



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

81 Main Street  
Essex Junction, VT 05452  
Wed., Oct. 30, 2019  
6:30 PM

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[www.essexjunction.org](http://www.essexjunction.org)  
[www.essex.org](http://www.essex.org)

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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** [6:30 PM]
2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**
3. **APPROVE AGENDA**
4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**
5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**
  - a. Discuss Survey Results and Follow-up from Oct. 29 Selectboard & Trustee Joint Meeting
  - b. Discuss Next Steps and Consider Approving Process
  - c. Review Draft FAQs and Consider Approving for use on GreaterEssex2020
  - d. Review Summary Packet Binders
  - e. Consider Future Meeting Schedule
  - f. Approve minutes: September 12, 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: 10/25/2019 *J Mitchell*

**Memorandum**

**To:** Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager

**CC:** Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager

**From:** Ann Janda, Project Manager

**Re:** Discuss Survey Results and Follow-up from Oct. 29 Selectboard & Trustee Joint Meeting

**Date:** October 23, 2019

**Issue**

The issue is using the final survey results in determining a governance model to recommend to the joint boards.

**Discussion**

The mission of the Governance Subcommittee is to research governance issues (as per the motion of the Selectboard and Trustees at their June 14, 2018 joint meeting), and to develop a list of options for improving, reorganizing and updating local government in Essex which will at once serve as a focus for public education, engagement, and feedback. After researching a list of ten governance change options and recommending three for further consideration, the committee issued two surveys and commissioned six focus groups to gain resident feedback on a potential governance model for the future.

**Cost**

NA

**Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee discuss the results of the final survey and a possible governance recommendation to the joint boards.

**Memorandum**

**To:** Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager

**CC:** Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager

**From:** Ann Janda, Project Manager

**Re:** Discuss Next Steps and Consider Approving Process

**Date:** October 23, 2019

**Issue**

The issue is determining next steps and considering a process moving forward with a governance proposal.

**Discussion**

Discuss ideas for next steps and a process for moving forward once the joint boards are presented with a governance model recommendation.

**Cost**

NA

**Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee begin planning next steps and a process for moving forward once the joint boards are presented with a governance model recommendation.

**Memorandum**

**To:** Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager

**CC:** Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager

**From:** Ann Janda, Project Manager

**Re:** Update to FAQs on [www.greateressex2020.org](http://www.greateressex2020.org)

**Date:** October 23, 2019

**Issue**

The issue is updating the FAQs posted on [www.greateressex2020.org](http://www.greateressex2020.org).

**Discussion**

At two previous meetings, the Governance Subcommittee approved FAQs to be posted on [www.greateressex2020.org](http://www.greateressex2020.org).

Staff believe the FAQs need to be updated at this time to reflect current information and to reduce text in order to provide easy access to information for the public.

**Cost**

NA

**Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee approve these FAQs, with any edits, for posting on [www.greateressex2020.org](http://www.greateressex2020.org).

# Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

## Timeline and Process

### ***Where are we now?***

Two separate municipalities with separate charters, sharing some municipal services under contract.

### ***Why are we doing this now?***

Each year that passes is another year where the cost to merge in the future goes up. It is in part because of this reality that the Selectboard and the Trustees are now exploring the concept of merging the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction.

### ***What are the Town Selectboard and Village Trustees doing to gather input from residents on the question of merger?***

Before developing a merger plan, the Town Selectboard and Village Trustees gathered input from residents.

- A qualitative survey – July 2-15, 2019. [Here is the July 18 report on the survey results.](#)
- Six focus groups – Aug. 13-15, 2019. [Here is the Aug. 22 report on the focus group results.](#)
- Final quantitative survey – Sept. 24-Oct. 11, 2019. [Here is the Oct. 29 report on the final survey](#)

More public input will be sought over the summer of 2020. A potential new charter for a unified community would be brought to voters for consideration in November 2020, following public hearings in Oct. 2020.

## General Questions

### ***Why merge?***

*The Village Board of Trustees and Town Selectboard have come up with the following answer to “Why Merge?”:* The Village Board of Trustees and Town Selectboard believe we will be stronger together as one united community. We can work as one to plan for the future, attract and retain a vibrant business community, protect our natural resources, restore and enhance our infrastructure, improve our services, overcome challenges we face, and establish ourselves as Vermont’s premier livable community.

For those reasons, we are exploring a merger of the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction. We’re relying on residents’ feedback to help us develop the best models for representation and for taxing everyone equitably for our municipal services. We ask all our residents and businesses to give us feedback on what they seek in a merged community, so that we can develop a governance plan for a vote in November 2020.

### ***How are residents of the Town and Village defined?***

The geographic boundary of the Town includes the Village. Village residents are also residents of the Town. However, residents of the Town who do not live within the borders of the Village are not residents of the Village.



***What about separating?***

The Selectboard and Trustees created a governance subcommittee in July 2018 to explore governance options. The committee vetted over a dozen governance scenarios and determined that separation did not meet most of the criteria they established to measure what would benefit the community. Committee members at the time (Elaine Haney, Max Levy, George Tyler, and Irene Wrenner) unanimously agreed that separation would not improve relations or transparency, would not maintain a high level of service, would not enable tax equity, and basically failed the test the committee established. Both boards supported the committee's recommendations. What's more, all elected officials from both boards publicly stated their preference for one community and one government at a joint public meeting in April 2018. Both boards are exploring merger because it could allow for better use of scarce resources, to eliminate confusion for residents, and to save money over time.

***What about the culture of the two communities?***

Culture means different things to different people. The Selectboard and Trustees understand the importance of culture and will be reviewing responses from surveys and focus groups to understand how to best address the culture of the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction.

***Have the consolidation of some services in the past several years, starting with a shared Town and Village Manager as of 2013, saved money?***

Yes, consolidation efforts to date have saved more than \$2.5 million from Fiscal Year 2014 to Fiscal Year 2020. (This does not include ordinary everyday things like the sharing of equipment or when the Town Engineer helped the Village receive a grant for bridge work.) Here is the breakdown for each municipality:

- **FY2014 - FY2019: \$2.13 Million**

<b>Service</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Village</b>
Manager	\$367,000	\$606,000
Finance & Admin	\$378,000	\$179,000
Stormwater & Public Works	\$344,000	\$254,000
<b>Total Savings</b>	<b>\$1,089,000</b>	<b>\$1,039,000 = \$2.13M</b>

- **FY2020: \$0.69 Million**

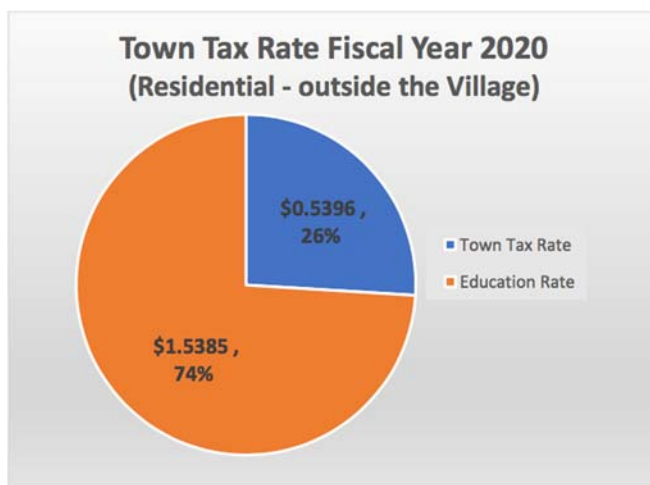
<b>Service</b>	<b>Town</b>	<b>Village</b>
Manager	\$67,200	\$113,500
Finance & Admin	\$194,300	\$195,600
Stormwater & Public Works	\$59,800	\$62,300
<b>Total Savings</b>	<b>\$321,300</b>	<b>\$371,400 = \$0.69M</b>

***How would a merger affect development?***

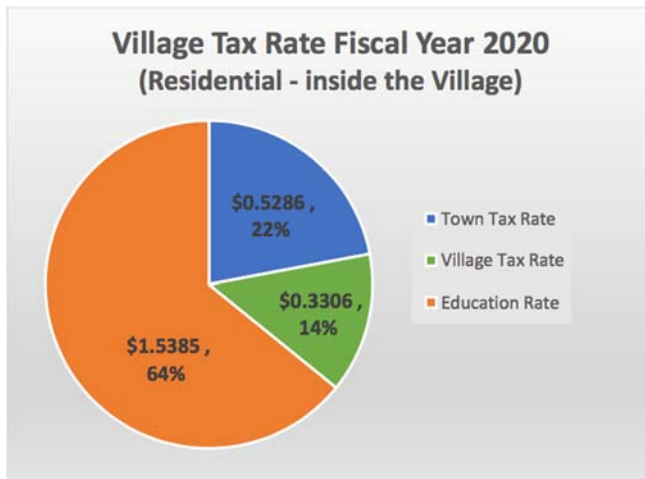
Merging the Town and Village governments wouldn't change their comprehensive plans, but, over time, it would merge them into a single document. If merger happens, the long-term evolution of the newly unified Town-Village comprehensive plan would be under the control of a single planning commission, development office, and elected board. Changes and updates would reflect the coordinated strategic vision of the entire community. Zoning and subdivision regulations and land development code would then be updated according to the strategic vision laid out in the comprehensive plan of the entire community.

***How would merger affect my property taxes?***

Residents of the Town outside the Village currently pay municipal taxes only to the Town.



Residents of the Village of Essex Junction currently pay municipal taxes to both the Village and Town.



\*Does not include Town Highway Tax Rate, which is paid only by Town outside the Village residents.

The amount Essex homeowners owe in municipal tax is based on the assessed home value:

- *A resident of the **Town outside the Village** with a home value of \$280,000 pays a **total of \$1,510.88 in municipal taxes***
- *A resident of the **Village of Essex Junction** with a home value of \$280,000 pays a **total of \$2,405.76 in municipal taxes***

The Town and Village coming together means the two different levels of taxation meet somewhere between the two. This requires the lower of the two rates (Town) to rise as the higher of the two rates (Village) falls.

Additional Considerations:

- *All residents of Essex, whether in the Village or the Town outside the Village, pay the same rate in education taxes. Education tax rates would not be impacted by merger.*
- *Only users of municipal water and sewer pay for these services. Residents in parts of Essex that do not have municipal water or sewer service do not pay for those services or their associated infrastructure.*
- *Any remaining debt owed by the Village municipality will stay with the properties in the Village. A temporary “Village Debt Assessment District” would be established and sunset once the debt is paid in full by Village residents.*



VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES  
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING  
September 12, 2019

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

**ADMINISTRATION:** Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Ann Janda;

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Ken Signorello; Dave Treston (KSV); Irene Wrenner; Colin Flanders; Dawn McGinnis; Betsy Dunn; Iris Banks; Heidi Clark;

**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 6:32pm.

**2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

Evan Teich provided the following additions or changes to the agenda: a brief discussion of Dan Richardson’s response to Ann Janda’s request for research on hybrid voting. This will be agenda item 5aa and will occur before agenda item 5a.

**3. AGENDA APPROVAL**

**GEORGE TYLER made a motion, and MAX LEVY seconded, that the Subcommittee on Governance approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed 4-0.**

**4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

Ken Signorello stated that he has asked that separation be considered an option for discussion and surveys when talking about a potential governance change, and that all options should be presented to the public and examined carefully.

Irene Wrenner noted that she had submitted comments from the previous meeting, and requests that they be reviewed and addressed. Mr. Tyler replied that the subcommittee will review her comments as they review the revised survey draft later in this discussion.

Betsy Dunn asked why the focus groups held by KSV on the merger topic all 80 members who had expressed interest in participating. Mr. Tyler replied that larger focus groups are difficult to run and that KSV advised for smaller groups. He also stated that the previously-fielded qualitative survey had a significant number of respondents and was representative of both the Town outside the Village and the Village, and that the focus group was only one step in a multi-step, multi-yearlong process of gathering public input on this topic.

**5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

46 **aa: question to Dan Richardson—should we ask questions about annual meeting and**  
47 **voting and should we switch to Australian ballot? Should we ask question about hybrid**  
48 **voting?**

49 Ann updated the subcommittee on Dan Richardson’s feedback. At the previous subcommittee  
50 meeting a question had arisen regarding hybrid voting, which was put to Mr. Richardson after  
51 the meeting. His response was that no other municipalities in Vermont are using that form of  
52 voting, and expressed concern that adopting this form of voting would make the town vulnerable  
53 to legal challenges, would allow residents to vote more than once (voice vote and ballot vote),  
54 and that it would also present logistical challenges if ballots needed to be changed after a voice  
55 vote. Mr. Tyler noted that based on this response, a question around hybrid voting will not be  
56 included in this survey.

57  
58 **a. Discuss second draft of quantitative survey about governance change and consider**  
59 **approval**

60  
61 Dave Treston walked the subcommittee through revisions made since its September 5 meeting.  
62 He noted that many of the changes were made during the last meeting, but some have been made  
63 since then. He also noted that he combined certain questions where it made sense, and whittled  
64 down the survey to around 30 questions, which should take between 10-15 minutes for a  
65 respondent to complete.

66  
67 The subcommittee reviewed the latest draft of the survey and made the following edits:

- 68 • Minor wording changes in ‘Representation’ section of survey;
- 69 • Added sentence to ‘Voting’ section’s explanatory text to give further information on  
70 annual meetings;
- 71 • Additional questions and reordering of questions in ‘Voting’ section;
- 72 • Minor wording changes in ‘Taxation’ explanatory text for clarity;
- 73 • Minor wording change in ‘Notes’ subsection of ‘Taxation’ section for clarity;
- 74 • Statement added to ‘Taxation’ section clarifying how the Town and Village tax rates  
75 could change in a merger scenario;
- 76 • Rewording and additional potential responses to questions under ‘Services’ section;
- 77 • Removal of Q27
- 78 • Modifications to ‘Merger Options’ questions to remove the tax rate options from  
79 potential responses.

80  
81 Next steps:

- 82 • Mr. Treston will send the revised draft quantitative survey to the subcommittee and will  
83 begin programming the survey. The link should be available to distribute on September  
84 17<sup>th</sup>.
- 85 • Staff will print and place paper copies of the survey at senior center.

86  
87  
88 **RAJ CHAWLA made motion, and MAX LEVY seconded, to accept the draft quantitative**  
89 **survey as edited and authorize the distribution of survey. Motion passed 4-0.**

90

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE  
(DRAFT)**

**September 12, 2019**

91 **b. Consider cancelling meeting on September 19 if survey is approved, consider moving**  
92 **presentation of survey results to October 29 Joint Selectboard/Trustee meeting**  
93 The September 19 meeting will be cancelled and the presentation of survey results will occur at  
94 the October 29 Joint Selectboard/Trustees meeting.  
95

96 **c. Approval of minutes:**

97 *September 5, 2019:*

98 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and ANDY WATTS seconded, to approve the**  
99 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from September 5, 2019 as written. Motion**  
100 **passed 4-0.**  
101

102 **6. ADJOURN:**

103  
104 **GEORGE TYLER made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to adjourn the meeting.**  
105 **Motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.**  
106

107 Respectfully Submitted,  
108 Amy Coonradt  
109 Recording Secretary  
110

111  
112 Approved this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2019  
113

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