

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION NEWS

Issue No. 43

March 2020

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

State of the Village Report

From the Essex Junction Trustees
By Andrew Brown, Essex Junction President



The Village is as strong today as it has ever been through the full embrace of cooperation and change. As my first year in the role of President I extend a most sincere thank you to George Tyler for his mentorship. For the first time in 7 years the Trustees experienced additional change as Elaine Haney and Lori Houghton left the board. I thank Elaine and Lori for their dedication to the community and years of service. We welcomed Raj Chawla and Amber Thibeault to the board and they have hit the ground running. The following are some of the many highlights, and thanks, from the past year.

Town and Village Merger Exploration

The Village Trustees and Town Selectboard have continued to dedicate a significant amount of time and energy into the exploration of merging the two municipalities. The decision by both boards to pursue merger followed the Governance Subcommittee's research into various governance options. The Governance Subcommittee is comprised of two Trustees and two Selectpersons. After reviewing these options the Trustees and Selectboard members unanimously agreed that merging the two municipalities was the best path forward, as described in the following statement approved by both boards:

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.

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Community Supper & Annual Meeting

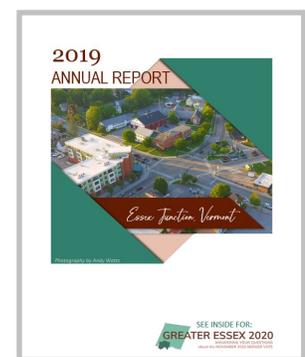
Wednesday, April 1st

Community Supper 6:00 PM
Village Annual Meeting 7:00 PM
Essex High School Cafeteria and Auditorium

Join your friends and neighbors for the Community Supper and Village Annual Meeting on April 1. The supper is free and dessert will be provided. Free on-site child care is provided during the meeting. Free rides are available for seniors by calling 878-6940 or 876-5087.

2019 Annual Report

To receive a full copy of the Village of Essex Junction 2019 Annual Report, stop by the Village Office at 2 Lincoln Street, the Town Office at 81 Main Street, Brownell Library or Essex Junction Recreation & Parks. You can also find it online at the www.essexjunction.org.



State of the Village Report *(continued)*

The Governance Subcommittee has continued its research into representation, taxation, identity, and charter changes, and the Trustees and Selectboard are using that research to propose a plan for merger. We are working with the belief that the November 3, 2020 election would be the best time for such an impactful decision to be voted upon by Essex residents.

The merger proposal has already been shaped in large part by feedback from residents. Recognizing the need for resident input beyond what occurs at regular board meetings, the Trustees and Selectboard contracted with Burlington-based market-research firm KSV to conduct two community-wide surveys and three smaller listening sessions. KSV obtained opinions and responses from almost 800 residents. We thank every resident who participated in a listening session, answered a survey, wrote a letter to the editor, posted on Front Porch Forum, or personally spoke to board members and staff. Your input is crucial.

The merger plan to date

Based on resident feedback and the Governance Subcommittee's research, the Trustees and Selectboard are considering the following details in a plan for merger:

First 5 Years

A seven-member board with two members elected from the Village, two from outside the Village, and three at-large from all of Essex. This board will develop a permanent elected board model that could be all district-based, all at-large, or some combination.

Reorganize Town and Village departments, building codes, municipal plans, ordinances, policies, etc.

First 12 Years

Village pays off its residual debt

Village and Town tax rates gradually reconciled to mitigate yearly impact on the Town outside the Village

A 12-year phase-in of taxes allows grand list growth and consolidation efficiencies to offset tax impacts on the Town outside the Village.

More details are available online at GreaterEssex2020.org, and there will be many more opportunities to provide your feedback in the coming months. As we continue refining a merger plan, please visit GreaterEssex2020.org for updates and information, and be sure to read the boards' weekly column, "Working towards a Greater Essex," in The Essex Reporter and on Front Porch Forum. As always, please reach out to any of your elected officials with your questions and concerns.

Crescent Connector

After more than a decade of planning, engineering, and negotiating, construction should begin in 2020 with new railroad crossings – more on that in a moment. The Crescent Connector will connect Maple Street (VT Route 117) and Park Street (VT Route 2A) by arching around the railroad so traffic going toward or from Williston on Park Street can go around the railroad. This will significantly reduce traffic wait time, not only when the wood chip train comes through, but at all times of the day. Construction of the actual Crescent Connector Road is scheduled to occur approximately a year after the rail crossings are installed and updated. Additional details of the Crescent Connector can be found by watching a Channel 17 recording of the Trustee meeting on December 17, 2019.

Infrastructure

The Village's roads, sidewalks, sewer lines, water lines, buildings, and more continue to be a high priority for the Trustees. With thanks to the Capital Program Review Committee the Trustees are again recommending a significant increase to our capital fund, the budget used to repair and replace our infrastructure. We have also begun conversations with the Selectboard on a Local Options Tax (a 1% tax on various sales) as a way to reduce our reliance on property taxes for the capital fund. In 2018, Essex (Village and Town combined) would have had access to over \$1.2 million for this purpose. We will continue our exploration of this in the near future.

Environment

We worked with the Wastewater Treatment Facility to take over the permit for biosolids land application from a subcontractor. This allowed the WWTF to continue its partnership directly with Whitcomb Farm for land application of treated wastewater sludge. Beyond reducing costs, this innovation is a more environmentally-friendly method than the alternative.

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State of the Village Report *(continued)*

We also approved the WWTF to enter Flexible Load Management Innovative Pilot Program with Green Mountain Power. The program will reduce peak demand on the electric grid by voluntarily curtailing electric use, with GMP notifying the WWTF of high-power demand days, during which the facility will generate a maximum amount of electricity with reserved methane gas through its cogeneration system. System improvements were provided at no cost as part of this pilot.

Village Committees

For the fourth straight year the Village received Tree City USA designation by the Arbor Day Foundation. We sincerely thank the efforts of the Village's Tree Advisory Committee for its work in maintaining the designation.

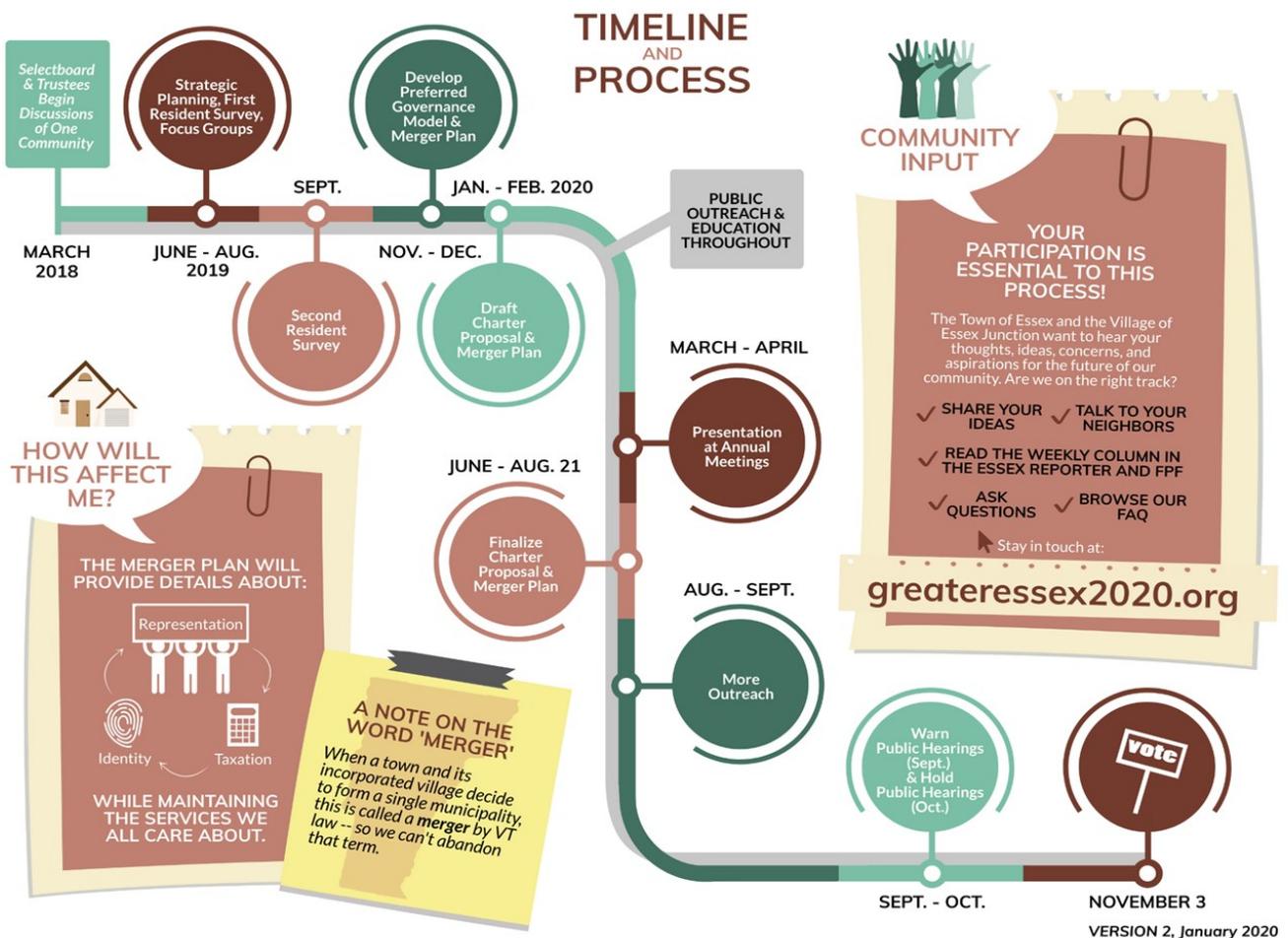
Similarly, the Village renewed our status as a Bronze Bicycle Friendly Community, as recognized by The League of American Bicyclists. We thank the Bike/Walk Advisory Committee, as this would not have been possible without their efforts.

Our Village would not be able to receive the many recognitions we get if it were also not for the efforts of the volunteer committee members on the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment. These members balance the needs and desires of the community and property owners as we continue to grow.

Equally important has been the work of the Brownell Library Trustees. Over the past year the Brownell Trustees and their Strategic Planning Committee has worked tirelessly on a new strategic plan for July 2020 to June 2025. You can find the plan here, <https://brownelllibrary.org/the-library/strategic-plan-2020-2025>. The Brownell Library has been, and will continue to be, the amazing community resource it has always been.

Concluding Thoughts

Moving into the next year we will continue many of the initiatives we started as well as ensuring the overall day-to-day functioning of the Village remains strong. To ensure this, I ask each of you to please reach out to any of the Village Trustees with your questions, comments, and concerns. Thanks to all of you for keeping the Village of Essex Junction such a wonderful place.





GREATER ESSEX 2020

ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS
about the NOVEMBER 2020 MERGER VOTE

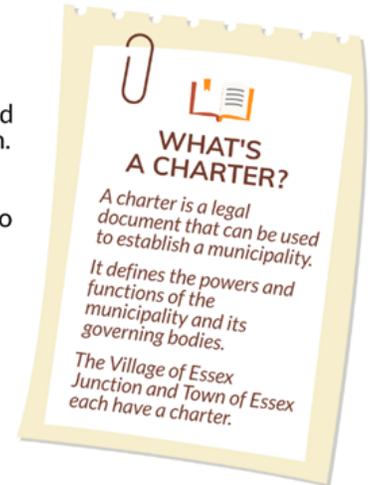
FIRST THING'S FIRST: WHAT ARE WE VOTING ON?

The Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction are currently **two municipalities** with **two separate charters**, sharing some municipal services under contract. Town and Village residents are all residents of the Town -- Village residents are residents of both.



The **Town of Essex Selectboard** and the **Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees** are exploring a potential merger of the governance of the two municipalities under a single charter to form a single government entity.

Following extensive research, collaboration, and a robust public engagement process, the community will vote on **November 3, 2020** on whether to proceed.



WHY EXPLORE A MERGER?

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



Restore and enhance our infrastructure



Attract and retain a vibrant business community



Improve our services



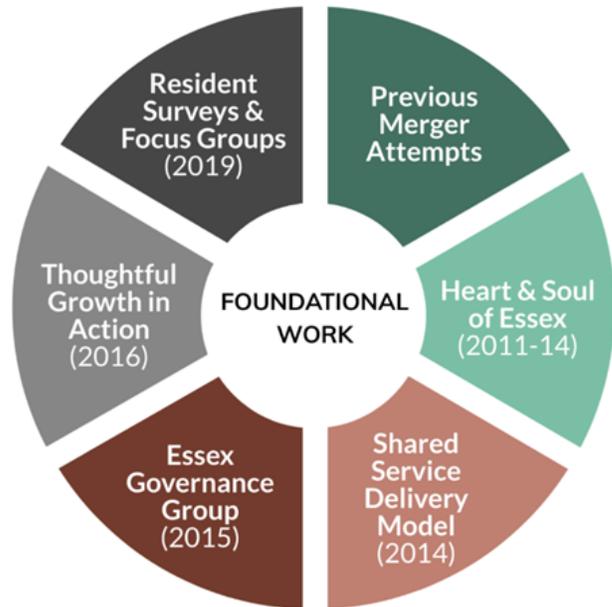
Protect our natural resources



Overcome challenges we face



Establish ourselves as Vermont's premier livable community



KEY CHALLENGES:

There are still a number of issues to resolve leading up to a community decision, including:



Taxation



Governing board structure & elections



Community identity

CURRENTLY:

The Town and Village function **TOGETHER** in many ways:



Manager's Office (One Unified Manager)
Police Department
Clerk's Office
Finance Department
Essex Area Senior Center
Public Works Department

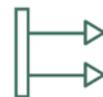


These departments and services are paid for by all members of the Essex community.



Consolidations have saved more than \$2.8 million combined from fiscal years 2014-2020.

The Town and Village still budget **SEPARATELY** for these services:



Fire Department
Libraries
Community Development
Parks and Recreation
Capital Planning
Elected & Appointed Boards

**Village of Essex Junction - General Fund Budget Summary
Fiscal Year 2021**

| | FY18 Actual | FY19 Budget | FY19 Actual | FY20 Budget | FY20 Estimated | FY21 Budget Proposal |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Revenues | | | | | | |
| 1 Property Taxes | 3,283,591 | 3,423,606 | 3,423,627 | 3,556,422 | 3,556,481 | 3,670,039 |
| 2 PILOT Payments | 12,094 | 7,000 | 11,220 | 11,200 | 11,200 | 11,200 |
| 3 Licenses and Permits | 29,925 | 58,000 | 16,318 | 35,000 | 18,000 | 25,000 |
| 4 Funding from Town of Essex | 1,136,449 | 1,160,126 | 1,160,126 | 1,259,376 | 1,295,177 | 1,341,811 |
| 5 Intergovernmental Revenues | 1,020 | 1,500 | 2,903 | 1,000 | 1,000 | 1,000 |
| 6 Funding from Enterprise Funds | 232,370 | 235,035 | 235,035 | 269,995 | 269,995 | 286,684 |
| 7 Miscellaneous | 87,460 | 43,020 | 71,464 | 7,020 | 148,020 | 7,020 |
| 8 Fees for Service | 27,333 | 26,400 | 26,930 | 24,900 | 24,900 | 24,900 |
| 9 Total General Fund Revenues | 4,810,241 | 4,954,687 | 4,947,622 | 5,164,913 | 5,324,773 | 5,367,655 |
| Expenditures | | | | | | |
| 12 Administration | 471,850 | 467,906 | 530,688 | 465,314 | 463,271 | 486,997 |
| 13 Buildings | 209,668 | 205,196 | 196,413 | 240,375 | 240,375 | 253,191 |
| 14 Community Development | 215,201 | 243,310 | 217,065 | 245,294 | 228,846 | 251,288 |
| 15 Debt Service | 315,009 | 317,983 | 317,983 | 313,560 | 313,560 | 202,734 |
| 16 Economic Development | 81,967 | 118,429 | 70,001 | 50,350 | 34,447 | 49,500 |
| 17 Finance | 87,264 | 79,835 | 88,892 | 160,503 | 170,686 | 181,414 |
| 18 Fire | 326,765 | 331,369 | 332,296 | 351,860 | 350,667 | 346,880 |
| 19 Highways | 1,097,992 | 1,145,126 | 1,214,370 | 1,182,376 | 1,218,177 | 1,264,811 |
| 20 Library | 655,585 | 703,635 | 684,070 | 731,684 | 725,600 | 751,850 |
| 21 Misc. Grants | 20,010 | - | 11,788 | - | 141,000 | - |
| 22 Recreation | 591,042 | 634,823 | 640,424 | 657,867 | 657,800 | 690,879 |
| 23 Transfers | 769,858 | 707,075 | 707,075 | 765,730 | 740,235 | 888,110 |
| 24 Total General Fund Expenditures | 4,842,212 | 4,954,687 | 5,011,064 | 5,164,913 | 5,284,664 | 5,367,655 |

WARNING

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 1 & 14, 2020

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 1, 2020 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 14, 2020 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 \$5,367,655 for fiscal year July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021, \$3,670,039 of which is to be levied in taxes against the Village Grand List?

ARTICLE 3. Shall the voters approve holding the 2021 Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 7, 2021 to act upon any articles not involving voting by Australian ballot and to reconvene on Tuesday, April 13, 2021 to vote for the Village officers and transact any business involving voting by Australian ballot?

ARTICLE 4. To transact any other business that may lawfully come before the meeting?

BALLOT QUESTIONS

ARTICLE 5. To elect Village officers required by law including: Moderator (one year term); three Village Trustees (2 three year terms, 1 one year term); one Library Trustee (five year term)?

Dated this 25th day of February, 2020

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

By: _____
Andrew P. Brown, President

George A. Tyler, Vice President

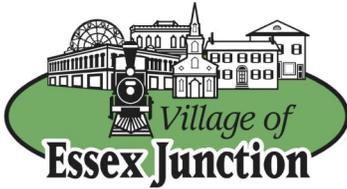
Raj D. Chawla, Trustee

Daniel S. Kerin, Trustee

Amber L. Thibeault, Trustee

ATTEST:

Susan McNamara-Hill, Village Clerk



2 Lincoln Street
Essex Junction, VT 05452-3154

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

**ECRWSS
POSTAL PATRON**

Village services: where do I go for...

81 Main Street office

ph. 878-1341



- ◆ **Voting:** registration, absentee ballots, and election questions
- ◆ **Tax bill** questions, copies of your bill, receipts for payment, to pay in cash, check or with a credit card
- ◆ **Water bill** questions, copies of your bill, receipts for payment, to pay in cash, check or credit card
- ◆ **Property assessment** information, land records, title searches
- ◆ **Other:** dog licenses, marriage licenses, birth and death certificates, Green Mountain Passports, hunting licenses

2 Lincoln Street office

ph. 878-6944



- ◆ **Community Development** information on upcoming projects
- ◆ **Planning and Zoning** questions and permits (building, garage sale, street vending, temporary use, water/sewer service)
- ◆ **Manager's Office**
- ◆ **Essex Area Senior Center**
- ◆ **Public Works**
- ◆ **Drop-off location** for water/tax bill payments (checks only; no receipts). *For receipts, to pay with cash/credit card, to ask questions or receive a copy of your latest bill, please stop by the 81 Main St. office.*