

SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE

January 16, 2020

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING
January 16, 2020**

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS: George Tyler, Chair; Annie Cooper; Raj Chawla; Max Levy.

ADMINISTRATION: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Greg Duggan, Deputy Manager.

OTHERS PRESENT: Brian Shelden; Ken Signorello, Irene Wrenner.

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 7 p.m.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Mr. Tyler requested the addition of a Suggested Introductory paragraph for Town of Essex Charter, to go with Item 5c (Consider Preparing Draft Transition Plan Language for Attorney Review prior to Discussion with Legislators).

3. AGENDA APPROVAL

MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, that the Subcommittee on Governance approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed 4-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

Ken Signorello wondered if he was being heard when he spoke about merger and governance topics. He presented a Facebook post made by Selectboard Chair Elaine Haney, in which she spoke about the potential tax impacts of a merger of the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction. Mr. Signorello said Ms. Haney was not qualified to speak about the tax impacts, and that he was concerned she was speaking as a Selectboard member about the issue. Mr. Tyler said the Selectboard and Trustees had publicly reviewed the potential tax impacts that Ms. Haney had posted. Mr. Signorello said he thought it was premature for Ms. Haney to make the comment. Ms. Cooper said Mr. Signorello’s statements that the boards were acting improperly are rude, and that the constant accusations are taxing.

5. BUSINESS ITEMS

a. Consider Finalizing Transitional Taxation Proposal and Transitional Village Tax District(s) Language for review by Selectboard and Trustees prior to Discussion with Legislators

Mr. Tyler reviewed the draft recommendation for Transitional Taxation Models in a Merged Essex Junction/Essex Town Municipal Government. He highlighted the “Important Forward” noting the expectation that current service levels would remain, and no big budget cuts are expected. He explained that a Village debt district would be required to pay off existing debt, and that the subcommittee could recommend adopting one or more other transitional tax schemes: designating the Village as a tax rate reconciliation district; a sidewalk district; a

47 capital improvement district; and/or designating the Village center as a downtown
48 improvement district.

49
50 Mr. Tyler said the Town and Village’s special counsel for merger, Dan Richardson, had
51 talked to the Vermont Department of Taxes and was told that a 12-year transitional phase for
52 taxes would be okay.

53
54 Mr. Chawla asked about the amount of sidewalks in the Village compared to the Town
55 outside the Village, and said he expected the service level expectations to rise in the Town
56 outside the Village in the next 12 years. Mr. Chawla also said that he thought the idea of a
57 capital improvement district for the Village had originally covered historical buildings, but
58 now seemed to be proposed for all capital needs.

59
60 **b. Consider Finalizing Transitional Representation Proposal Language for review by**
61 **Selectboard and Trustees prior to Discussion with Legislators**

62 Mr. Tyler reviewed the draft recommendation for a transitional representation model with a
63 merged governing board consisting of two members from what would be the former Town
64 outside-the-Village district, two members from the former Essex Junction Town-inside-the-
65 Village district, and three at-large members. The merged board would be tasked with
66 determining a long-term governance model.

67
68 The Subcommittee on Governance members discussed whether the length of time for the
69 representative districts would align with the taxation timeline. They also discussed
70 proportionality of the Village and Town-outside-the-Village districts, which currently have
71 similar populations but could change over time.

72
73 **c. Consider Preparing Draft Transition Plan Language for Attorney Review prior to**
74 **Discussion with Legislators**

75 Mr. Tyler proposed an introductory paragraph for a new charter to provide historical context
76 for the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction. Mr. Chawla said he would find the
77 language useful.

78
79 Mr. Teich said he planned to meet with Town and Village attorneys on how to transition
80 existing contracts for employee associations.

81
82 The subcommittee members discussed the timeline of a transition, which will need to
83 accommodate organizational changes to departments, updates to ordinances and zoning
84 regulations, and other items. Mr. Teich suggested specifying a five-year plan. Mr. Levy said
85 the transition should take no more than five years, and transition plan language could leave
86 open the possibility of a shorter timeframe.

87
88 The subcommittee members discussed annual Town Meeting dates, the possibility of
89 aligning voting dates with the Essex Westford School District, and whether to move to
90 Australian ballot for approval of the municipal operating budget. The discussion touched on
91 whether and how to incorporate voting recommendations from the Essex Governance Group.

92

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93 Mr. Tyler and Mr. Levy talked about the importance of an interim governing body of the
94 current Selectboard and Trustees to organize the first election for the transitional
95 government.

96
97 The subcommittee talked about whether or not to include language in the transition plan for
98 the future of Town and Village departments that have yet to consolidate, such as Fire and
99 Community Development. Mr. Teich advised that the charter would become the law for the
100 merged community, so specifying that the community would have two fire departments, for
101 instance, would codify such a setup. He said the community does need the services provided
102 by the two current departments. Mr. Tyler suggested holding a planning summit for
103 Community Development to consider needs of the different parts of the community.

104
105 **MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to send the taxation and**
106 **representation proposals in their current forms to the full Selectboard and Board of**
107 **Trustees for their meeting next week. Motion passed 4-0.**

108
109 Mr. Signorello said the subcommittee is threading the needle with its hard work. He said the
110 tax information is not official yet, and no one should comment on it in their official capacity.

111
112 Mr. Sheldon asked why terms for board seats would be staggered. Mr. Tyler said it keeps
113 some continuity on the board. Mr. Sheldon said he was concerned that if redistricting
114 occurred with staggered terms, people could be serving on seats that no longer represent the
115 area from which they were elected.

116
117 Ms. Wrenner said she was surprised to see the subcommittee consider a 10-member interim
118 board, because when she had proposed a 10-member board in 2018 she was told it was too
119 large.

120
121 Mr. Signorello asked if the tax mechanism would result in an increase of approximately
122 \$26/year for the Town outside the Village. Mr. Tyler confirmed the number.

123
124 **d. Approve of minutes: December 19, 2019**

125 **MAX LEVY made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to approve the minutes with**
126 **subcommittee corrections. Motion passed 4-0, with no corrections.**

127
128 **6. ADJOURN:**

129 **ANNIE COOPER made a motion, seconded by RAJ CHAWLA, to adjourn the meeting.**
130 **Motion passed 4-0 at 9:01 p.m.**

131
132 Respectfully Submitted,
133 Greg Duggan
134 Deputy Manager

135
136 Approved this __23rd__ day of _January_, 2020

137
138 (see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)