



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

81 Main Street, 1st Floor
Essex Junction, VT 05452
Friday, August 2, 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 and approve informational materials for focus groups
 - b. Approve focus group conversation guide
 - c. Approve future meeting schedule
 - d. Approve minutes: July 26, 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: 07/31/2019 *Mitchell*

Memorandum

To: Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager
Cc: Dave Treston, KSV *(SD)*
From: Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Ann Janda, Project Manager
Re: Informational materials for focus groups
Date: July 31, 2019

Issue

The issue is whether the Governance Subcommittee will approve informational materials for focus groups.

Discussion

As discussed at the last Governance Subcommittee meeting, subcommittee members, KSV, and staff felt it would be helpful to provide focus group participants with brief informational materials about potential governance change options.

The attached documents contain bullet points and graphic depictions about governance and representation options. The Governance Subcommittee should review and comment on the materials before making them available for the focus groups.

The approved materials can also be posted on GreaterEssex2020.org.

Cost

N/a

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee approve informational materials for focus groups (with any edits discussed at the Aug. 2, 2019 meeting).

August 2, 2019

The Town of Essex Selectboard and Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees are currently considering the following options for potential changes to governance in the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction.

Please note, these are conceptual options; specific details still need to be determined, based in part on feedback from focus groups and surveys.

Municipal Governance Model Options

Option 1: Unified Charter	Option 2: Unified Charter with Special Tax District(s)	Option 3: Status Quo*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction charters dissolved • One municipality with a new charter and one elected governing body • One tax rate for the entire municipality (the transition plan may require temporary tax districts until the rate is equalized) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction charters dissolved • One municipality with a new charter and one elected governing body. • Different tax rates based on perpetual Tax District(s) for certain services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue with two charters for Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction • Two municipalities, two charters with two elected governing bodies • Two tax rates with some shared services and some separate services, uncombined and budgeted separately*

Representation Options for a new Governance Model with one elected governing body

At Large Elections Only	Two Voting Wards Only	Combination of Two Voting Wards and At Large Elections
<p>Anyone residing anywhere in the entire community could run for election to the governing body.</p>	<p>The elected governing body would have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • half its members residing in the town outside the village and • half its members residing in the village 	<p>The elected governing body would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • members residing in the town outside the village • members residing in the village • members residing anywhere in the entire community

**Status Quo (Option 3) Services Status*

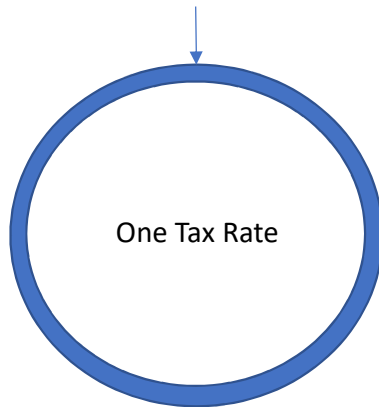
Shared Services	Separate Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Manager's Office• Police Department• Clerk's Office• Finance Department• Senior Center• Public Works Department• Human Resources Department• Information Technology Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fire Departments• Libraries• Parks and Recreation Departments• Community Development Departments• Capital Planning• Elected and Appointed Officials

Governance Options

August 2, 2019

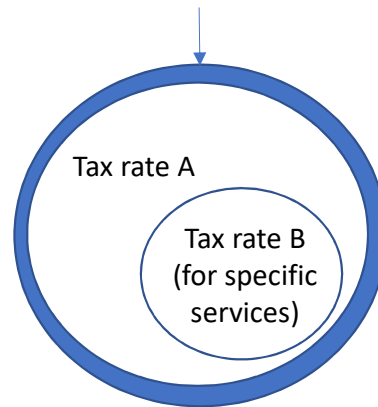
Option 1: One Municipality

- One elected governing body
- One tax rate



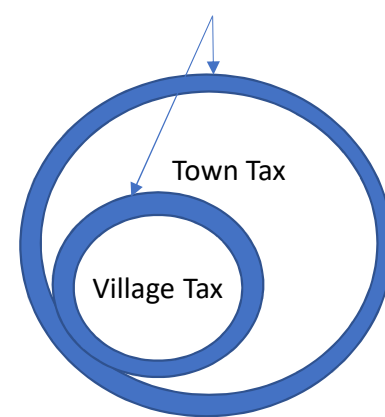
Option 2: One Municipality

- One elected governing body
- Multiple tax rates



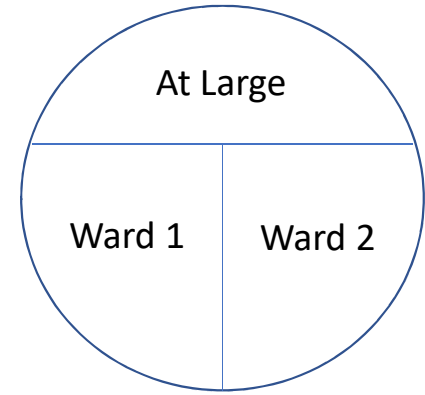
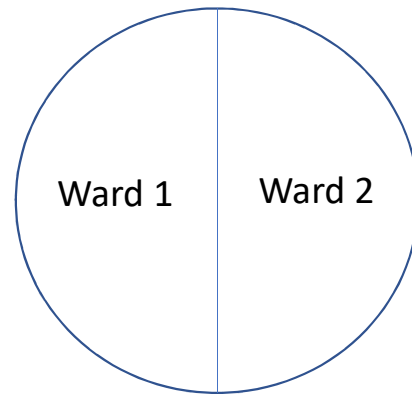
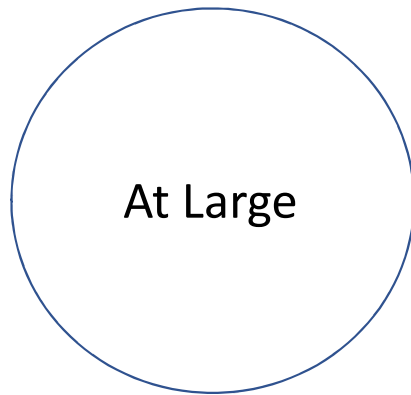
Status Quo: Two Municipalities*

- Two elected governing bodies
- Two tax rates



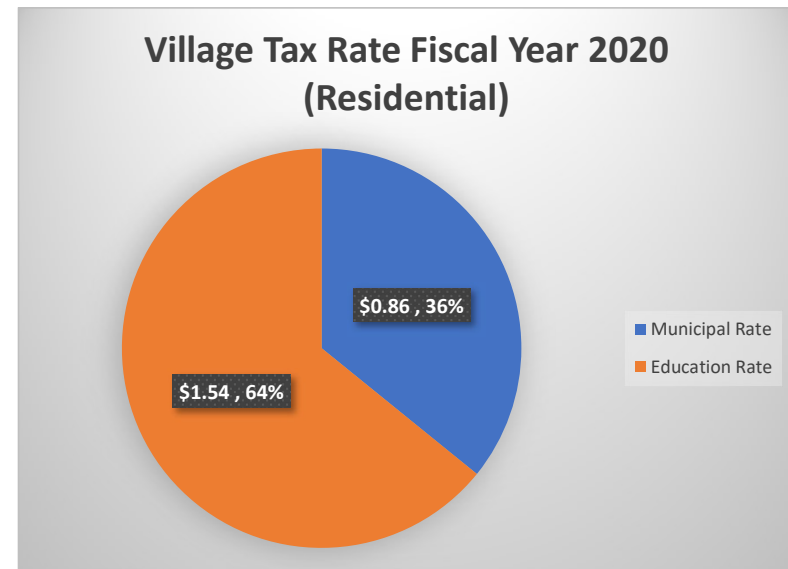
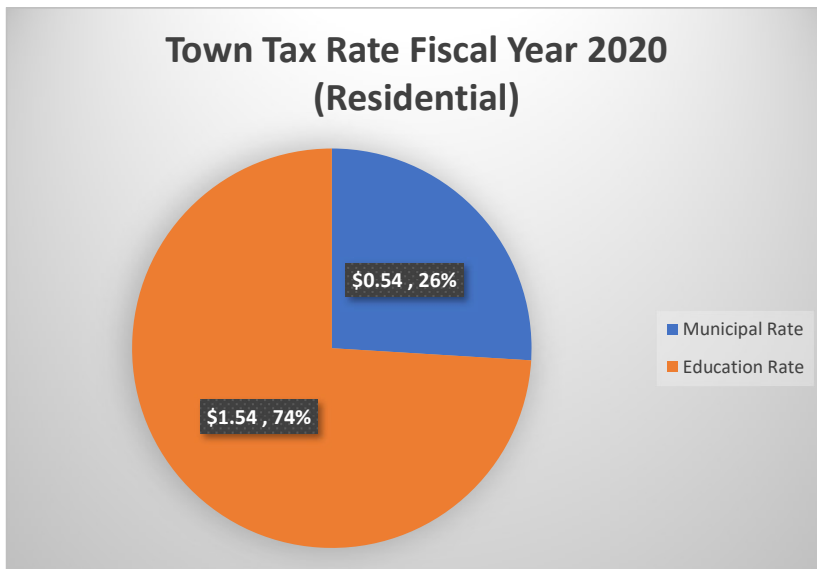
Representation Options

August 2, 2019



*Status Quo - Current Tax Structure

August 2, 2019



Memorandum

To: Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager
Cc: Ann Janda, Project Manager; Dave Treston, KSV
From: Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager GSD
Re: Focus group conversation guide
Date: July 31, 2019

Issue

The issue is whether the Governance Subcommittee will approve the focus group conversation guide.

Discussion

Based on feedback at the last Governance Subcommittee meeting, KSV has updated the conversation guide for upcoming focus groups about governance change. The updated version of the guide is attached.

Dave Treston of KSV had the following comments about the updated guide:

“I have added a question around expectations of services/benefits as a result of tax impacts and a question related to development, as those were the two top-of-mind thoughts shared with the group. There were a few other revisions added related to the educational material that we discussed.

“This is a fairly thorough guide! We'll see if we have any difficulty getting through the questions after the first group or two. We'll keep the conversation moving though. As you look through this latest draft, if there is anything you'd like to cut, let me know and we can save it for the September survey.”

Cost

N/a

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee approve the focus group conversation guide (with any edits discussed at the Aug. 2, 2019 meeting).



**Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction Merger
Focus Group Discussion Guide
July 24³⁰, 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. Note that Village residents can serve on the Selectboard but that Town outside the Village residents cannot sit on the Board of Trustees.*
 - ⊖ *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*

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Commented [DT1]: Given that this video is three years old at this point, it would be outdated, so we will not show it. Educational material should be printed out, so that respondents can reference it throughout the session.

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

DISCUSSION OF MERGER OPTIONS – 50 MINUTES (20 minutes for each of the proposed merger options, 10 minutes for "status quo")



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. Include a breakdown of current taxes and the percent of which is municipal tax vs. school tax, etc. It was recommended we talking about potential tax impacts “qualitatively” rather than showing numbers, as the numbers would likely be different in November 2020 and beyond, due to fluctuations in the grand list, state grants, development, and other factors.*
- *Services: What is consolidated, what remains separate (if anything)*
- *Voting: How often do residents vote and by which method (Town meeting, ballot vote)*
- *“Myth-busting”: Merger would result in X (ex. the two libraries overseen by a single committee), but it wouldn’t result in Y (ex. a library closing)*
- *Definitions of terms, if necessary*

Commented [DT2]: For lack of a better phrase. This is the section to outline what would happen with a merger and what would not happen with a merger – addressing residents’ frequent concerns around facilities/programs going away, etc.

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 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 and accessibility of services given potential tax impacts. Do higher taxes result in an expectation of better services and more access? What if taxes go down or don't go up as much?]

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?

How do you believe this option would impact any future development in the Town of Essex, including the Village of Essex Junction and the Town outside the Village? [Probe: If planning/development committees were combined, what are potential benefits? What are concerns? Is it important to have two development districts?]

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?

Show of hands – have you ever participated in Town Meeting Day and/or Village Meeting Day? Did you do so last year?

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?]

Communication

In terms of communication from the governments related to the merger talks, what would be the best way in which you would like to be informed? [Probe: Channels of communication, what information do they need, cadence/frequency of updates]

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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!

Memorandum

To: Governance Subcommittee; Evan Teich, Unified Manager
From: Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager; Ann Janda, Project Manager
Re: Future meeting schedule for Governance Subcommittee
Date: July 31, 2019

GSD

Issue

The issue is whether the Governance Subcommittee will schedule future meeting dates.

Discussion

The Governance Subcommittee agreed to hold upcoming meetings on Aug. 2 and Aug. 22 (6:30 p.m.). After looking at other upcoming deadlines, staff recommends the following dates also be added to the Governance Subcommittee's schedule:

Thursday, Sept. 5 – review draft quantitative survey on governance change
Thursday, Oct. 17 – KSV presentation of quantitative survey report

Staff recommends 8 a.m. meetings. Evening meetings are also possible.

Cost

N/a

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Governance Subcommittee schedule future meetings for Sept. 5 and Oct. 17.

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING
July 26, 2019

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

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Betsy Dunn; Jerry Fox; Bruce Post; Ken Signorello; Margaret Smith; Dave Treston, KSV

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. 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 8:07 a.m.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Mr. Tyler asked to add comments to item 5a, Review focus group discussion guide.

3. AGENDA APPROVAL

MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to add comments to item 5a. Motion passed 4-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Ken Signorello asked for the subcommittee members and staff to give their names.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Review focus group discussion guide

Mr. Treston of the market research firm KSV provided an overview of the draft focus group discussion guide. The guide contains questions and talking points to direct conversation during the upcoming focus groups about governance change. Mr. Treston said the focus groups will look at proposed options for merger of the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction governments, as well as keeping the status quo. Mr. Treston said he would moderate the group conversations. He said the groups would have printouts to help review the governance options.

Mr. Treston reviewed the discussion guide and explained the expected process of welcoming participants, setting ground rules, and discussing topics around governance.

The subcommittee decided not to use an informational video about Essex and Essex Junction, since it was produced three years ago and contains outdated information. The subcommittee did want to have a one-page summary about the existing governance structure. The subcommittee also wanted informational sheets about the options for different governance structures, with the info sheets to be approachable and contain a high-level presentation of information. The sheets

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE
(DRAFT)**

July 26, 2019

47 should also contain information about taxes. Staff agreed to put together info sheets with bullet
48 points and graphics by the week of August 5.

49
50 Mr. Chawla asked that the info sheets make clear that the discussion about governance change
51 only affects municipal taxes, and that school taxes make up the majority of tax bills. The
52 subcommittee agreed, and also wanted the focus groups to discuss a palatable timeline to reach
53 equal tax rates for the entire Essex community.

54
55 Mr. Watts and Mr. Duggan suggested that the discussion guide ask focus groups about their
56 expectations for service levels to increase or decrease along with any changes in taxation.

57
58 Ms. Janda noted the semantics of saying taxes will increase or decrease, since it is unlikely that
59 taxes will decrease. Rather, they may increase at a faster or slower rate because of governance
60 changes.

61
62 Mr. Treston asked if the Subcommittee on Governance wanted to dispel any notions during the
63 focus groups. Mr. Tyler said neither of the fire departments nor the libraries would close.

64
65 Mr. Tyler asked that the focus groups probe into the issues of economic development and
66 attracting businesses and residents to Essex.

67
68 Mr. Treston explained that one of the goals of the focus groups is to get people to talk about
69 themselves, the impacts of governance change on them, as opposed to their neighbors or friends.
70 He said the focus groups would touch on themes of identify, culture, timing of changes, and the
71 importance of naming the community. He also said the focus groups can be asked how people
72 want to be informed about the issue of governance change.

73
74 **b. Schedule future meetings of Governance Subcommittee**

75 The Subcommittee on Governance agreed to hold upcoming meetings at 8 a.m. on Friday, Aug.
76 2 at 2 Lincoln St., and at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 22 at a location to be determined.

77
78 **c. Approve minutes: July 18, 2019**

79 **MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by ANDREW WATTS, to approve the**
80 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from July 18, 2019. Motion passed 4-0.**

81
82 Mr. Post asked who would select the participants for focus groups. Mr. Tyler said KSV would
83 make the selections.

84
85 **6. ADJOURN:**

86 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and MAX LEVY seconded, to adjourn the meeting.**
87 **Motion passed 4-0 at 9:31 a.m.**

88
89
90 Respectfully submitted,
91 Greg Duggan
92 Deputy Manager

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE
(DRAFT)**

July 26, 2019

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Approved this _____ day of _____, 2019

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

DRAFT