

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION NEWS

“In the whole world, there is only one Essex Junction”

Issue No. 36

March 2013

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2012

The Board of Trustees was very busy throughout 2012. Looking back, it was a very good year and a lot of progress was made. Here are the highlights of what the Board worked on last year:

Oversaw the progress of several large projects in various stages of development:

- The Crescent Connector and the securing of federal and state funds to pay for it (construction is expected to begin in late 2014)
- Continued work on improvements to the Amtrak station (currently working on securing right-of-way from various railroad companies)
- Approval of a conceptual design for improving Pearl Street from the fairgrounds to Five Corners, to include a bike lane and improved sidewalks and lighting
- Approval of the start of design work on a bike/walking path parallel to the train tracks from Central Street to North Street
- High school pump station was completed
- Capped the zoning and building permit fee at \$10,000 for public or semi-public structures
- Moved forward with the wastewater treatment facility renovation
- Endorsed plans by IBM to develop a 10-acre parcel of land on Maple Street
- Opened discussions with the Planning Commission about affordable housing and inclusionary zoning in the Village

Emphasized the importance of planning and budgeting for capital projects - and the importance of citizen involvement - by creating a new Capital Committee to review and rank necessary capital improvements.

In terms of technology, we have entered the 21st century:

- Significantly cut back on supplies and labor costs by introducing iPad use for trustees and department heads
- Upgraded equipment and installed a new video monitor in the conference room so that the public can see all materials that are being viewed
- Upgraded the tables and chairs in the conference room for the first time in decades so that viewers watching the meeting on Channel 17 can better see the entire meeting

We spent a lot of time assessing the Village's administrative needs:

- Appointed Village Clerk/Treasurer Susan McNamara-Hill and Finance Director Lauren Morrisseau to be interim co-managers of the Village
- Instituted a new evaluation process for the Village Manager that involves a 360-degree review
- Crafted a new job description for the Village Manager to better suit the needs of the Village and Village staff
- Began initial discussions with the Town about shared administrative services
- Together with the Town authorized a management study to investigate the feasibility of shared services

And in the miscellaneous category:

- Currently awaiting delivery of the new ladder truck
- Completed the work of the Village Wi-Fi Committee; currently composing an RFI to learn more about potential costs

It has been a VERY busy year! More importantly, though, one that kept the Village on a positive trend, always making Essex Junction a great place to live and work. The agendas for 2013 look like they'll be overflowing too, so stay tuned.

Here are just a few things we're looking at in the near future:

- The first live coverage of Village Annual Meeting
- Preserving Whitcomb Farm for farming and residents' use with the Vermont Land Trust
- Investigating ways to improve access to affordable housing in the Village
- Culminating work of the Heart & Soul Committee

So stay tuned, and keep in touch!

Water/Sewer Utility Bills: How We Pay for Water, Sanitation, and Sewage Treatment is About to Change

Introduction

In 2011 Essex Junction Voters approved a bond to pay for necessary improvements to the Village's sewage treatment facility on Cascade Street. The bond will be repaid over 20 to 30 years by increases in water, sanitation, and sewage treatment charges to households and businesses in Essex Town, Essex Junction, and Williston, the three communities served by the treatment plant. The sanitation department maintains the underground sewer lines while sewage treatment is done at the sewage treatment facility.

To ensure equity and long term stability for repayment of that portion of the bond that will be paid by Village consumers, the Village Trustees launched a review and analysis of the existing rate structure. The current rate structure consists of a per cubic foot usage rate with a 1500 cubic foot minimum per 6 month billing cycle.

Declining Usage and Increasing Costs

The Trustees' analysis showed that even with increased charges to repay the bond, Essex Junction's water, sanitation, and sewage treatment utility rates will continue to be among the lowest in the state. The data also showed that there has been a steady decline in water usage in Essex Junction over the last few years. That's good news, but it has also presented challenges for the Village government.

Village homeowners and businesses are presently charged for water and sewer based on how much water they use, which encourages conservation. The less you use, the less you pay. That method of billing may seem reasonable but, unfortunately, it is not consistent with how the Village must operate the system. Most of the Village's costs of owning, running, and maintaining the system are fixed, and do not fluctuate depending on how much water is used. To provide clean water to all Village households and businesses, and to ensure that the sewage is treated in a safe, environmentally

responsible way, the Village government must collect a fixed amount of revenue each year. As people use less water, the Village must compensate for the lost revenue by increasing the rates.

Budgeting Difficulties and Inequities

The declining water usage seen in recent years has required the Village to continuously adjust water, sanitation, and sewage treatment rates upwards to compensate for the declining revenue. The constant upward adjustments have made it very difficult for the Village to anticipate and manage the water, sanitation, and sewage treatment system budgets. That instability is reflected in the utility bills sent to consumers, who may see wide variations in the rates they are charged from year to year, and even within the same year.

Basing rates solely on usage also causes inequities. Some households and businesses may be in a position to lower their water usage; others may not. That means the burden of paying for the fixed costs of the water, sanitation, and sewage treatment systems is shifted disproportionately onto homes and businesses that are unable to lower their water usage.

New Approach

To improve the financial predictability and reduce the inequities of the present system, the Trustees approved a new rate structure based partly on usage and partly on a fixed charge.

Households and businesses will still have an opportunity to lower their costs by consuming less water. But everyone will also be assessed a fixed charge to help pay for the fixed costs of operating the water, sanitation, and sewage treatment systems. That will improve the year-to-year predictability of utility rates, and distribute the fixed costs in a more balanced and equitable way.

For more information, see our Village website at www.essexjunction.org.

The Real Value of Annual Meeting

By George Tyler, President

Village of Essex Junction

Vermont's tradition of annual town meetings has gotten a lot of attention in recent years. Supporters praise it as a sacred rite of self-governance – a living tradition that connects us to our forebears and our democratic roots. Each citizen has an opportunity to address the assembly, question the government, and attempt to influence the voting.

Critics claim it's a tradition that has outlived its usefulness, particularly in large communities such as Essex Junction and Essex Town. Because few people can spare the time to attend a two or three hour meeting in the middle of a busy work week, budgets and other important issues are usually decided by a fraction of the voters. It would be much better, they say, to handle budget voting by Australian ballot where people can choose the time that's convenient for them to drive to the polls and make their decisions in the privacy of a voting booth.

As a member of the Village government I see value in both arguments. Whether people attend annual meeting to criticize the budget or support it, I and the other Village Trustees appreciate the opportunity to meet our constituents and hear what they have to say. On the other hand, as an advocate for greater citizen involvement in local government, I believe that Australian balloting probably would allow more voters to make their voices heard.

But there is one benefit to annual meeting that is usually overlooked. Meeting people face to face at the Essex High School Auditorium provides the Trustees and Village staff the only true opportunity we have to ensure that voters get the information they need to make informed decisions.

While it's true that governments now have an abundance of media resources for disseminating information, it's also true that many people have become overwhelmed with information, and are more likely to tune things out. The Essex Junction government can broadcast information about the budget and other issues with our online newsletter, Front Porch Forum, the Village website, Channel 17, local newspapers, and direct-mail newsletters like this one. But we have no guarantee that any of it is actually getting through to the people who matter most.

At annual meeting we can give voters a succinct description of the budget and why it may or may not have changed from last year. We can provide people with detailed answers that they would not receive from those other sources. And we can hear your concerns that inform our deliberations over the next budget.

Democracy requires voter participation; but it also requires an informed electorate. We do need to boost turn-out at annual Village meeting. We've tried to make the meetings as pleasant as possible, with buffet dinner and an efficient and lively meeting format. We'll keep working to make it better. But in the meantime, we'll keep advocating to maintain the annual meeting tradition as the best way to give you the information you need to make the right decisions about your community.

Water quality and stormwater info at smartwaterways.org and ccstreamteam.org.

**SMART
Water WAYS**



Add Up to Cleaner Water

JOIN FRONT PORCH FORUM

If you haven't already, sign up for your neighborhood's e-newsletter today. Hear from your clearly identified nearby neighbors and post messages yourself. No fees, no spam, all local. It won't overflow your inbox. There are 5 neighborhoods in Essex Junction which have their own forums: Five Corners North, Five Corners South, Fairview Farms, Countryside and Essex West.

After just a few months on FPF, people often report feeling more connected to their neighbors, more tuned in to local goings on and more a part of their community. You'll see postings looking for a contractor, a lost pet, organizing a group yard sale, etc. Check it out at frontporchforum.com. Online conversations help neighbors connect and build community.

WARNING
VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION ANNUAL MEETING
APRIL 3 & 9, 2013

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 Wednesday, April 3, 2013 at 7:00 PM to act upon any of the following articles not involving voting by Australian ballot, said meeting to be adjourned to reconvene at the Essex Community Educational Center, on Tuesday, April 9, 2013 to vote for Village officers and transact any business involving voting 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 act upon the report of the auditor?

ARTICLE 2. Shall the voters approve an annual General Fund Budget in the amount of \$3,344,713 for fiscal year July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014, \$2,806,463 of which is to be levied in taxes against the Village Grand List?

ARTICLE 3. Shall the voters increase the “not-to-exceed” balance of the General Fund Capital Reserve Fund to \$750,000 in recognition of the increased costs of capital projects since the fund’s inception in 1993?

ARTICLE 4. Shall the voters approve a donation of up to \$20,000 from the Land Acquisition Fund to Vermont Land Trust to be used for the Whitcomb Farm Conservation Project, pending approval of the Trustees?

ARTICLE 5. Shall the voters approve holding the 2014 Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 2, 2014 to act upon any articles not involving voting by Australian ballot and to reconvene on Tuesday, April 8, 2014 to vote for the Village officers and transact any business involving voting by Australian ballot?

ARTICLE 6. To transact any other business that may lawfully come before the meeting?

BALLOT QUESTIONS

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

ARTICLE 8. Shall the voters approve the following amendments to the Charter: (new language is underlined, language to be deleted is in brackets [])

Throughout the document: Add the words “or her” and “or she” in each instance that the word “his” or “he” appears in the Charter.

Section 2.04. Prohibitions. . . .

c) Interference with Administration. Except for the purpose of evaluating the manager’s performance, or for the purpose of inquiries and investigations under section 2.06, the Trustees or its members shall deal with Village officers and employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the manager solely through the manager, and neither the Trustees nor its members shall give orders to any such officer or employee, either publicly or privately.

Section 4.01. Appointment; Qualifications; Compensation; Removal. The Trustees shall appoint a Village manager for an indefinite term and fix his or her compensation. The manager shall be appointed solely on the basis of his or her executive and administrative qualifications in accordance with the Vermont statutes. In all matters, the Village manager shall be subject to the direction and supervision of the Trustees and shall hold office at the will of the Trustees.**Section**

4.02. Powers and Duties of the Village Manager. . . .

[(11) Repealed April 8, 1993]. . .

[(12)11) The manager may when . . .

[(13)12) The manager shall annually appoint, subject to the Trustees approval, the Village treasurer/Tax collector, Village clerk, Village attorney, Village fire chief and Village engineering consultant.

[(14)13) The manager shall perform. . .

Section 4.03. [Removal] Hearing Process.

a) The Trustees may remove the manager from office for cause in accordance with the following procedures: . . .

A complete copy of the Charter with proposed amendments is available at the Village Clerk’s office.

Dated this 26th day of February, 2013

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION BOARD OF TRUSTEES

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION GENERAL FUND REVENUES

Account	FY12 Budget	FY12 Actual	FY13 Budget	FY13 Amended Budget	FY13 Estimated Revenues	FY14 Proposed Budget
1 Unrestricted Fund Balance	34,587		35,000	35,000	35,000	35,000
2 Property Taxes	2,519,354	2,520,386	2,666,989	2,666,989	2,667,252	2,806,463
3 State for Pilot & Current Use	2,000	2,577	2,000	2,000	4,079	2,500
4 IBM Subsidy	121,123	121,123	60,578	60,578	60,578	0
5 Penalties/Interest Delinq. Taxes	7,000	7,346	7,000	7,000	6,570	7,000
6 License & Zoning Fees	32,000	61,060	30,000	30,000	50,000	35,000
7 Service Fee - Water	112,993	112,993	110,169	110,169	110,169	111,336
8 Service Fee - WWTP	56,497	56,497	55,085	55,085	55,085	55,668
9 Service Fee - Sanitation	112,993	112,993	110,169	110,169	110,169	111,336
10 State District Court Fines	2,000	1,929	2,000	2,000	3,600	2,000
11 State Highway Aid	95,000	109,059	100,000	100,000	113,000	100,000
12 EJSD Tax Collection Fee	47,000	46,569	47,000	47,000	47,000	47,000
13 Lincoln Hall Rentals	289	0	0	0	0	0
14 Parking Space Fees	0	4,800	4,800	4,800	4,800	4,800
15 Miscellaneous Fire Receipts	20	25	0	0	1,221	10
16 Block Party Donations	0	1,790	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500
17 Miscellaneous Street Receipts	3,000	3,701	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,500
18 Miscellaneous Library Receipts	600	641	450	450	800	600
19 Library Replacement Receipts	0	3,397	0	0	2,485	0
20 Essex Town Contribution to Library	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
21 Interest Earnings	1,000	1,432	1,000	1,000	1,500	1,000
22 Miscellaneous Grants/Donations	0	24,992	0	0	43,153	0
23 Misc. Receipts	6,000	6,964	4,600	4,600	3,500	5,000
TOTALS	3,168,456	3,215,274	3,256,340	3,256,340	3,339,461	3,344,713

GENERAL FUND BUDGET SUMMARY

	FY12 Budget	FY12 Actual	FY13 Budget	FY13 Amended Budget	FY13 Estimated Expenditures	FY14 Proposed Budget
GENERAL GOVERNMENT:						
24 Administration	594,352	588,180	600,386	597,386	582,449	598,797
25 Transfers & Misc Expenditures	556,412	556,412	596,412	596,412	596,412	620,051
26 Grants & Non-Budgetary Expenditures	0	63,895	0	0	88,277	0
27 Fire Department	262,326	263,181	270,189	270,189	283,634	287,208
28 Library	640,328	629,689	655,585	652,785	652,413	684,479
29 Lincoln Hall	51,084	46,505	38,053	38,053	40,368	38,452
30 Planning Department	240,452	215,576	244,352	242,852	233,742	244,740
31 Economic/Community Development	57,689	53,994	67,018	83,318	83,379	79,628
32 Street Department	765,813	707,953	784,345	775,345	731,187	791,358
GENERAL FUND TOTAL	3,168,456	3,125,385	3,256,340	3,256,340	3,291,861	3,344,713

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
2 Lincoln Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452-3154



PRST STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
Burlington, VT
05401
Permit #675

ECRWSS

POSTAL PATRON

IMPORTANT DATES FOR VILLAGE RESIDENTS

<u>March 15, 2013</u>	2 nd installment of property taxes due
<u>April 3, 2013</u>	Community Supper, 6 pm, Essex High School Cafeteria Annual Meeting , 7 pm, Essex High School Auditorium
<u>April 9, 2013</u>	Village residents ballot voting 7 am-7 pm, EHS
<u>May 25, 2013</u>	Memorial Day Parade, 10 am
<u>May 31, 2013</u>	Water/sewer bills due Five Corners Farmers Market opens
<u>July 4, 2013</u>	4 th of July Celebration with fireworks at Maple St. Park
<u>July 20, 2013</u>	12 th Annual Block Party, Railroad Avenue, 4-9 pm
<u>Aug. 30, 2013</u>	Water/sewer bills due
<u>Sept. 15, 2013</u>	First installment of property taxes due
<u>Dec. 2, 2013</u>	Water/sewer bills due
<u>Dec. 4, 2013</u>	Tree Lighting and Train Hop, Five Corners, 6-8 PM

Community Supper Before Annual Meeting, April 3 at 6:00 PM

Please join your neighbors and friends for the Community Supper on Wednesday, April 3, 2013 at 6 PM in the Essex High School cafeteria. *The lasagna supper is free - but we ask that you bring a dessert to share.* The supper is followed by the Village Annual Meeting in the auditorium at 7 PM. ***Free on-site child care is provided during the meeting.***

2012 Annual Report

The 2012 Village Annual Report will be available at the Annual Meeting or may be picked up at the Village office or the Brownell Library by March 22. It will be also online at www.essexjunction.org. The FY 12 Audit Report is also available on the Village website or at the Village office.