

VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION TRUSTEES  
TOWN OF ESSEX SELECTBOARD  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNANCE - SPECIAL MEETING  
March 5, 2020

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

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

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Irene Wrenner, Ken Signorello, Harlan Smith, Christine Packard, Bonnie Doble, Caitlin Corless, Margaret Smith, Bruce Post, Brian Sheldon.

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

George 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 7:02pm.

**2. AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

Mr. Tyler suggested changing the order of the agenda so that Business Item 5b would be discussed first and Business Item 5a would be discussed second. Other subcommittee members agreed and the order of the agenda was changed.

**3. AGENDA APPROVAL**

**GEORGE TYLER made a motion, and MAX LEVY seconded, that the Subcommittee on Governance approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed 3-0 [Annie Cooper not present for vote].**

**4. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

George Tyler noted that the charter change will be discussed during Item C.

**5. BUSINESS ITEMS**

**a. Discuss and consider approving Q&A for water/sewer transition language:**

Mr. Tyler noted that Andy Watts had had questions about water/sewer transition language and messaging around changes in tax rates. Mr. Teich clarified that the current proposal is that the Town and Village would both have their separate legacy systems for water and sewer, with their own rates and any associated debt. In the future, the systems could decide (with voter approval) to take on new debt, which would be shared between the two systems, and rates would eventually equalize. He further emphasized that only residents who are connected to the systems would pay for services from those systems.

Mr. Chawla suggested including language in the Q&A that explicitly states that only people who pay for water/sewer pay for the infrastructure and the services associated with them.

Ms. Cooper emphasized the importance of transparency and clear messaging to residents on the topic of the merger.

47 **b. Discuss library proposal:**

48 Christine Packard, Chair of Brownell Library Trustees, Bonnie Doble, Chair of the Essex Free  
49 Library Trustees, and Caitlin Corless, Director of the Essex Free Library were present to describe  
50 the role of their respective Boards of Trustees and how a merger could impact them.

51  
52 Ms. Packard stated that the Brownell Library trust requires a Board of Trustees made up of  
53 permanent and elected members, which oversees library policy creation, fundraising, and budget  
54 oversight. Mr. Tyler noted that dissolving this board would require legal action, and that it has  
55 remained intact due to conditions in the library's bequest.

56  
57 Ms. Doble noted that the Essex Free Library is a municipal library, which is a town department  
58 and is bound by requirements in state statute. She added that the trustee are appointed by the  
59 Selectboard for 3-year terms and generally have the same duties as the Brownell Library trustees,  
60 in terms of policy-setting and fundraising.

61  
62 Mr. Tyler noted that because of the board requirements for both libraries, a merger would pose  
63 no changes to the board structures of either entity and have relatively little impact on them.

64  
65 Ms. Packard noted that the libraries have proposed to align applicable procedures and staff  
66 compensation where possible, to continue to realize cost savings.

67  
68 **c. Review and approve Subcommittee memo to Joint Boards:**

69 Mr. Tyler outlined the recommendations for the merger proposal that would be given to the joint  
70 boards for their final approval, which included recommendations on a representation model, tax  
71 rate integration and reconciliation, and other transition language in the draft charter.

72  
73 The subgroup discussed how the March 3 vote to approve the Town's charter change to allow an  
74 even-number of Board seats split between the Town and Village would impact the  
75 recommendation within the proposal for a board with two Village, two Town, and three at-large  
76 seats. Mr. Tyler proposed putting this recommendation on hold pending a decision from the  
77 House Committee on Government Operations about whether an even-numbered representational  
78 board is feasible. Mr. Levy proposed that if the Government Operations Committee allows an  
79 even-numbered Board, the current recommendation should be modified to reflect an even-  
80 numbered board. Mr. Levy also cited concern that the legislature does not have a deadline for  
81 making that determination.

82  
83 Mr. Tyler noted that the tax reconciliation section is still pending input from staff on which of  
84 the tax reconciliation models and associated financial figures should be included. He also noted  
85 that the section around community development and planning is still pending while the two  
86 planning commissions meet to discuss proposed language.

87  
88 Ms. Cooper expressed concern about the amount of misunderstanding and confusion around the  
89 merger in both the Town and the Village, and strongly urged the Subcommittee to issue clear  
90 communication both on the merger proposal but also on what a separation scenario and  
91 associated costs could look like. Mr. Tyler suggested that that topic may be out of the purview of  
92 this subcommittee and that it may be more appropriate for the joint boards to discuss.

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(DRAFT)**

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93  
94 Ms. Wrenner echoed Ms. Cooper’s request to see costs for a separate-and-share option. She also  
95 urged the administration to listen to voters and consider all proposals, including those not touting  
96 the position of the establishment.

97  
98 Mr. Sheldon, Ms. Wrenner, and Mr. Tyler discussed whether there was voter confusion at the  
99 polls. Mr. Tyler noted that there was some confusion about the charter change ballot question in  
100 the Village, but whether confusion impacted ballot results is speculation at this juncture.

101  
102 **d. Prepare draft transition provisions language for attorney review:**

103 This item was discussed in Business Item 5c.

104  
105 **e. Set date for next Subcommittee on Governance meeting:**

106 The next Subcommittee on Governance meeting date was tentatively set for March 26, 2020 at  
107 7:00pm.

108  
109 **f. Approval of minutes**

110 *February 13, 2020:*

111 **RAJ CHAWLA made a motion, and ANNIE COOPER seconded, to approve the**  
112 **Subcommittee on Governance meeting minutes from February 13, 2020 with the following**  
113 **modifications:**

- 114
  - **Line 51: replace “relied” with “replied”.**

115  
116 **Motion passed 4-0.**

117  
118 **Reading file:**

119 **Mr. Watts had questions about the process for dissolving charters as the result of a merger**  
120 **vote. Other subcommittee members reached out to legislative counsel and were provided**  
121 **with clarification.**

122  
123 **6. ADJOURN:**

124  
125 **MAX LEVY made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to adjourn the meeting.**  
126 **Motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 8:17pm.**

127  
128 Respectfully Submitted,  
129 Amy Coonradt  
130 Recording Secretary

131  
132  
133 Approved this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2020

134  
135 **(see minutes of this day for corrections, if any)**