

**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF MEETING
September 28, 2021**

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Andrew Brown, President; Raj Chawla, Vice President; Amber Thibeault, George Tyler.

ADMINISTRATION: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Maureen Gillard, School Age Childcare Director; Ricky Jones, Public Works Superintendent; Maguerite Ladd, Assistant Manager; Brad Luck, Director of Essex Junction Parks & Recreation; Sarah Macy, Finance Director/Assistant Manager,

OTHERS PRESENT: John Alden, Michael Bleau, Jonathan Breen, Bob Burrows, Alise Certa, Annie Cooper, Karen Dolan, Erin Ennis, Steven Eustis, Stacy Jordan, Richard Hamlin, Lori Houghton, , Tamara Jaques, Chris Kline, Deb McAdoo, Ed Malina, Greg Morgan, Kristie Paschall, Kristen Shamis, Margaret Smith, Mike Sullivan, Andy Suntup, Linda Suntup, Carmelle Terborgh, Dennis Thibeault, Mike Thorne, Jane Thurston, Ann Wadsworth, Doug Wilson, Irene Wrenner, Harlan ____

1. CALL TO ORDER

Andrew Brown called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES

Mr. Teich requested adding an executive session for discussion of personnel. He also noted additional material for the work session.

3. APPROVE AGENDA

GEORGE TYLER made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to approve the agenda as amended. The motion passed 4-0.

4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD

a. Comments from public on items not on the agenda
None at this time.

5. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Public hearing on the charter for the City of Essex Junction

Mr. Brown noted that this would be to vote to adopt a new municipal charter that would transform the Junction into an independent city that would no longer be a part of Essex. He outlined why this vote is occurring, noting that Villagers had recently voted to merge with the Town and the Town voted not to merge. He said in April, there was a non-binding article about separation, which passed overwhelmingly, and so the Junction has been looking into becoming a City. He outlined what would stay the same (a 5-member governing board, an annual budget voted by Australian ballot, maintenance of municipal services, and maintenance of high quality of life and Junction identity). He outlined what would be different (the Junction would have full control of its future, tax dollars would be invested only in the City, and the Junction would be an equal municipality). He outlined the process up until the present, noting that this is the first public hearing on the charter, and that the second will be in October, with a vote on November 2. He outlined the timeline for what would happen if the vote passes, noting that the City could potentially be formed by July of 2022 and have a transition year to prepare for full operation, with a fully operational City by 2023 (all of this would be subject to timely legislative approval of the charter). He then outlined the financial impacts of becoming a City. He walked through Fiscal Year 2022 budget revenues and expenditures for the Village, the Town, and

54 estimated figures for a City. He said the taxes needed to support municipal operations in a City would
55 decrease, the overall amount of property taxes would decrease, General Fund municipal spending
56 would decrease, the tax rate would decrease, and the savings on a Village/City home of an assessed
57 value of \$300,000 would be approximately \$195 per year. He outlined the departments with the most
58 significant cost savings, and the departments with the most significant cost increases. He addressed a
59 number of Frequently Asked Questions, noting the following: Selectboard and Trustees are working to
60 contract for shared police services, the Village has the means and assets to become a City, there will
61 be 4 new FTEs that will need to be hired, the hall of government would be 2 Lincoln Street, the City
62 would grow its Grand List by reinvesting in itself, and the Trustees are committed to continuing the
63 Senior Center at 2 Lincoln Street. He said ballots will be mailed and expected to arrive by October 11,
64 and that in-person voting will occur on November 2.

65
66 Mr. Brown opened the discussion up to the public.

67
68 Ms. Thurston asked for a handout of the presentation. Mr. Tyler replied that they can mail a copy to
69 her home address. She cited concerns about taxes increasing as a result of the Junction becoming a
70 City.

71
72 Mr. Suntup said he is satisfied with how the Junction is being run currently and satisfied with services,
73 except for the high taxes that residents pay. He asked for confirmation that taxes would decrease if the
74 Junction becomes a City. Mr. Brown replied that he is confident that taxes would decrease. Mr. Tyler
75 added that if the Junction becomes a City, the taxes that are raised would stay locally and not be
76 shared with the Town. Mr. Chawla added that they anticipate that service levels would remain the
77 same.

78
79 Mr. Eustis thanked the Trustees for their diligent work on the separation initiative and looks forward to
80 supporting the initiative on the ballot.

81
82 Mr. Sullivan asked if the presentation could be video recorded independently from the recording of the
83 meeting itself, saying a video recording would help with canvassing. Mr. Brown thanked Mr. Sullivan
84 for this idea.

85
86 Mr. Morgan said that this initiative would simplify the operations of the Junction.

87
88 Mr. Suntup asked about access to Indian Brook Reservoir and Essex Free Library. Mr. Brown replied
89 that access to the Essex Free Library would stay the same and the Trustees and Selectboard are still
90 working out an agreement around Indian Brook Reservoir.

91
92 Mr. Brown closed the public hearing.

93
94 Mr. Tyler added that the Village's charter endows the Village with the same powers of municipal
95 government that the State constitution grants. He said people often interpret incorporated entities as
96 having lower status, but that isn't the case.

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99 **6. BUSINESS ITEMS**

100 **a. *Work Session on Essex Junction Independence Initiative**

101 Mr. Luck began by outlining the topics that will be discussed during the work session, which include a
102 debrief on proposals and contract discussion with the Selectboard, plans for 2 Lincoln Street
103 renovations, and the Fiscal Year 2022 budget.

104
105 He began with the negotiations on proposals and contracts with the Selectboard. Mr. Brown said he
106 feels good about where they are in the process, especially with police services. He said he doesn't
107 foresee hurdles on discussions for other services. Mr. Tyler acknowledged that Indian Brook Reservoir
108 is an important resource and said that he is confident that they will be able to come to an agreement
109 with the Selectboard by the time that the charter would be approved. He thanked the Selectboard for
110 their cooperation on these discussions.

111
112 Mr. Luck then began a discussion of the plans for the 2 Lincoln Street space. He said they will need
113 space for 13 employees, security updates are needed, health safety updates are needed, and the
114 Senior Center, Teen Center, and Essex CHIPS will be housed in the same locations. He noted the
115 Village is anticipating receiving \$3.2 million in ARPA funds, though the exact uses are still to be
116 determined. He noted the ARPA funds could go toward some of the capital projects (like water line
117 work), which could free up other money for these renovations. He then outlined the different options
118 for renovations to prepare the building. Two options would renovate the basement and first floor, and
119 two options would renovate the basement, first floor, and second floor (and would require an elevator).
120 Ms. Thibeault asked if parking would be lost if a vestibule is installed, and Mr. Alden replied no parking
121 would be lost, but some electrical equipment would need to be relocated. Ms. Thibeault asked if
122 renovations for the second floor would necessitate an elevator, and Mr. Alden replied the second floor
123 would be where public meetings would be held and thus would necessitate an elevator for access. Mr.
124 Chawla asked whether public meetings could still be held at 2 Lincoln if the first or second option
125 (basement and first floor only) is selected, and Mr. Alden replied that they could still hold public
126 meetings at 2 Lincoln Street in the first and second options. Mr. Chawla asked what areas need
127 improvement to bring the building up to code, and Mr. Alden outlined ventilation, thermal energy, and
128 access.

129
130 Mr. Luck then began a discussion of the Fiscal Year 2022 budget, highlighting that the budget is based
131 on actual expenditures and that it reflects the organization of the City when it is operational and self-
132 sufficient (only assumes sharing for police services). He said that the Village is financially well-
133 positioned to become a City. Trustees thanked Mr. Luck and Ms. Macy for putting together the budget
134 information.

135
136 **b. Discussion on Main Street Water line**

137 Ms. Macy provided an overview of a new project from the Village Capital Committee, which is a
138 replacement of the Main Street water line. She noted that the Capital Committee heard about this
139 project over the summer and ranked it very high on their list of priorities, due to the enormous
140 disruption the line would cause were it to fail. She noted there is some funding in the Capital Account
141 for this, but it is not enough to cover this project. She noted that the project will be eligible for ARPA
142 funding, but staff cannot dedicate those monies to this project with certainty at this time. She said that
143 they could bond for this using either the Vermont Municipal Bond Bank, with a vote in April, or the
144 State's revolving loan fund, which has the possibility of some loan forgiveness, but also has more
145 stringent guidelines on the funds and would push the timeline for the project back a year.

146
147 Mr. Jones noted there have been some problems with this water line including at least 10 breaks in the
148 last 30 years. Mr. Hamlin outlined the sections of water line needing replacement, namely Main Street
149 from Densmore to the Champlain Valley Water District tank on upper Main Street. He noted the
150 failures in the water line have historically had extremely large impacts given the volume of water in the
151 line and its position.
152

153 Mr. Brown asked if the water line is under the road and/or multi-use path. Mr. Hamlin said the line is
154 biased toward the edge of the road and that the impact would mainly be to the sidewalk and multi-use
155 path, which would mean much less traffic disruption. Mr. Brown asked if the old line would be removed
156 once the new line is installed. Mr. Hamlin replied saying the ends of the old line, which is made of cast
157 iron, would be capped and the pipe would be a closed structure and left under the road. He
158 emphasized there are no contaminants within the pipe. Mr. Brown noted it looks like a portion of the
159 project is outside the Village and in the Town and Mr. Hamlin confirmed this, but said that the line itself
160 belongs to the Village and that there is no Town connection to that portion of it. Mr. Brown asked about
161 the loan forgiveness within the State's loan fund. Ms. Macy replied a certain percentage of the funds
162 from the federal government to the State will be forgiven as grants, but it isn't a certainty. Mr. Hamlin
163 added the timing will take longer if federal funds are used. He noted that the Village has had good luck
164 with the Vermont Bond Bank.

166 Mr. Chawla asked if this could be done in tandem with or closely after construction on the multi-use
167 path. Mr. Hamlin replied that the goal is to complete this prior to beginning the construction on the
168 multi-use path. He said that it would be better to replace the water line sooner rather than later.

170 Mr. Tyler asked how the bond would be paid, should it be taken out. Ms. Macy replied that this would
171 be a revenue bond associated with the Water Fund. She said that the trajectory of the Water Fund
172 looks sufficient to cover the bond payments. Mr. Tyler asked about the urgency of this replacement
173 and Mr. Hamlin replied that there are efficiencies that can be realized with this replacement. Mr. Teich
174 added that once water mains begin to break, it's indicative that the water line needs to be replaced
175 soon. He also noted that the water rate system for the Village has future anticipated work built into it.

177 Ms. Macy noted that the next step would be to authorize staff to start the planning and design process
178 to determine an estimated bond amount.

180 Mr. Brown opened the discussion to the public.

182 Mr. Eustis asked how some of the bigger, more critical projects in the Capital Plan are anticipated. Mr.
183 Hamlin replied that the water line replacement has been included in the Capital Plan for some time,
184 and recent breaks have caused it to be pushed ahead.

186 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and AMBER THIBEAULT seconded, that the Trustees approve**
187 **the project and authorize staff to begin planning and design. The motion passed 4-0.**

189 **c. Consider charter revisions for the City of Essex Junction**

190 Trustees did not have revisions at this time.

192 Mr. Brown opened the discussion up to the public. There was no public comment.

194 **ANDREW BROWN made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, that the Board of Trustees**
195 **agree to remove the words "established and" from Section 102 (Transition Period) of the draft**
196 **City of Essex Junction Charter, on the fifth line from the bottom of page 1. The motion passed**
197 **4-0.**

199 **d. Consider warning of special election for November 2**

200 Mr. Luck outlined the draft notice for the special election, noting several edits from Ms. McNamara-Hill.

Mr. Chawla asked what date the mailing labels were printed and when residents should contact the Clerk for a mailed ballot if they registered to vote after the labels were printed. Ms. McNamara-Hill said that ballots will continue to be mailed after the batched mailing as residents register to vote.

RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and GEORGE TYLER seconded, that the Trustees approve the warning of the Special Election on November 2, 2021 in consideration of the Charter of the City of Essex Junction dated September 14. The motion passed 4-0.

e. Consider approval of Village mailer about vote on independence

Mr. Luck reviewed the information that would be mailed out, saying it should arrive for voters in tandem with ballots. Trustees clarified language around some technical terms in the mailer, as well as made clearer for laypeople what some of the intent is.

Mr. Chawla suggested highlighting more prominently the areas where significant cost savings would be realized.

Mr. Brown opened the discussion up to the public.

Ms. Certa said that the mailer does not concisely provide a call to action for voters. She said that they need to know that a vote is coming up and when the vote is, which would motivate them to look further within the document. She also cautioned against the use of pie charts and graphs.

Mr. Harlan ____ agreed with Ms. Certa on her suggestions.

AMBER THIBEAULT made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, that the Trustees authorize for the mailer on independence for the City of Essex Junction charter vote be mailed to all Village households as amended by the Trustees. The motion passed 4-0.

7. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Approve minutes: September 14, 2021
- b. Approve Check Warrant #17269—9/17/21

GEORGE TYLER made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to approve the consent agenda as presented. The motion passed 4-0.

8. READING FILE

- a. Board member comments: Mr. Brown noted that the Out and About in Essex event is occurring this weekend, and that vouchers are available at 2 Lincoln Hall, Barnyard Restaurant on Susie Wilson Road, and at the Essex Experience. Mr. Teich thanked the many volunteers and staff that worked to put on this event.
- b. Letter from Richard Harnish, High Speed Rail Alliance re: Passenger rail
- c. List of Boards/Committees/Commission openings
- d. Health insurance update
- e. 2020 Report, Implementation of Essex Junction All-Hazard Mitigation Plan actions
- f. Upcoming meeting Schedule

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

- * An executive session may be needed to discuss negotiation of contracts and agreements with the Town of Essex

251 **ANDREW BROWN** made a motion, and **RAJ CHAWLA** seconded, that the Trustees enter into
252 **executive session to discuss the employment of public employees in accordance with 1 V.S.A.**
253 **Section 313(a)(3), to include the Trustees (and, if desired, the Unified Manager. The motion**
254 **passed 4-0 at 9:12 PM.**

255
256 **AMBER THIBUEALT** made a motion, and **GEORGE TYLER** seconded, to exit executive session.
257 **The motion passed 4-0 at 10:01 PM.**

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259 **10. ADJOURN**

260 **AMBER THIBEAULT** made a motion, and **RAJ CHAWLA** seconded, to adjourn the meeting. The
261 **motion passed 4-0**

262 The meeting adjourned at 10:02 PM.

263
264 Respectfully Submitted,
265 Amy Coonradt