

Public Suggests Merger Plan is Incomplete

by Irene Wrenner, November 18

Quite a few folks weighed in on the current draft of the Merger charter — several in favor, more against — at the Selectboard's Nov. 16th listening session.

Patty Davis noted that before the 2006 merger plan was formulated, voters approved a study of merger (Jan. 2005).

No such vote took place this time around. Yet, much time and money have been spent in the past three years without voter approval.

Ken Signorello stated that grand list growth in the Town-outside-the-Village (TOV) is considerably higher than the Village.

As TOV property owners pay a growing percentage of town taxes in the years ahead, how does this impact the merger tax shift allocation?

Signorello also asked how the

tax shift was calculated and how it may vary over time.

Thirdly, he asked what the special taxing district cost estimates are for year 13, when they are set to expire and spread additional costs to TOV taxpayers.

Tracy Delphia noted that one of the traits of a good leader is trust. She's learned that trust is lacking and people feel they aren't accurately represented because they don't have a voice at the table.

Leveling the playing field by implementing equal representation in the form of "3+3" would ultimately lead to a stronger Essex.

What about Separation? asked Ed Daudelin, a long-time Village resident.

[Daudelin believes](#) separation is a valid alternative and should be considered equally with merging or not merging.



Million Dollar Meeting

by Irene Wrenner, November 11

In just under 90 minutes, the Village Trustees allocated nearly a million dollars toward a [culvert fix](#), a sidewalk plow, and several employee bonuses at their Nov. 10th meeting.

It's been a year since the Halloween storm of 2019 ravaged a culvert on Densmore Drive near Sherwood Square.

So long as paperwork and procedures continue to follow FEMA's strict guidelines, the Village expects to see an eventual 75% reimbursement of the \$829,215 bid from S.D. Ireland which the Trustees approved.

Stabilization of the channel for winter begins Monday. Installation of the box culvert will take place in the spring.

Next, the Trustees approved a bid for the purchase of a new sidewalk plow, which may or may not look exactly like the one in the above photo, but will be a familiar sight on Village sidewalks after a storm. A five-year warranty was included in the

	Scenario A			
	Elaine	George	Irene	Max
Better integrated planning	Yes	No	Yes	Don't Know
Better relations	Don't Know	No	Yes	No
Better transparency	Yes	Don't Know	Yes	No
Diversify tax base	Don't Know	Don't Know	No	Don't Know
Economic and overall sustainability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Don't Know
Eliminate duplication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Don't Know
Equal representation (in a consolidated environment)	Yes	Don't Know	Yes	No
Eventual single tax rate	Yes	Don't Know	No	Don't Know
Improves communication	Yes	Don't Know	Yes	No
Maintain a high level of service	Yes	Don't Know	Don't Know	Yes
Maintain Heart & Soul values	Yes	No	Don't Know	Yes
Maintain public safety	Yes	Yes	Don't Know	Yes
Makes public participation easier	Yes	No	Yes	No
Makes voting easier	Yes	Don't Know	Yes	Don't Know
Preserve identity (in a consolidated environment)	No	No	Yes	Don't Know

Why has separation never been given much thought?

To him, "Separation is important because it lets the Village keep the identity it's had as an Industrial hub of Essex for over 100

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years. Now you're taking our identity away."

This isn't the first time that someone has publicly uttered the s-word since Sarah Macy, Finance Director, presented a [detailed analysis](#) of separation vs merger impacts in September.

However, [Haney downplayed](#) the rigor and importance of that analysis during this November meeting, calling the estimates on separation "very back of the napkin".

Actually, Macy spent two months generating her models and a comprehensive report after a late-July request from 27 residents.

The revelation on separation — that it costs no more than merger but its effects manifest promptly — contrasts with Haney's 13-year merger plan.

The audience was then treated to a lesson in merger history according to Haney. She tutored that separation was considered early on, when the SB and Trustees established a Governance Subcommittee.

Members of that committee (including Haney, George Tyler, Max Levy and Irene Wrenner) reviewed a variety of governance models and developed criteria on which to grade them.

Haney reminisced about a chart that ranked the scenarios on such criteria as "would it equalize taxes, would it benefit the future economic development of the community,

[and] would it reduce the number of times residents had to vote". The one with the highest total was merger. It met "more of the goals than any of the other models."

The chart — [available online](#), a snippet of which is shown on page 1 — contains the actual criteria used by the four elected officials to rank the alternative governance models they had generated.

Not included in the two-year-old analysis were such criteria as preserving planning expertise and priorities; ensuring public input gets incorporated into plans and ordinances; and diversifying representation.

Only recently have these factors been identified as important considerations.

This author, when called upon, noted that, of the nine options ranked by that team, five were versions of merger, one was status quo, two were forms of separation-and-sharing, and one was separation.

Very little time was spent discussing separation back

then, because the boards were looking for ways to continue consolidating functions.

Also, the assumption was that separation would be cost-prohibitive.

Many other residents spoke about merger that night. Consider viewing the [meeting videotape](#) to hear the full range of public comments.

Despite much constructive input at both listening sessions, Unified Manager Evan Teich and the Selectboard Chair are resistant to making any substantive changes to the merger plan draft.

They anticipate the Selectboard will consider warning a merger vote for March at its next meeting.

More info on this Selectboard Meeting may be found [online](#).

Retorter Circulation

July, 2020: 1,000
August, 2020: 1,000
September, 2020: 2,000
October, 2020: 2,000
November, 2020: 750
December, 2020: 1,000

(Million Dollar Meeting continued from page 1)

bottom line of \$131,339.

After returning from an executive session, the Trustees voted to award one-time bonuses equal to 5% of their salaries to three Essex Junction Parks and Recreation Employees.

No indication was provided to the public as to why these women were being commended.

More news from the Nov. 10th Trustee Meeting may be found online: <https://www.essexretorter.com/million-dollar-meeting>

“Ready, Fire, Aim!”

11/23/20 Joint Board Meeting

by Ken Signorello
and Irene Wrenner
November 24

Pearl Street Park has a parking problem.

Although paved parking is accessible from the jughandle along Route 15 at West Street Extension, some park users leave their vehicles along Warner Avenue or Brooks Avenue. They use the footpath that meets the nexus of both streets to access pickleball courts and other amenities.

Residents complain about the traffic and parking that visitors to the 14-acre park have brought to their otherwise quiet neighborhood.

The proposed solution: a resident-only parking ordinance offered by police and staff at the Joint Selectboard / Trustee Meeting on November 23rd.

Residents in attendance asked, why should we suffer the hassle and insult of needing permits to park in front of our houses, when the Town should simply provide adequate parking at the Park? It sounded like a case of the cure being worse than the problem!

One resident reported the Essex Parks &

Recreation Director’s idea, which was not considered by the boards: simply trim back the brush, grade the siding, and install signage to notify visitors where off-road parking IS permitted. Between 10 and 12 vehicles could easily park there and no longer impede traffic flow on Warner Avenue, which is fairly narrow and lacks sidewalks.

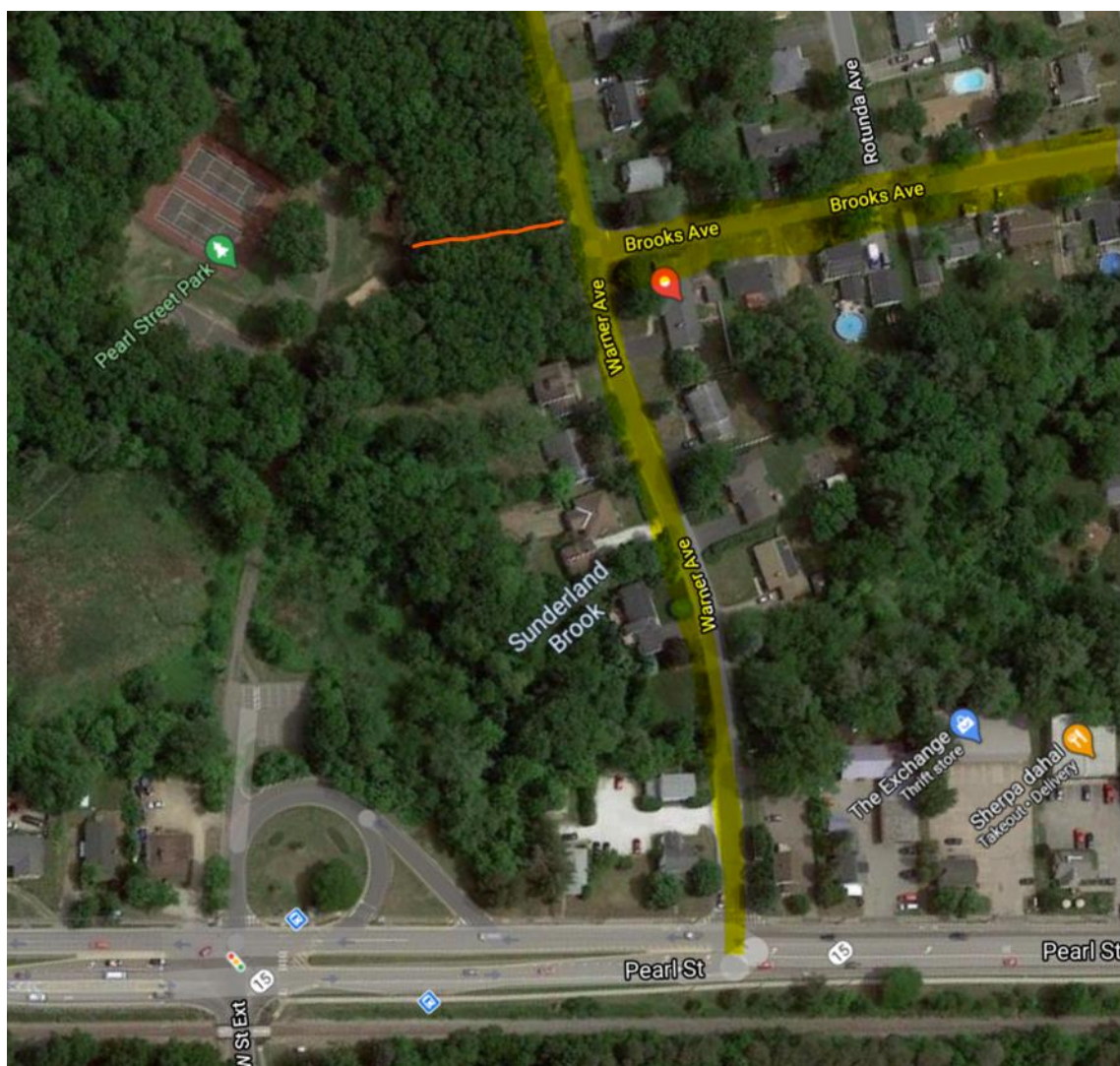
This discussion was one of several that night related to combining the Town and Village traffic ordinances. One confounding concern was why Village Streets are even listed in the Town’s version

of the Traffic ordinances, although the Police Chief understood that streets in the Village are also Town streets.

In the end, the last minute changes and duplicate street listings were too much to move forward. The Traffic ordinance will need another revision and shall return at a future date, after more public input on how to resolve the park’s parking issue.

The public is reminded:

WINTER PARKING BANS are in effect between December 1st and April 1st from 12 midnight to 7 a.m.



Rakes and Shovels and Wheels, Oh My!

“Dig Day” at Maple Street Bike Park

by Irene Wrenner
November 28

Ten years ago, the Maple Street Bike Park consisted of some sketches on paper and a few fundraising ideas, plus the passion of several dedicated volunteers.

They applied for grants and permits. They hosted raffles and bake sales. They and their friends moved tons of dirt.

And, in two years' time, a sloped forest floor was transformed into a popular outdoor hangout for youth-on-wheels.

Since its Grand Opening on July 4th, 2012, this freestyle bike park has offered the public a pump track plus three dirt jump lines in a prime wooded location.



The COVID pandemic has not affected this park's availability nor its appeal eight years later.

Maintaining jumps and lines is a perennial job that volunteers take on, as stewards of the park. This fall, a Bike Park Action Committee formed to assess the current needs and

goals for this well-loved amenity. The committee will focus on feature designs and maintenance protocols to provide a fun and progressive experience for riders of all ages to learn and grow.

The BPAC hosted its “Dig Day” event on November 1st at Noon. A dozen volunteers pitched in to clear leaves from the trails, repair jumps and berms, and improve the overall rideability of the park.

Thanks to all who rolled up their sleeves and wielded a rake or a shovel this month.

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Watch Ken Signorello's video
at www.essexretorter.com/rakes-shovels-wheels