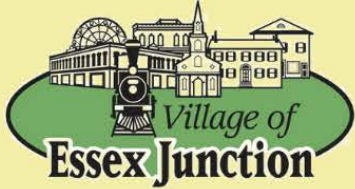


NEWS

ISSUE NO. 44 MARCH 2021



In the whole world, there is
only one **Essex Junction**

Informational Hearing

April 7 - 7pm (online only)

See inside for the link.

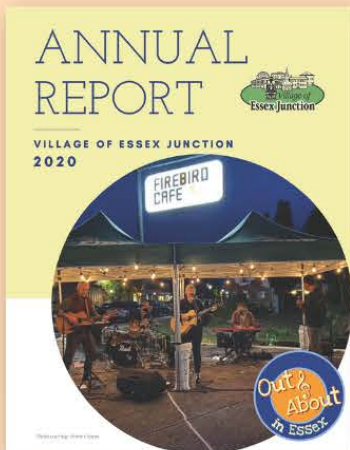
Annual Meeting

April 13 - 7am to 7pm

Essex High School

More information can be found in
this newsletter and online at
www.essexjunction.org.

2020 Annual Report



Visit www.essexjunction.org to view
the full 2020 Annual Report or
send a request to receive one by
emailing admin@essexjunction.org
or calling 878-6951.

State of the Village Report

By Andrew Brown, Essex Junction Trustees President

2020 tested each and every one of us in ways we individually may not have been ready to handle. Those of us with school-aged children had to determine the logistics of remote learning, we all had to rethink our annual traditions/celebrations and holidays, the reality of changes in the way we carry out our professional lives, and many more. While we were faced with these individual challenges, it was the way I saw our friends, neighbors, family members and community come together which I will



be forever grateful. I cannot thank you enough for rising to the occasion and further proving why there is no other place I would want to call my home.

Merger

In November, nearly 74% (3,453) of Village of Essex Junction voters who cast ballots approved of the plan of merger. This was a strong signal that the Village sees the value in being one community with the Town of Essex. As of the writing of this, there will be a reconsideration vote on the same merger plan which will happen at the same time as the Village's annual voting and election. According to state law, a reconsideration vote can only happen once in a calendar year so it is very important that you vote on this matter.

Also on the ballot is a non-binding resolution which asks you whether the Village should separate from the Town of Essex should this merger reconsideration vote fail. As a non-binding resolution this is not a formal vote for separation but rather is more akin to a formal survey of the community. This came about from a citizen-led petition which received over 400 Village signatures.

With whatever happens from the merger reconsideration vote and separation non-binding resolution it is clear that our community is passionate about the

State of the Village Report (continued)

future of the Village. As such, should the merger reconsideration vote fail I ask for your patience and your input into where we go from here. The most common input I have received from the community is that the status quo is no longer acceptable so it is important that, as a community, we make an informed decision as to what path we take next.

Budget

You are being asked whether or not to approve of a \$5,641,278 general fund budget which will raise the tax rate 0.97%. The only initiative we are proposing is to compensate the volunteers on all of our boards at a rate of \$50 per meeting which individual volunteers can choose to opt-out of receiving. There are many motivations for this which include trying to diversify the demographics of those who volunteer such as by ensuring those who need child care to be able to attend a meeting can afford to do so. We also recognize the stipend for Village Trustees, Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment have not increased in more than 15 years. Within this budget we are also proposing to double the stipend. Members of the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment would receive \$600 per year, up from \$300. Village Trustees would receive \$1,000 up from \$500. For comparison, Town Selectboard members receive \$1,500 per year.

Due to the language within the Village's charter we are asking voters whether or not to approve of this stipend increase for Village Trustees. This is why you see this question on the ballot for Village Trustees and not for the rest of the volunteer boards.

COVID and Village Services

Staff in all Village departments swiftly rose to the challenge of figuring out how to continue providing the services we cherish during a pandemic. Brownell Library has continued to be the agile and innovative library we love with not only curbside service but their kits, virtual offerings and more. EJRP was able to provide a safe learning environment by partnering with local businesses during remote learning days which provided working parents with the time and peace of mind that their child/children would be able to learn while they themselves were working. Community Development partnered with other departments in the Village and Town to provide opportunities for residents to get outside for entertainment and shopping at local businesses with vouchers. The Village's Fire Department, Public Works, Wastewater Treatment Facility and Administration were all able to continue providing the essential services for the well-being of our community.

Coming Soon

In the next year I anticipate many opportunities for our community to come together, for example:

- Hopeful recovery from the pandemic and shaping what "normal" will become
- Results of the April vote on merger
- Whether to allow for the retail sale of cannabis
- Updating the Village's Land Development Code
- Implementation of recommendations from the Racial Equity Task Force

As I look toward 2021 and beyond I again thank each and every Village of Essex Junction resident who has helped to instill the sense of community we love while we continue to live with the impacts of the pandemic. Please contact the Board of Trustees with your questions, thoughts and concerns. Thank you all, take care and be well.

INFORMATIONAL HEARING: APRIL 7, 2021 AND ANNUAL MEETING: APRIL 13, 2021

INFORMATIONAL HEARING - online only
Wednesday, April 7 **[7:00 PM]**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this hearing will be held remotely. Available options to watch or join the meeting:

- **WATCH:** the meeting will be live-streamed on [Town Meeting TV](#).
- **JOIN ONLINE:** <https://zoom.us/j/95576633602?pwd=VFN4YWVhYSUhb3dNQ0NkT3lNeU5tZz09>
- **JOIN CALLING:** Join via conference call (audio only): (646) 558-8656, 95576633602#, 538553# US (New York)
- **MODERATOR:** All instructions for conduct of the meeting will be guided by the Moderator.
- **If you have difficulty accessing the hearing, please call (802) 878-6951 or email manager@essex.org.**

The 2021 Village Annual Meeting will be held entirely by Australian ballot. A public informational hearing on the Articles to be voted on at Village Annual Meeting will be held according to 17 V.S.A. § 2680. No voting will take place during this hearing. If you wish to make a public comment but do not have the ability to comment remotely during the meeting, please email your comment(s) to the Unified Manager at manager@essex.org by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 6. Agenda will include discussion of articles and public to be heard.

ANNUAL MEETING - Australian Ballot **Tuesday, April 13 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM**

The legal voters of the Village of Essex Junction are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Essex Community Educational Center on Educational Drive in the Village of Essex Junction on Tuesday, April 13, 2021 to transact the following business by Australian ballot. Said voting by Australian ballot to begin at 7:00 AM and close at 7:00 PM.

ARTICLE 1. Shall the voters approve an annual General Fund Budget in the amount of \$5,641,278 for fiscal year July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022, \$3,745,866 of which is to be levied in taxes against the Village Grand List?

ARTICLE 2. Shall the Village authorize the transfer of the remaining balance in the Land Acquisition Fund, estimated balance to be approximately \$82,700, to the Economic Development Fund to be used for downtown development.

ARTICLE 3. Shall the voters approve extending the one cent Capital Improvement tax (also known as Economic Development tax), as established in 2016, to be reconsidered at annual meeting in 2024.

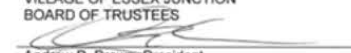
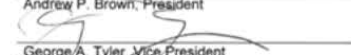
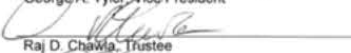


ARTICLE 4. Shall the annual stipend for the position of a Trustee of the Village Board of Trustees be raised from \$500 to \$1,000?

ARTICLE 5. Shall the voters approve holding the 2022 Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 6, 2022 to act upon any articles not involving voting by Australian ballot and to reconvene on Tuesday, April 12, 2022 to vote for the Village officers and transact any business involving voting by Australian ballot?

ARTICLE 6. By a non-binding resolution, shall the Essex Junction Board of Trustees be advised to draft a charter to create the independent City of Essex Junction, for consideration by the Village of Essex Junction voters no later than November 2021, should efforts seeking a vote for reconsideration on the issue of merger fail. We advise that the charter shall not include any union municipal districts, interlocal contracts, special tax districts or other relationships within the Town of Essex for the provision of Village Government services. The only exception may be for the consideration of police services.

ARTICLE 7. To elect Village officers required by law including: Moderator (one-year term); two Village Trustees (2 three-year terms); one Library Trustee (five-year term)?

Dated at Essex Junction, Vermont, this 9th day of March, 2021 by the Village Board of Trustees

By: 
Andrew P. Brown, President

George A. Tyler, Vice President

Raj D. Chawla, Trustee

Daniel S. Kerin, Trustee

Amber L. Thibault, Trustee

ATTEST:


Susan McNamara-Hill, Village Clerk

Village of Essex Junction - General Fund Budget Summary

Department Name:	FY19 Budget	FY19 Actual	FY20 Budget	FY20 Actual	FY21 Budget	FY22 Budget Proposal	Dollar Change from Prior Year	Percent Change from Prior Year
Revenues								
Property Taxes	3,423,606	3,423,627	3,556,422	3,556,878	3,670,039	3,745,866	75,827	2.1%
PILOT Payments	7,000	11,220	11,200	10,419	11,200	11,200	-	0.0%
Licenses and Permits	58,000	16,318	35,000	40,795	25,000	28,000	3,000	12.0%
Funding from Town of Essex	1,160,126	1,160,126	1,259,376	1,296,855	1,341,811	1,545,880	204,069	15.2%
Intergovernmental Revenues	1,500	17,268	1,000	151,852	1,000	2,000	1,000	100.0%
Funding from Enterprise Funds	235,035	235,035	269,995	269,995	286,685	281,412	(5,273)	-1.8%
Miscellaneous	43,520	59,624	9,020	38,809	9,020	9,520	500	5.5%
Fees for Service	25,900	24,430	22,900	18,849	22,900	17,400	(5,500)	-24.0%
Total General Fund	4,954,687	4,947,648	5,164,913	5,384,452	5,367,655	5,641,278	273,623	5.1%
Expenditures								
Administration	467,906	530,688	465,314	439,097	486,997	514,791	27,794	5.7%
Buildings	205,196	196,413	240,375	244,117	253,191	281,300	28,109	11.1%
Community Development	243,310	217,065	245,294	216,323	251,288	279,840	28,552	11.4%
Debt Service	317,983	317,983	313,560	313,561	202,734	199,325	(3,409)	-1.7%
Economic Development	118,429	70,001	50,350	20,093	49,500	49,250	(250)	-0.5%
Finance	79,835	88,892	160,503	169,766	181,414	187,481	6,067	3.3%
Fire	331,369	332,297	351,860	345,430	346,880	460,623	113,743	32.8%
Highways	1,145,126	1,214,370	1,182,376	1,137,166	1,264,811	1,468,880	204,069	16.1%
Library	703,635	684,070	731,684	727,540	751,850	778,306	26,456	3.5%
Recreation	634,823	640,424	657,867	634,304	690,879	725,654	34,775	5.0%
Transfers and Misc.	707,075	725,863	765,730	926,882	888,110	695,828	(192,282)	-21.7%
Total General Fund	4,954,687	5,018,065	5,164,913	5,174,279	5,367,654	5,641,278	273,624	5.1%

Re-vote on the Merger Plan

Why are we voting again?



Village residents voted on merger in November 2020. It passed. Town residents, including those in the Village, voted on merger in March 2021. It failed. Now, after a voter-backed petition requested a reconsideration of the March merger vote, voters are receiving another ballot in accordance with Vermont law.

I keep hearing about separation. What is the cost of separating the Town and the Village?

An exact cost cannot be known unless a detailed separation plan is proposed. For instance, will the Town and Village continue to share all services and many staff? Some services, and some staff? For shared services, would costs be allocated per capita? By tax base? By the number of calls? Staff provided some estimates about the costs of separation at the September 28, 2020 Selectboard and Trustee meeting, but they include many assumptions, all of which could change. **Here's what's known:** The Village grand list makes up 42% of the total grand list of the Town. If the Village were to become a completely separate municipality, it would keep all its property tax revenue, and the rest of the Town (the Town outside the Village) would lose that property tax revenue. Both municipalities would need to make decisions about how to pay for services, and whether to increase taxes to maintain current service levels, or cut services to limit tax increases.

Why did the boards choose to put together a plan to merge instead of separating?

The Subcommittee on Governance agreed that merger would be better than separation in achieving better governance in Essex. Based on the research from the Subcommittee on Governance, feedback from resident listening sessions and surveys, cost savings from consolidation (approximately \$3 million to date), the efficiencies of departments working together, and sharing of assets, the Trustees and Selectboard began work on a plan of merger to support a vision of one strong and united community.

Visit www.greateressex2020.org for ***New*** Questions & Answers on separation, sample ballots and updated information and specific examples of the cost of separation.

NOVEMBER 2006

Voters in both municipalities approve merger.

2005-2006, MERGER TASK FORCE

Task Force proposes one charter with one governing board for Town and the Village. Town Selectboard and Village Trustees approve draft charter and plan of merger.

2013 TO PRESENT

Town and Village consolidate some services and departments, saving approximately \$3 million to date.

JANUARY 2007

Following a petition to reconsider the merger vote, voters overturn November 2006 vote and reject merger.

2018 TO 2020

Selectboard and Trustees create Subcommittee on Governance to consider ways to improve local government, ranging from merger to separation. Selectboard and Trustees decide to pursue merger. Subcommittee on Governance works with market research firm to hear from residents and draft merger plan and charter.

NOVEMBER 3, 2020

Village voters approve merger plan and charter proposed by Trustees, 3,453 to 1,205.

MARCH 2, 2021

Town voters, including those in the Village, reject merger plan and charter proposed by Selectboard, 3,737 to 3,756.

MARCH 9, 2021

Voter-backed petition adds non-binding, advisory question to the April 13, 2021 Village ballot. The question asks, if the town-wide vote on reconsideration of merger fails, whether the Trustees should draft a charter to create the independent City of Essex Junction, for consideration by Village voters no later than November 2021. The question advises that a separated City of Essex Junction share no services with the Town of Essex except for possibly police.

MARCH 11, 2021

Voter-backed petition for reconsideration of merger vote leads to special Town Meeting on April 13, 2021. Ballots will be mailed to all active, registered voters.

What happens now?

APRIL 13, 2021 - RE-VOTE ON MERGER

- **TOWN OUTSIDE VILLAGE BALLOT:** Town voters from outside the Village can again vote on the Plan of Merger and Charter. **The merger question is located on the other side of the Essex-Westford School District ballot.**
- **VILLAGE BALLOT:** Village voters, all of whom are also Town residents, can also vote again on the Plan of Merger and Charter. Village voters can also vote on a non-binding, advisory article to pursue separation if the merger vote fails. **(The merger question is located at the bottom of the Village ballot.)**