

**RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE
JOINT MUNICIPAL SURVEY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING
FOUNDERS MEMORIAL SCHOOL
ESSEX, VERMONT
November 16, 2016**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Michael Smith (Chair); Jason DiRosa, Kim Maiberger, Max Levy, Raj Chawla, Lori Houghton, Erika Baldasaro, Betzi Bilodeau.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Christine Packard, Theresa Fletcher, and Andy Watts (alt.).

ADMINISTRATION: Ally Vile, Essex Parks & Rec; Brad Luck, EJRP.

OTHERS PRESENT: Marc Wennberg, Kay Maloney, Mike Yandow, Adriane Martin, Andy Suntup, Linda Suntup, Mary Brooks, Dan Brooks, Pat Scheidel, Margaret Smith, Candace Morgan, Leah Pastel, Carmelle Terborgh, John Terborgh, Dylan Giambatista.

1. CALL TO ORDER and AGENDA

Michael Smith called the meeting to order at 6:16 PM. Introductions were done. Meeting moderator, Marc Wennberg, was introduced.

2. PUBLIC FORUM

Marc Wennberg explained the process to be followed at the meeting and stressed having a respectful gathering to hear information and to have the opportunity to be heard.

A video was viewed on how the two rec departments presently operate. A presentation was given on how the study committee was formed and developed the recommendation to establish a union municipal district called “Essex Community Parks & Recreation” (ECPR) that combines EJRP and EPR. Seven different governance models were evaluated before making the selection for a union municipal district. Articles of agreement were drafted which had to be approved by the Vermont Attorney General and which provide the framework for ECPR. The vote on December 13, 2016 is to decide whether or not to enter into the agreement and form ECPR.

Advantages to forming ECPR were noted:

- Independent budget voted by Australian ballot in April of each year concurrent with the school budget vote as has been done with EJRP and was suggested by the study group.
- Unites community recreation.
- Allows both rec departments and in turn the two communities to come together on equal ground.
- Provides long-term stability.
- Another step forward in tax equity in the community.
- Provides increased transparency with all operations of ECPR, which is overseen by a five member Board of Directors.

RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Public Forum

MINUTES – November 16, 2016

PAGE 2

Disadvantages to forming ECPR were noted:

- Two small departments are combined into one large department.
- Realizing tax equity will result in an increase for town-outside-the-village taxpayers.
- Adds another elected board and government entity to the community.
- Potential additional administrative costs as two departments move to one independent department.

The five member Board of Directors for ECPR initially will have one Selectboard appointee, one Trustee appointee, one Essex Junction resident, one town-outside-the-village resident, and one at-large resident. Subsequent boards will be five elected at large members. An Executive Director will be hired to oversee operations and appoint a Treasurer. There will be an annual independent financial audit. The budget will be approved by Australian ballot vote. There is the possibility of a Rec Advisory Council.

The Transition Team made up of members of the rec departments, school district, and municipal staff have the goal of creating a seamless transition if the vote passes. The team has been researching and getting answers and wants to ensure existing services are maintained or enhanced. The Transition Team is recommending:

- ECPR handling daily receipts, accounts receivables, accounts payable, and HR.
- Essex Town will provide the Treasurer, check signing, accounting and audit, tax collection, and elections.
- A 3rd party provider will handle payroll, IT support, and legal support.
- Lands and buildings will be leased to ECPR for \$1/year and the village and town will retain ownership. ECPR will insure the properties and buildings and name the village and town as “additional insured”.
- ECPR will maintain the spaces and provide capital asset and equipment replacement.
- Parks and rec supplies and equipment purchased by the rec departments will transfer to ECPR and be used by rec staff. ECPR will insure and provide future replacement and maintenance.
- Capital reserves related to parks and rec held by the town will be retained, but the rec district may submit a request for use of the funds. Requests must be authorized by the Selectboard.
- The estimated budget assumes growth of 1% in the grand list, the village assuming debt relief payments on the Maple Street bond, the village proposal to phase out additional tax support for ECPR over five years to ease the burden on the town, and the village no longer budgeting for the block party, farmers market, and train hop.
- The estimate of tax impact of ECPR on a \$280,000 house for a resident in the town-outside-the-village is \$16 (from \$87 to \$103). Village residents will see a tax decrease of \$11 (from \$280 to \$269).

RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Public Forum

MINUTES – November 16, 2016

PAGE 3

The town and village can vote on creation of Essex Community Parks & Recreation (ECPR) and elect the initial board members via early voting or absentee ballot starting 11/23/16 or at the polls on 12/13/16. All participating residents of the Town of Essex, both inside and outside the Village of Essex Junction, will receive a ballot that asks: “Shall the Town of Essex enter into an agreement for the formation of a Union Municipal District to be known as “Essex Community Parks & Recreation”? Voters will have the opportunity to vote for three directors for the ECPR Board of Directors. Residents in the Village of Essex Junction will receive a separate ballot with only the question: “Shall the Village of Essex Junction enter into an agreement for the formation of a Union Municipal District to be known as “Essex Community Parks & Recreation”?”

A “yes” vote from Essex at-large and the Village of Essex Junction means ECPR is created, members of the ECPR Board of Directors are concurrently elected, and the Transition Team continues to work to merge the two recreation departments.

A “no” vote from either Essex at-large or the Village of Essex Junction means the Prudential Committee will work with the Village Trustees to transition EGRP to the village municipality. EPR will stay under the town municipality.

If the community votes to form ECPR there are several decisions outside the scope of the Rec Governance Study Committee’s work that will need to be made including but not limited to:

- Hiring an Executive Director.
- Determining the plan for program access, enhancements and/or changes.
- Continuing the work on agreements related to village and town recreation assets.
- Finalizing the budget for a vote in April 2017.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. After the December 13th vote the process will start and it is hoped there will not be a gap in childcare or preschool services. Would Act 166 apply to preschool without licensing and would there be a gap?
 - Answer: The preschool needs to be licensed to qualify for Act 166 which is a state mandate for assistance for public preschool ages three and up.
2. Are taxes used to pay for EGRP childcare programs?
 - Answer: No, the programs are self-sustaining.
3. Will town only residents have equal access to programs during the tax equity transition including childcare and daycare?
 - Answer: Yes, everyone in the community would come as a resident. Part of the transition work is making sure there is similar, equal programming throughout the community so all have the same opportunities to programs at the same prices, same staffing, same training, same expectations, and aligning all these so there is consistency throughout the community. Space in schools is limited. Location is based on capacity and how needs can be fulfilled while keeping a safe environment for everyone.
4. What are the terms for election of board members for ECPR?

RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Public Forum

MINUTES – November 16, 2016

PAGE 4

- Answer: The terms are staggered three year, two year, one year positions so new members are not elected every year. After the first term of each position the new election will be at-large members. The initial board will have a Trustee appointee, a Selectboard appointee, and village and town-outside-the-village members.
5. Will village members vote twice as a town member and a village member?
 - Answer: There are two separate ballots. One ballot is available to residents of the village and asks if the village should enter into an agreement to form a union municipal district known as ECPR. The other ballot is available to all residents including those in the village and asks if the town should enter into an agreement to form a union municipal district known as ECPR and a second question that is the vote for the five board members. Even if the union municipal district is not formed the board members will be elected.
 6. What programs or functions are to be added or anticipated to be added to the new district – Senior Bus? Library?
 - Answer: It is possible to add other services. This will be a decision of the new Board of Directors.
 7. Is the total combined budget of both entities as they exist today expected to decline after merger in future years?
 - Answer: Figures for overall parks and rec spending show there are multiple entities that spend money on parks and rec (town, village, EJRP). The figures show total spending FY17 and anticipated expenses FY18. A 4% increase is anticipated based on the preliminary budget that was presented.
 8. Will the Train Hop and Block Party continue after the merger?
 - Answer: The Train Hop and Block Party today are run by the village municipal office and are expected to continue provided people continue to attend the events and there are volunteers to assist. The Trustees have discussed putting these programs under the new rec department because the programs should be run by a rec department.
 9. Will all events be located in Essex Junction (i.e. fireworks) at a larger venue?
 - Answer: That is a decision the new larger rec staff will look at and with a new set of eyes because it will be the entire community. Right now both work in isolation. When EJRP makes a decision only village property and village parks and village budgets are considered. When EPR is making decisions they are making decisions on behalf of the whole community, but are respectful of another neighboring rec department serving the village area. EPR only manages the parks outside the village. There will be an administration that now has the purview of the entire community for all events and with one budget. The types of decisions the department looks forward to discussing – new opportunities to move, add, combine in a more effective and efficient ways.

There were no further questions or comments. Information will be posted on the website as it becomes available. Next public forum is 12/6/16 at Essex High School.

3. OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD

A resident from the town-outside-the-village said he is happy with the programs by both departments and is on the ballot as a perspective board member and wants to hear the comments of the people.

A woman from the town expressed concern about the possibility of all the board members being residents of the village. Merging the town and village would solve the issue. Another concern is the major tax impact down the road.

Kay Maloney, town resident for 18 years and now a village resident, announced she is on the ballot for the member at-large position and is happy to listen to the people.

Erika Baldasaro announced she is on the ballot for the one year at-large position on the ECPR Board and feels she will be a strong voice for rec in the new combined entity.

Betzi Bilodeau announced she is on the ballot for the town-outside-the-village position on the new board and looks forward to talking to the people outside of a committee setting.

John Terborgh, village resident, expressed appreciation to the rec departments for the services provided and looks forward to this continuing. The effort by all the volunteers to make this possible is also appreciated.

4. BUSINESS MEETING

RGSC business meeting commenced at 7:34 PM.

5. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD ON ITEMS NOT ON AGENDA

Pat Scheidel asked to clarify a statement made at the June 22, 2016 RGSC meeting relative to the election date of November 8th being “impossible”. The record should reflect that according to Mr. Senning from the Secretary of State’s Office there is agreement with the guidance of the Town Clerk that a local election within a federal election would not work. Mr. Scheidel pointed out the word “impossible” was not used.

6. APPROVE OF MINUTES: 11/3/16

MOTION by Lori Houghton, SECOND by Kim Maiberger, to approve the minutes of 11/3/16 as presented. VOTING: unanimous; motion carried.

7. PUBLIC FORUMS REVIEW

There was a discussion about the public forums. All agreed the format would continue for the final forum.

8. FORUM #5 & #6 RESPONSE PLAN

Questions from Forum #5 will be answered online. Questions from Forum #6 will only be answered in person that night.

9. TASK UPDATES

RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE

Public Forum

MINUTES – November 16, 2016

PAGE 6

Tasks related to public outreach opportunities, Front Porch Forum, the Essex Reporter, web updates, web inquiries, the Essex Balloteer, the final information/q&a sheet, promoting early & absentee voting, videos, the postcard, and information about candidates for the ECPR Board were all discussed.

10. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business and without objection the meeting was adjourned at 8:15 PM.

By tape, RScity: MERiordan