

1                   **RECREATION GOVERNANCE STUDY COMMITTEE**  
2                                   **MEETING MINUTES**  
3                                   **APRIL 5, 2016**

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5   **Committee Attendance:** Erika Baldasaro; Betzi Bilodeau; Raj Chawla; Jason DiRosa;  
6   Lori Houghton; Max Levy; Kim Maiberger; Christine Packard; Michael Smith; Brad  
7   Luck; and Ally Vile.

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9   **Absent Committee Member:** It was noted that Theresa Fletcher was unable to attend  
10 the meeting.

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12 **Others Present:** Bridget Meyer; Wendy Johnson; George Tyler; Adam Sollace; Brian  
13 Roy; Pat Scheidel; Adriane Martin; Andy Watts; Matt Leighninger; Kayhl Cooper; and  
14 Irene Wrenner.

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16 **Agenda Item 1: Call to order.** Brad Luck called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. He  
17 was looking for a delicate balance to the meeting as the process needs to meet statutory  
18 requirements, however it can proceed with some informality and people should be able to  
19 speak freely. He asked if there were any changes to the Agenda. There were none.

20  
21 **Agenda Item 2: Introductions.** Ally Vile asked each member to introduce themselves  
22 and reflect on an experience that made them feel proud, as follows:

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24           Jason DiRosa, representing Prudential Committee, is proud that he has 3 children  
25           partake in the Town and Village recreation services.

26  
27           Ally Vile, as Town Recreation Director, she is proud to see the growth in the  
28           community - the campers move up to lifeguards, etc. It is a positive feeling. As a  
29           10 year resident, it is fun to pick her kids up from programs and know they are  
30           satisfied.

31  
32           Max Levy, Town Selectboard Chair, is proud of the recreation departments and  
33           the quality of life it brings to the community. The residents value the services.

34  
35           Raj Chawla, has lived in the Village for 12 years. His kids have gone through  
36           childcare, then onto programs and now want to be counselor. He is proud of the  
37           programs.

38  
39           Michael Smith, representing the Prudential Committee, loves the passion people  
40           exhibit towards parks and recreation. He wants to keep it preserved.

41  
42           Kim Maiberger, Village resident and works at Essex Middle School. She sees the  
43           programs at the school and her kids love the programs and camps. She is proud to  
44           be a part of the Committee and be a voice.  
45

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46 Lori Houghton, Village Trustee, was a part of the Recreation Advisory  
47 Committee. She is proud of the community and happy there were no fights at the  
48 Easter Egg Hunt.

49  
50 Erika Baldasaro, lives in the Village. She is proud because her children feel like  
51 they belong to a recreation family.

52  
53 Betzi Bilodeau, lives in the Town and she was also impressed with the Easter Egg  
54 Hunt. She is happy her daughter made it off the 'wait list' and is enrolled into a  
55 summer camp.

56  
57 Christine Packard, lived in the Village for 10 years and the Town for 20 years.  
58 She is proud of Indian Brook Reservoir and has been there everyday for 30 years.  
59 She hears comments from out-of-towners as to how great a place it is.

60  
61 Brad Luck, Village Recreation Director, enjoys the fun and new and familiar  
62 faces each year during staff training week wherein he see 100+ people.

63

64 **Agenda Item 3. Elect Chair & Secretary.**

65

66 **Jason DiRosa nominated Michael Smith as Chair. The nomination passed 9-0.**

67

68 Raj Chawla stated that he would be willing to be secretary, however he asked about the  
69 meeting minutes. A discussion ensued regarding how to proceed with future minutes. It  
70 was decided that someone should be hired, with the expense being split between the  
71 Town and the Village, so that all members could focus on the meeting. Brad Luck stated  
72 that he needs to check with the Town and the Village on finances. Ally Vile asked if the  
73 School District could also help with expenses as it currently involves all 3 entities. Lori  
74 Houghton suggested that if a secretary can't be hired, then they should take turns rotating  
75 the meeting between the committee members.

76

77 **Michael Smith nominated Raj Chawla as secretary. The nomination passed 9-0.**

78

79 **Agenda Item 4. Agree on Scope of Work (Goals/Objectives) and Timeline.**

80

81 Brad Luck asked for suggestions on written rules for the meeting. The Committee agreed  
82 to the following:

83

- 84
- One speaker at a time;
  - 85 • Be on time;
  - 86 • Start on time;
  - 87 • End on time;
  - 88 • Share the floor;
  - 89 • Be respectful of others opinions; and
  - 90 • Make time for public comments.

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Max Levy stated the importance to take comments from the community.  
Erika Baldasaro read the *Joint Municipal Survey* comments into the record, as follows:

- We remain focused on what it will take to maintain or improve the level of excellent service Essex Junction Parks and Recreation provides to the community;
- We as a group can come up with the best possible set-up for the recreation departments. This outcome should encompass a solution that both meets the needs of the community and is fiscally responsible.
- This committee will be successful if it positions EJRP to continue to provide high-quality, programming, child care and recreational facilities for the Essex Junction community in a sustainable and affordable way. Success will be measured by ensuring that employees are retained, facilities are preserved and the community continues to see the organization as a centerpiece of the community.
- All avenues are explored including the possibility of including other municipal entities such as the senior center and libraries in the final results.
- We have a solid recommendation on how to continue or exceed the level of quality recreation programming available to our community.
- Examine all the information and makes an informed recommendation.
- We stay focused on the decision of overall governance and stay out of the weeds of people and transition.
- We set agreed upon goals and adhere to them and the timeline. Respect each other with regards to input and who "has the floor." Be committed and embrace this opportunity to serve.
- We ensure the public is well informed throughout the process.
- We have an open discussion and cohesive understanding about what we are trying to accomplish.

The Committee broke into 3 groups to develop goals. Suggestions were as follows:

- Group 1: Explore all avenues and entities before making a recommendation and engage the community in the process; and  
Make a recommendation that everyone is comfortable with.
- Group 2: Make a decision in a timely manner - by the end of the school year and keep the public informed; and  
Be fiscally responsible.
- Group 3: Ensure the quality of services are continued and enhanced; and  
Ensure the funding is sound.

Max Levy asked the audience if they had any suggestions on goals. There were none.

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134 Brad Luck asked if there was any opposition to making a recommendation by the end of  
135 the school year. He noted that if the task can be accomplished by 7/1/16, this will give  
136 time to sort the issue out for 2017. The Committee agreed to meet this goal.

137

138 **Agenda Item 5. Identify Meeting Days, Times and Location.**

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140 Luck stated that he and Vile will go through all the options and create a detailed outline  
141 for the next meeting. At the end of that meeting, there should be a general direction so  
142 the Committee can start to focus. He suggested an additional 3-5 meetings would be  
143 required.

144

145 The Committee reviewed their schedules and determined that the next meeting date to be  
146 Monday, April 25th from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Other meeting dates scheduled are May  
147 4<sup>th</sup>, May 11<sup>th</sup>, & June 1<sup>st</sup>. All meetings will continue to be held at 75 Maple Street.

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149 **Agenda Item 6. Review Options to be Explored.**

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151 The Committee was given the following options that will be explored at future meetings:

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153 A. Continue to operate two recreation departments

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1) Essex Junction Recreation Program (EJRP) continues to serve the  
155 Village of Essex Junction.

156

a. Under the Village municipality

157

b. Through a non-profit corporation

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2) Essex Parks and Recreation (EPR) continues to operate under the  
159 Town municipality.

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a. Continues to serve the Town of Essex (including the Village)

161

b. Serves only the Town Outside the Village

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B. EJRP and EPR consolidate into one department.

163

1) Under the Town municipality

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2) Through an interlocal contract

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3) Under a union municipal district

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4) Under the Essex Westford Educational Community Unified Union  
167 School District.

168

5) Through a non-profit corporation

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170 Luck stated that 'Other' options can be added. He noted that the community decided to  
171 unify the school districts. If the Unified School, (Westford, Town and Village) is not a  
172 viable solution, the Committee will be exploring Options A or B above. Eventually, the  
173 current school district will dissolve and the EJRP will need to move. Luck noted that  
174 consolidation has begun between the Town and Village and the following departments  
175 are now shared:

176

- Shared Town Manager;

177

- Finance Departments combined. A benefit is that landowners only receive

178

1 tax bill.

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- 179 - A portion of Public Works is joined and work is starting to combine the  
180 remainder.  
181 - The Thoughtful Growth process was helpful with looking at consolidation  
182 and made suggestions for Planning & Zoning.  
183

184 Luck stated that the time has come for a decision to be made on whether consolidation is  
185 right for the recreation departments. It is for the Committee to make a decision on its  
186 recommendation. Luck stated the next meeting is when the Committee will dig into the  
187 Options.  
188

189 Michael Smith asked if they will have legal representation at a meeting. Luck said yes,  
190 VLCT will be at a future meeting.  
191

192 **Agenda Item 7. Brainstorm Ways to Engage and Communicate with the Public.**

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|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| 193 -Facebook                   | -Presence at events |
| 194 -Front Porch Forum          | -Community Forums   |
| 195 -Press Releases             | -Focus Groups       |
| 196 -Posting the minutes-where? | -Interviews         |
| 197 -Survey                     | -Other?             |
| 198 -Channel 17 coverage        |                     |
- 199

200 Luck introduced Matt Leighninger, who works for Public Agenda based in New York  
201 City. Leighninger said it is helpful to get citizens and school systems involved in  
202 engagement. He suggested it would be helpful to categorize the list as 'thin forms of  
203 engagement' and 'thick forms of engagement'. He stated that empowering small groups  
204 gets people thinking as the work is intensive. This would be a thick form of  
205 engagement. He described thin forms of engagement as less intensive and requiring  
206 someone to be less involved, such as signing a petition. Leighninger noted that the  
207 conventional forms of engagement are not tuned to give people a chance to be heard, but  
208 he is conscience of law requirements. He believes that more can be done.  
209

210 Luck informed the Committee that he and Vile must do a lot of simultaneous work and  
211 also engage the public. He asked for direction on how they want them to proceed. A  
212 discussion ensued on how to reach out to people and the use of surveys, a mailing and  
213 associated costs, the use and cost of the Essex Reporter, the use of Friday school folders,  
214 use of a bean pole, and attending the Village Meeting to use as a platform.  
215

216 Bridget Meyer said that the Committee has been chosen to represent the community and  
217 to ask uninformed people what they want is a pre-conceived notion, with prejudices and  
218 will confuse the process. She stated that it is the Committee's job to talk to community  
219 members at public places, such as sporting events and relay the issues. She noted that the  
220 Village meeting provides an opportunity at the end of the meeting for public discussion.  
221 She noted two populations the Committee did not speak to, which were 1) people who  
222 moved into the community who don't have children; and 2) Seniors who don't have kids  
223 in schools.  
224

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225 Matt Leighninger noted that a meeting tomorrow night was too short a window, but it  
226 would be good to say something about the topic.

227

228 Max Levy noted the school consolidation had good communications and asked if they  
229 could get that person in to share their experience. Luck said yes.

230

231 Lori Houghton noted that she doesn't want to exclude senior citizens on their opinions.  
232 She asked if there were resources on each staff that can help with the outreach. Luck  
233 stated that there is a communications coordinator, Kayhl, for Essex Recreation. Vile  
234 stated that staff will do the work.

235

236 Max Levy stated that they need to define a budget as the costs of some of the suggestions  
237 adds up quickly.

238

239 A brief discussion ensued on whether the focus should be placed on public attendance for  
240 the next meeting - before the Committee makes a decision on its focus or if it should be  
241 the following meeting. Jason DiRosa suggested that it would be good for the public to  
242 get the "informational dump" at the next meeting.

243

244 Christine Packard suggested the discussion include bringing in the seniors and libraries as  
245 her concern is that both is a huge amount of the community. Max Levy said the process  
246 can be structured to keep the door open to broaden the scope.

247

248 **Agenda Item 8. Organizational Profile Presentations**

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250 **A. Essex Parks & Recreation - Ally Vile**

251

Ally presented a power point and spoke briefly on the following points:

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- Vision/Mission (noting a completed 2011 Needs Assessment);
- History – she noted that the position was part-time in 1972 and went to full time in 1979; 575 acres was purchased to obtain Indian Brook; 2004 started recreation impact fees. This money is used for recreation needs as they arise; 2005 extended school started and is now an after school program; 2010 was the purchase of the Tree Farm; Starting January, 2017, the senior activity coordinator will become full-time;
- Governance Model;
- Staffing/Organization Chart;
- Operating Budget and its Revenue;
- Capital of \$490,000, noting that overall the Recreation Department receives 1/5 of the money to cover Park Asset, Park Equipment, Milfoil Mitigation, Indian Brook Dam Repairs and Senior Van;
- Capital Expenses to cover field expenses, pool infrastructure, park equipment, new playground equipment, court resurfacing, etc.;
- Programs/Events. A handout was provided listing the programs;
- Youth Program Highlights;

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- 270 • Teen & Adult Program Highlights;
- 271 • Co-Sponsored Events – She noted that the Town and Village have
- 272 been working together for close to 20 years. She provided an
- 273 example using the Easter Egg Hunt, which required 8,000 eggs;
- 274 • Parks, Pools, Facilities – She noted that there are a total of 18
- 275 parks and facilities and described some of the locations and work,
- 276 such as the 76 acres of Prairie Fields behind the Middle School, the
- 277 school district 90 acres located in Saxon Hill, Indian Brook
- 278 Reservoir, mowing the area along the Susie Wilson Bypass, and
- 279 more. She noted that the Sand Hill pool was built in 1979 and in
- 280 2010 a spray ground was installed;
- 281 • She announced the recent agreement to lease 71 Center Road for
- 282 additional space for programs. A contest was held for its name,
- 283 which is ‘Sunset Studio’. A grand opening is Saturday, April 30<sup>th</sup>;
- 284 • She was pleased to report that Vermont is the only municipality to
- 285 offer free van appointment service;
- 286 • She described the Committees being Trails Committee, Positive
- 287 Youth Sports Alliance of Essex, Healthy Youth Coalition, VRPA
- 288 State Conference Committee (which is the oldest committee
- 289 nationally), and VRPA Executive Board Committee.
- 290 • She noted the strengths as being excellent customer service,
- 291 building strong relationships with patrons/families; strong
- 292 institutional and community knowledge with 4-full time and
- 293 seasonal staff; inclusive programming to the entire Essex
- 294 community; community builder; and large supporter of senior
- 295 programming and accessibility.
- 296 • She noted that both recreation departments would be impacted if
- 297 the resources provided by the School District were eliminated as
- 298 being Human Resources (Finance, HR, Legal, IT, etc.), Financial
- 299 impact, and equipment/services.
- 300 • If there was a new governance model she would like to see a
- 301 smooth and seamless organizational transition both inside for the
- 302 employees and outside for the patrons; hopes to retain the trust and
- 303 satisfaction of the community; will work together with open
- 304 communication and collaboration; and maintain an independent
- 305 work culture to create and develop programs within staff
- 306 capacities.

307  
308 **B. Essex Junction Recreation & Parks - Brad Luck**

309  
310 Brad presented a power point and spoke briefly on the following points:

- 311
- 312 • Vision/Mission;

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- 313 • History – he noted that in the year 2000 a \$2.1 million dollar bond  
314 for a new pool and recreation center was obtained. The payoff will  
315 be in 2019;
- 316 • Governance Model – he noted his position working in the school  
317 district was desirable because everyone worked for the same  
318 employer;
- 319 • Staffing/Organizational Chart – was passed out. He stated there  
320 are 10 full-time and 5 part-time employees and over 200 part-time  
321 and seasonal employees;
- 322 • Budget – he described the operation budget, capital budget and tax  
323 dollars;
- 324 • Capital Expenses – he described that the expenses are voted on as a  
325 separate article; there are two separate line items for the %0.01 on  
326 the municipal grand list; recent projects include small pool  
327 resurface, truck & tractor, and a new maintenance garage. Future  
328 projects include, an electric sign, complete new maintenance  
329 garage; water/sewer to new program space, and program space  
330 addition;
- 331 • Programs/Events – he noted that over a course of one year, over  
332 115 programs are offered. He described the locations and  
333 percentages of the spaces used and population served;
- 334 • Joint Programming – he noted shared events such as Halloween  
335 celebration, Senior Thanksgiving lunch, Winter Carnival, and  
336 Easter Egg hunt. He noted the Town coordinates fall soccer and  
337 Essex Lacrosse for the entire community and the Village  
338 coordinates youth basketball for the entire community;
- 339 • Parks, Pools, Facilities – he noted that the Village has 3 parks and  
340 described the areas and activities held at the locations;
- 341 • Committees – he stated it was a 9-member committee, with 4  
342 adults and 1 youth appointed by the Planning Commission, and 4  
343 adults appointed by the Trustees. The Committee advises the  
344 department staff and serves as a conduit to the community;
- 345 • Strengths – he is proud that the tax rate has remained level for 10+  
346 years; proud of the social media presence; proud that there are over  
347 250 kids in care during the school year; proud of the relationship  
348 with schools; and entrepreneurial spirit – they are constantly  
349 starting new programs.
- 350 • He noted the following resources would be needed if the program  
351 left the school district: Human (finance, HR, legal, IT, etc.);  
352 Financial impact; and equipment/services.
- 353 • If there was a new governance, he would care most about an  
354 independent budget, system of childcare, entrepreneurial spirit and  
355 relationship with the schools.
- 356



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357 In response to an inquiry, Luck stated that if costs increase the Village taxpayers get to  
358 vote on the Village Recreation Budget. He explained how fund balance rolls directly  
359 back to the recreation department and not into the municipality.

360

361 Lori Houghton stated that understanding the history was important and there needs to be  
362 a contractual agreement with the school.

363

364 **Agenda Item 9. Future Agenda Items.**

365

366 Brad Luck and Ally Vile will work on the information received at this meeting for the  
367 next agenda.

368

369 **Agenda Item 10. Adjourn.** The meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

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371 These minutes were reviewed and approved on \_\_\_\_\_.

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Raj Chawla, Secretary