 respondents to the survey, which was deemed to be a good turnout and a large enough sample size to instill a level of confidence about survey results. There was a decent spread across demographics for respondents, in terms of age, income, districts, and residence. He noted that the survey skewed slightly toward Town-outside-the-Village residents when compared to census data. He also noted that there was less representation in the survey from the 18-34 age demographic, which was anticipated. Finally, he noted that voting district tended to be the strongest influencing factor for many survey responses, and that it was a stronger predictor than age, income, or housing type.

Mr. Treston then walked through the key findings of the survey. He first noted that the survey was composed of open-ended and qualitative questions. Open-ended questions were analyzed by identifying and quantifying key common themes of concern and interest to respondents. The survey indicated that while the merger ranked in the top four perceived issues for all three voting districts, it intersected with the other top issues for respondents, which included taxes, economic development and attracting businesses, and traffic/infrastructure issues. The merger had both positive and negative associations for respondents. Other key findings include:

- 47 - Approximately 75% of respondents were moderately aware of the merger conversation
48 (and this was one of the few questions in which age was a factor in determining
49 responses);
- 50 - 70% of respondents stated that they were moderately familiar with the structure of the
51 local government, and more than a third stated that they were extremely familiar with it;
- 52 - 70% of respondents were at least somewhat in favor of a merger, and 50% of respondents
53 were very in favor of moving forward with a merger;
 - 54 o There was a slight skew in favorability for upper income respondents;
 - 55 o District 8-1 was most likely to be in favor of a merger and District 8-3 was most
56 likely to not be in favor of a merger;
- 57 - Top perceived challenges to a merger included tax equity and concerns about
58 representation. When broken out by voting district, this was a top concern for Districts 8-
59 1 and 8-3. Other challenges were spread across an array of different issues and themes.
- 60 - Top perceived benefits to a merger included realizing cost efficiencies and eliminating
61 redundancies, simplification, unification, tax equity, a united community, and more
62 cohesion in long-term goals.
- 63 - 80% of respondents stated that shared services benefit the community, and that services
64 should be combined, though Village residents were slightly more likely to prefer that the
65 fire department, libraries, and parks & recreation department remain separate.
- 66 - 42% of respondents were not sure about what an ideal merger would look like, and the
67 top concrete suggestion was that all services and offices be combined. There was no real
68 consensus in terms of a suggested solution.

69
70 Mr. Treston then outlined the following takeaways and recommendations, based on the results of
71 the survey:

- 72 - Future phases of research should include probes on different types of governance models
73 and the importance of identity, as representation, tax equity, and identity were the key
74 survey themes.
- 75 - Future phases of research should include more concrete examples of potential governing
76 models, more information on current state in terms of what services have already been
77 combined and what is being proposed, and examples of potential benefits and perceived
78 challenges.
- 79 - Focus groups should include a mix of participants from Districts 8-1 and 8-3, as there
80 were notable differences between these two groups in the survey.
- 81 - Future phases of research should include more concrete examples of potential governing
82 models, more information on current state in terms of what services have already been
83 combined and what is being proposed, and examples of potential benefits and perceived
84 challenges.
- 85 - Residents requested open, transparent discussions, to ensure that they feel that they have
86 ownership of this process, and should be kept abreast of the merger discussion.
- 87 - Some residents also wanted to see potential savings projections or financial modeling to
88 leverage when making decisions.
- 89 - Future research should also probe for preferences on timeline for execution of merger, as
90 the issue arose regarding how quickly or slowly a merger should occur.
- 91 - The merger options be examined through a cultural lens as it moves forward, since the
92 cultural difference was a persistent theme in survey.

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Mr. Chawla asked if survey results could be broken out by voting districts, and Mr. Treston agreed to send tabulations of final survey results to subcommittee members.

Mr. Tyler noted that the survey highlighted issues where respondents were making statements based on misunderstandings, and that the survey can help identify those issues to target for further education of the public. He noted that the merger website could provide additional in-depth information on those issues to address misunderstandings.

Ms. Banks questioned what respondents meant when they state that one of their concerns is representation and lack thereof.

Ms. Meyer commented that a fact sheet and potentially video and visuals would be extremely helpful resources for focus groups, to inform them about governance, how the Town and Village are operated currently, and changes that could be made. She also noted that her impression is that the general public does not understand the issues at play in this discussion, and effort will need to be made to inform them.

Ms. Wrenner noted that a current fear is that a merger would eliminate jobs, which could potentially be based on the previous attempt at a Town and Village merger, years ago. She also asked Mr. Treston if the survey tracked contact information of respondents. Mr. Treston replied that the survey asked for email addresses if respondents wanted to be informed about future merger-related news, but not everyone gave an email address. Ms. Wrenner also stated that the naming once a merger takes place will be an important issue. Mr. Treston agreed and stated that it will be a good issue to probe on, in the context of identity.

Ms. Smith asked if the Town and Village planning commissions would merge. Subcommittee members replied that yes, they will merge.

Mr. Collins noted that he thought the survey and its results were very illuminating, and it further emphasizes the need to educate the public in certain key areas and issues around the merger conversation.

b. Discussion of process for analyzing KSV qualitative survey

The subcommittee discussed process for analyzing the survey and next steps for presenting the results of the survey to the Town Selectboard and Village Trustees. The survey analysis from KSV will be included in the reading file at the next Joint Selectboard/Trustees meeting to give members the opportunity to review and formulate questions. Mr. Chawla suggested discussing these results at a Joint Selectboard/Trustees meeting in the future, when there is more time to devote to this as an agenda item. Mr. Levy noted that this survey will serve as the baseline and status quo to which results from future research phases can be compared. In addition, Mr. Teich noted that Mr. Treston should attend the next joint meeting or a special meeting to discuss the survey in depth. He further noted that it will be important to outline the process going forward for the Selectboard/Trustees.

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE
(DRAFT)**

July 18, 2019

139 Next steps:

- 140 - Mr. Tyler requested that each subcommittee member review the survey results and
- 141 individually submit their written responses and thoughts to him, for discussion at the next
- 142 Subcommittee meeting on Friday, July 26th.
- 143 - Mr. Treston and KSV will draft and bring a proposed discussion guide for the focus
- 144 groups to the next Subcommittee meeting on July 26th, at which time feedback from
- 145 subcommittee members' comments on the survey can be incorporated.
- 146 - Ms. Janda and Regional Planning Commission staff will draft a two-page summary of
- 147 historical context, current state, anticipated actions and timelines for governance
- 148 change/merger, and a list of common definitions.
- 149 - Town and Village staff will continue inventorying a list of topics for an FAQ page, and
- 150 will incorporate questions from survey.
- 151 - Mr. Treston will distribute full list of open-ended responses from the survey to the
- 152 subcommittee for their review, redacting any personal information or email addresses.
- 153

154 **c. Approve focus group screener**

155 Mr. Tyler led a review of the focus group screening questionnaire with the subcommittee. The

156 following modifications were made:

- 157 - Language in S2 modified to strike “within the last ten years” and replace with “Have you
- 158 ever served...”
- 159 - A question around voting districts will be added to the screener, based on districts being a
- 160 large factor in responses to qualitative survey
- 161 - Language in Q8 will be modified to quantify each option, and will add “or watch public
- 162 meetings on television” after “how often do you attend public meetings”
- 163 - Language in Q18 will be added to indicate that responses are part of publicly funded
- 164 research and are subject to public records requests.
- 165

166 **d. Discussion of FAQs about governance change—Ann Janda**

167 Ms. Janda provided a status update on drafting FAQs related to governance change and

168 reviewed the current draft of FAQs which will be posted on the merger website. Mr. Watts

169 suggested rewording the currently recommended options in question 1 to refer to a charter

170 and special districts, but not specifying the number of special districts. Mr. Chawla noted that

171 the FAQs are a great educational opportunity, and also suggested creating a new question #2

172 to give a description of current status and additionally including a graphic of the timeline for

173 governance change/merger, and that the current question #2 would become question #3. Mr.

174 Levy suggested modifying language in the question about culture from “how to best retain

175 culture” to “how to best address culture.” The subcommittee will use this FAQ as a running

176 list of questions, and all will send any additional questions to Mr. Teich. Mr. Chawla

177 suggested using the KSV qualitative survey to begin to categorize different questions within

178 the FAQ document.

179

180 Ms. Janda will modify the FAQ document with the discussed changes and will post on

181 Greater Essex.

182

183 **e. Discussion of elevator speech about governance change**

184 This agenda item is tabled until the next meeting of the Governance Subcommittee.

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE
(DRAFT)**

July 18, 2019

185 **f. Approval of minutes:**

186

187 *June 20, 2019:*

188 **ANDREW WATTS made a motion, and MAX LEVY seconded, to approve the**
189 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from June 20, 2019 without Subcommittee**
190 **corrections. Motion passed 4-0.**

191

192 **6. READING FILE:**

193

194 **7. ADJOURN:**

195

196 **MAX LEVY made a motion, and ANDREW WATTS seconded, to adjourn the meeting.**
197 **Motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.**

198

199

200 Respectfully Submitted,

201 Amy Coonradt

202 Recording Secretary

203

204

205

206 Approved this _____ day of _____, 2019

207

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