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**VILLAGE OF ESSEX JUNCTION
BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF MEETING
July 27, 2021**

TRUSTEES PRESENT: Andrew Brown, President; Raj Chawla, Vice President; Dan Kerin; Amber Thibeault.

ADMINISTRATION: Evan Teich, Unified Manager; Marguerite Ladd, Assistant Manager; Brad Luck, Essex Junction Recreation and Parks.

OTHERS PRESENT: Marcus Certa; Andrew Champagne; Ray Gaboriault, Paula Sargent, Ken Signorello, Edward Steele, Sandy White, Irene Wrenner;

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

Andrew Brown called the meeting to order at 6:34 pm.

2. **AGENDA ADDITIONS/CHANGES**

None at this time.

3. **APPROVE AGENDA**

The agenda did not need to be approved as it was not amended.

4. **PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

Edward Steele said that he has spoken to many seniors who feel that the senior center hours and access should be restored to pre-pandemic levels, and that seniors feel very strongly about this.

Paula Sargent asked for an update from the Town/Village on the Senior Center. She said that a committee of seniors had gotten together and sent a letter to the Recreation Department directors and the Town Selectboard and Village Trustees, stating that they would like to support the Recreation Department in reinstating senior programming as it was prior to the pandemic. She said that they are aware of the transition plan and would like the Senior Center to open from 10:00 to 4:00 Monday through Friday so that seniors can engage in informal activities and socialize. She said that many seniors want to reiterate that they either walk or drive themselves to the Senior Center. She said that they would like to have in-person gatherings and open houses as soon as possible and to develop new activities. Mr. Luck said that staff met today regarding the Senior Center and that they are aware of this feedback about returning to pre-pandemic programming. He said that they are discussing having the Center be closed on Mondays but open for the remainder of the week. He said that conversations will continue with the possibility of opening for more extended hours for the latter part of the summer.

Andrew Champagne spoke about the proposed separation charter, noting that there should be a provision to allow for the recall of elected officials, should a petition to do so be signed by 5% of voters. He also said the charter should include an elected police commission and the ability to remove them.

5. **BUSINESS ITEMS**

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

Mr. Luck began by outlining the topics that will be discussed during the work session, which include City committees and commissions, intergovernmental and Health and Human Services, proposed contracts with the Town of Essex, a review of the proposed City organizational chart and draft charter, and the meeting schedule and timeline review.

53 Irene Wrenner noted that the intergovernmental charter says that Green Mountain Transit (GMT) costs
54 around \$300,000 per year. She suggested that the Junction look at how much ridership comes from
55 the Village to be able to proportionately allocate those costs between the Junction entity and the
56 Town.

57
58 Mr. Luck outlined the proposed City committees and commissions, saying that having a rough idea of
59 them will help inform the budget to determine which committees/commissions there will be.

60
61 Mr. Brown said that the current Village committees and commissions should continue. He suggested
62 having a separate City Housing Commission, given that there will be separate Planning Commissions
63 and Development Review Boards (the current Housing Commission is a joint commission with the
64 Town). He suggested combining climate and energy committees, since they're closely related. He said
65 he had no concerns about adding any of the others, saying that beginning with a board list and then
66 paring it down is a good approach.

67
68 Ms. Thibeault noted that the Ordinance Appeals Board is referenced in ordinance language but does
69 not seem to currently exist. She suggested this be added to the "current" commissions/committees
70 section. Mr. Kerin recalled the creation of that Board 8 years ago but said that it's never had to
71 convene. Mr. Brown suggested categorizing it as an "as needed" committee.

72
73 Mr. Chawla asked whether the City entity would need a Conservational Trust committee. He said that
74 some of the listed committees/commissions could probably be consolidated.

75
76 Mr. Luck then spoke about intergovernmental and Health and Human Services, outlining a list of
77 intergovernmental organizations that either the Village or Town is a part of, as well as their FY2022
78 budgets. He showed organizations/areas where the Village currently holds seats and areas where the
79 Village could join if it chooses to. He noted that the Village is currently an associate member of the
80 Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) and would need to become a full member. He also noted
81 that the Town currently has the practice of allocating 1% of its budget to offering human services
82 grants, and that the Village may want to consider adopting a similar practice should it separate and
83 become a City. He also noted that Essex Rescue costs \$3.87 per capita and that it may increase over
84 time, since some rescues charge around \$17 per person.

85
86 Mr. Chawla asked how current dues are determined. Mr. Luck replied that cemetery has an annual
87 contribution, that the Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce dues are determined by the
88 number of employees, that he was still waiting to hear back from GBLC and CCRPC about whether
89 dues amounts would change, that GMT calculates their fees based on service and a historical record
90 of the use of SSTA, the Village portion of which for FY2022 is \$223,000, that he is waiting to hear back
91 about county taxes, and that WVPD uses a funding formula including grand list as well as population.
92 All Trustees concurred that this list looks right.

93
94 Mr. Luck then reviewed proposals for contracts with the Town. Mr. Brown said it would be good to
95 have a general conversation about this topic in a public meeting, without the need for entering into
96 executive session. Mr. Kerin said it will be difficult to make decisions now without feedback from the
97 Selectboard, particularly around police services. Mr. Brown agreed that the Police Department is the
98 highest priority, and cited concern about not being able to meet the deadline for decisions. He asked
99 whether the Trustees should consider a Plan B, should they be unable to work out an agreement with
100 the Town Outside the Village for sharing police services. He asked whether staff should research other
101 ways to obtain these services, such as issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP). Mr. Kerin said he does
102 not think neighboring municipalities have the police staff to help with policing. Mr. Chawla said that the

Trustees gave the Selectboard a lot of material last week, and that perhaps it would be good to let them know which of the items in that material are the high priority ones.

Ms. Thibeault said she understands the need for a Plan B, but doesn't like the alternatives, knowing staff time is already limited and how the community feels about keeping police services within Essex. Mr. Brown asked staff if they have time to put the documentation and process together. Mr. Luck replied that isn't too big of a lift, though it will be tricky for potential bidders to respond accurately knowing that it's hypothetical. Mr. Kerin pointed out that the Junction is still tied to the police station debt for another 16-17 years. Mr. Teich said that if the Trustees would like to make those inquiries, they should discuss whether they wish to seek all services that town police has, like dispatch to Public Works, Fire Department, Wastewater Treatment Plant, and coverage at CVE. Mr. Chawla said that if staff has the time to start these conversations, he is in favor of it. He said that the entire community benefits from having police services where they are, but appreciates being able to explore other options.

Mr. Luck then spoke about organization charts. He said there are no changes from the previous time this was reviewed by the Trustees. He said that there are four positions and one contract (for IT services) that need to be hired. He said that the plan is to hire two of those positions in Year 1 and then hire the other two of them in Year 2. Mr. Brown said that is a good reminder that this organization chart is full of existing positions that fill most of these roles. He also said that he's heard concern about how these positions could be afforded. Mr. Brown said that if you look at duplication of services that the Junction currently pays for, like highway; if City had been formed, would be paying \$300,000 less on highway. There are other examples of this.

Mr. Luck then reviewed areas of the charter. He noted areas that have changed since the last time this was reviewed as a group. He said that the transition period is in flux. Mr. Kerin said that he is comfortable with the flexible timeframes, if they are to work with the Selectboard. Mr. Luck then reviewed Transitional Districts, noting that the City would lose the Village Center Zone and would need to seek a new designation. Mr. Brown asked if there are City Center designations that the Village should start a process on now, and whether would have a development board or development commission. Mr. Luck said he will reach out to Robin Pierce on this topic. Mr. Luck noted that the merger charter had been used as the base for the governing body language and that it has now been revised to state that the Trustees would become a City Council and serve their elected terms. He noted other clarifications around compensation, finances, and collective bargaining.

Mr. Brown said Mr. Chawla had mentioned talking about Local Option Tax as part of this process and Mr. Luck said that he will add it as an item on the next agenda.

Mr. Luck reviewed the meetings and timeline. He noted that the public hearing dates have not yet been decided on. He outlined the timeline of the process from charter to becoming a City, if the charter vote is approved.

b. Consider approval of request for bids for the purchase of two buses for EJRP

Mr. Luck said that earlier this year, EJRP had begun engaging in conversation about buying two full-sized 48 passenger school buses, but postponed that conversation until now. He said that the Village currently has two multi-function 20-and-30 passenger activity buses and that they have bids out to purchase a 48-passenger bus. He said the driver of this renewed activity is that it would allow them to increase the size of the afterschool program and get all of the current kids on the wait list into the program. He said that they would also use the bus for field trips and summer camps. He noted that the bus would be paid for out of program funds and does not have tax implications. He said that this

153 requires Trustee approval because VLCT recommended not taking on the added liability of the 48-
154 passenger bus.

155
156 Mr. Kerin asked about leasing services from a company such as Mountain Transit to compare costs.
157 Mr. Luck said that if the Village were to contract the service, it would cost around \$150 per day or
158 \$26,000 per year, and that a new bus would cost around \$75,000. He noted that these buses would
159 not be operated frequently and that they expect to get around 15 years out of them. Mr. Luck added
160 that a new bus would add a new full time staff member, which would be a shared staffing position that
161 would work for the school district during day and for Village after school. Mr. Brown confirmed these
162 vehicles were not replacing older buses. Mr. Brown asked about where the liability funding is coming
163 from. Ms. Macy replied that the general fund portion of insurances are consolidated in general fund
164 and that this specific liability would be part of the program and enterprise funding. She noted that any
165 insurance claims would impact the experience modification for the entire group and not just the
166 enterprise fund where the buses are. Mr. Teich emphasized that it's the Board's decision whether to
167 accept the risk or not.

168
169 Mr. Chawla asked if liability costs could be shared with the Essex/Westford School District (ESWD).
170 Mr. Luck said he will look into whether that is possible. Mr. Brown said that the bus would add flexibility
171 to programming when school isn't in session, if the Village purchases it. He asked if exploring
172 relationship with ESWD would do adverse things to timeline. Mr. Luck said he could start that
173 conversation, but that it would be helpful to know the Trustees' position on purchasing the bus, should
174 the conversation with ESWD not pan out. Trustees voiced their support for purchasing the bus.

175
176 **MOTION by DAN KERIN, SECONDED by RAJ CHAWLA that the Trustees approve EJRP**
177 **purchasing a 48- passenger bus. The motion passed 4-0.**

178 **c. Consider approval of Village tax rates for FY2022 (July 1, 2021-June 30, 2022)**

179 Ms. Macy outlined the tax rates for FY2022 that need to be approved prior to mailing out tax bills,
180 which will be printed next week and in residents' mailboxes by August 13th. She said that the Village
181 Grand List increased by 0.5% over the prior year. She noted three tax stabilization agreements
182 currently in place, and that there were four in place the prior year. She said that the Grand List with
183 stabilization applied increased by 0.7%. She noted that for this fiscal year, the highway rolling stock
184 contribution was moved into the highway department, which is funded by the Town budget. She said
185 that this had the effect of lessening the increase in the tax levy. She said that in order to raise the
186 budgeted amount of \$3,745,866, the tax rate needs to be 0.3345, which is a 1.3% increase over the
187 prior year. She also noted Village's 1-penny economic development tax, which was approved in 2016
188 and was renewed for another 3 years at the 2021 Annual Meeting, and which will raise around
189 \$112,000 per year.

190
191 Mr. Brown asked when the tax stabilization agreements would phase out. Ms. Macy said that two of
192 them will be completely phased out by FY2024, and will pay 70% of their assessed value in FY2023,
193 and that the third is up for renewal in this fiscal year.

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195 **MOTION by DAN KERIN, SECONDED by RAJ CHAWLA, that the Trustees set the FY2022 Village**
196 **General tax rate at \$0.3345 per \$100 of assessed property value. The motion passed 4-0.**

197 **VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.**

198 **d. Consider revision to FY2022 Sanitation Capital Fund Budget to replace pickup truck**

Ms. Macy noted that this truck had not previously been on the Sanitation Fund Capital Budget list, and that staff is asking for an amendment to the FY2022 budget. She noted that this does not negatively impact this fund.

MOTION by RAJ CHAWLA, SECONDED by DAN KERIN, that the Trustees amend the FY22 Sanitation Fund Capital Budget to include replacement of the 2007 Ford pickup truck. The motion passed 4-0.

e. Discuss update on refuse collection times

Ms. Ladd noted that Robin Pierce has been working on passing a Public Nuisance Ordinance around refuse trash times, based on input from residents and haulers. She said that the new times are consistent with those of surrounding towns. Ms. Thibeault agreed with the ordinance as written, but asked about the process for implementing the ordinance and whether it's part of a larger project and what the timeline would be. Mr. Brown spoke about the ordinance approval process, noting that the Village needs one public hearing for approval and the Town needs two. Mr. Chawla noted different times for trash hauling (6:00) and operating equipment for contractors (7:00), and also noted that there are many commercial areas with dumpsters that have residential properties within 200 feet of them. Mr. Brown agreed, saying that further information would be helpful to inform the discussion. Ms. Thibeault noted that the language in the ordinance prohibits the use of "mechanized" equipment to empty trash bins, but noted that there would still be noise from physically dumping trash containers, and that the language doesn't prohibit that.

6. CONSENT ITEMS

- a. Approve minutes: July 15, 2021
- b. Check Warrants: #17260—07/16/2021

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

7. READING FILE

- a. Board member comments: Mr. Brown said that there is a stormwater retention pond installed in his backyard, and he was impressed by how well it functioned in recent storms. He commended Ms. Mandigo and Mr. Jutras for the installation. He also noted that VHFA has approved affordable housing tax credits for the Depot Junction area. He said that it would be a 43-unit development for low-income housing and people at risk of homelessness. Mr. Kerin noted the reopening of the Vermonter (Amtrak line). Mr. Brown thanked staff for preparing materials for the Amtrak event. Mr. Kerin noted a community gathering event at Essex High School on August 3rd. He said that the Police Chief and Equity Committee are working to make it a family friendly, open, and inclusive event. Mr. Chawla spoke about the 3 community forums that will come up in August and that two of them don't have a virtual way to connect. He suggested looking for an alternative location and adding a virtual component.
- b. Email from Carole Harvey re: Indian Brook
- c. FY2021 Quarterly Status Financial Report—preliminary
- d. Emails from Chelsea Mandigo and Jim Jutras re: Municipal Assistance Grants in Aid: Village of Essex Junction participant in the amount of \$4,500.00
- e. Work Plan for Compliance Well Testing for PFAS, Essex Jt. Biosolids Land App Sites, SW-124
- f. Essex Junction Amtrak Event July 19, 2021
- g. Upcoming meeting Schedule

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8. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

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

9. ADJOURN

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**DAN KERIN made a motion, and RAJ CHAWLA seconded, to adjourn the meeting. The motion
passed 4-0.**

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The meeting adjourned at 8:52 PM.

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Respectfully Submitted,
Amy Coonradt