

## Essex Rescue Anticipates Move

by Ken Signorello



Essex Rescue has outgrown its current location on Educational Drive near Essex High School. This non-profit organization is planning a move to 35 Essex Way just south of the 289 Exit ramp.

Dennis Lutz, Public Works Director, first disclosed the move in a memo to the Selectboard dated June 28th, as part of the planned traffic signal upgrade along Essex Way near the Circ.

Lutz stated that Emergency Vehicle Preemption would be installed so that, when the squad pulls out, traffic lights are controlled to provide them right of way.

Darren Schibler, Town Planner, confirmed Essex Rescue's plans at the September 14th Conservation & Trails Committee meeting. The Town of Essex Planning Commission

*(Continues on page 3)*



*Wag it Forward raised money for non-profit shelters and more on Sept. 26th at CVExpo. Videos available on our Facebook page.*

## Stevens Park: Emerald in the City



by Ken Signorello and Irene Wrenner

Stevens Park is a lush 8.2-acre oasis in the heart of Essex Junction. (Our 5-minute [video tour](#) is available online.)

It's bordered by Park Street, South Street, Orchard Terrace and Iroquois Avenue, and those who live nearby can attest to both its beauty and its neglect. Other Village parks get

more attention. [Maple Street Park](#) has amenities, signage, parking and activity year-round. A new [Pocket Park](#) at Five Corners is in the works after the Trustees invested more than \$60,000 to purchase and beautify the asphalt parcel fronting the Firebird Café. Urban planners continue to wrestle with how to green-up this brownfield.

Just a few blocks away sits a wooded park donated to the Village by Bertha Stevens, widow of former developer Guy Stevens, in 1973. Rusty playground equipment haunts this peaceful park, which is bisected by two trails connecting its formal South Street entrance to its unmarked entrance in the parking lot behind the School District administration building at 51 Park Street.

*(Continues on page 3)*





## School Board Chair Sells But Stays

by Irene Wrenner

Kim Gleason, Chair of the Essex Westford School District Board, has sold her 2924 sq. ft. home on Sydney Drive and appears to have moved into her 5310 sq. ft. home on Grand Isle.

Her lakefront land was bought 13 years ago as a “second summer property,” Gleason told the *Retorter*.

Town of Grand Isle records show a large year-round home was built in the intervening years and completed in 2015.

When asked about the recent sale, Gleason responded, “Essex is our ‘homestead’. It is my intent to downsize in Essex.”

State law requires that elected officials live in the district they serve. Gleason claims the law also allows for her to remain in her seat so long as she intends to reside here in the future.

She cited the tight real estate market for her inability to find

another home in Essex in a timely manner.

Two Essex Town residents spoke to this issue during Comments from the Public at the EWSD Meeting on September 21st.

Video of that board meeting is available [online](#); time points are noted below.

Lynn Smith said, “Ms. Gleason needs to resign the board. She is no longer an Essex resident and

that board seat should be maintained by an Essex resident.” (1:59:20)

Brad Kennison asked the board chair point blank, “Will you step down?” (1:33:58)

Gleason indicated earlier in the meeting (1:00) that she felt justified in remaining in her seat so long as she intended to find a dwelling in Essex. “Should my situation change, I will inform the board.”

Near the meeting’s end, the board itself addressed Gleason’s residency status.

One member noted the statute does not define intent or set a time limit for one’s absence.

Board members voted unanimously, as Gleason abstained, to seek a formal legal opinion from their attorney. (3:25:50)

Gleason’s Essex closing date was August 31st, per her state Property Transfer Tax Return.

As of the next scheduled school board meeting on October 5th, she will have not resided in the School District she represents for 35 days.





(Rescue, continued from page 1)

will hold a public hearing on the site plan on October 14th. The Links at Lang Farm property would need to be subdivided in order to site a new Rescue Building there.

The Lang Family, which owns this property through an LLC, strongly supports this sale to Essex Rescue, said Jonathan Lang.



Essex Rescue has served Essex, Jericho, Underhill, and Westford for 50 years. Its existing building no longer meets its personnel or vehicle needs. Nor can it be expanded due to its age, hence the necessity of the move.

According to a statement from the ER Board of Directors, "The planned location will ensure a strong response time to all of our communities and will allow Rescue to continue to provide the service that everyone has come to expect."

Should the subdivision receive approval, Essex Rescue would conduct a capital campaign to purchase the property and erect a new building.

To contribute to Essex Rescue, visit [essexrescue.org/donate](https://essexrescue.org/donate).

(Park, continued from page 1)

Long-time Village resident and Stevens Park visitor Andy Champagne bemoaned its neglect to elected officials during a public meeting last month. Then, on September 3rd he shared his passion for the park and his dismay at its decline with the *Essex Retorter*.

During our guided tour, Champagne pointed out erosion, overgrown plants, downed trees, and stumps that haven't been removed.

He believes a small investment of money and effort in the park would improve its appearance and provide welcome respite to Village residents amidst the increasingly busy downtown.

Village Trustee George Tyler mentioned the park at the mid-September Trustee Meeting.

He said he would advocate for spending some money to improve Stevens Park when the FY23 budget is discussed.

Tyler said he would like to see a task force convened and funded to determine how to make it a much nicer and more inviting amenity. He suggested that the task force:

- 1) Improve and maintain the trails;
- 2) Clean up any brush/detritus particularly around the periphery;
- 3) Survey neighbors to find out how they use the park and what changes they would like to see;
- 4) Improve safety; and
- 5) Explore innovations found in other small urban forest parks.

## Separation Myth #2

**MYTH** Per the [Our Village, Our Voices website](#) ("Municipal Services/Does"):

*"The Village has been operating as a full service, self-governing, and self-sustaining municipality since 1893."*

**FACT** The Village has been part of and **extensively served by a second municipality**, the Town of Essex.

If the Village were **full-service** and **self-sustaining**, the Town would not be supplying a host of services that the Village government doesn't offer.

They include: Management, Assessor, Information Technology, Finance, Clerk, Human Resources, and Police.

The Town also offers [parks and trails](#).

Elsewhere on its website ("Taxes/Isn't"), OVVOV downplays these services: "Other than police, the Town of Essex provides some administrative and clerical services for the Village."

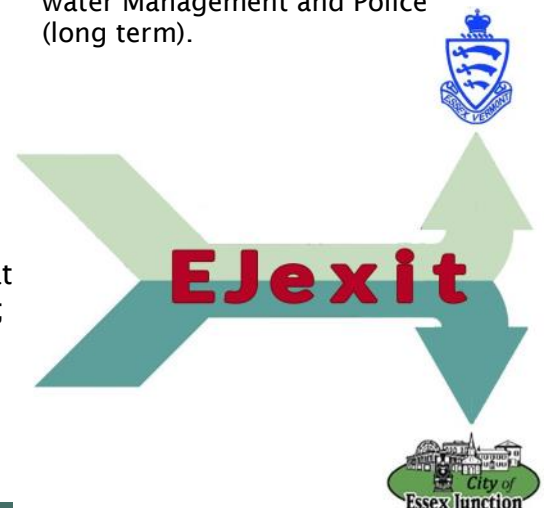
The Town also pays a number of local and regional expenses that would cost the new City at least \$376,500.

The OVVOV website categorizes them as "intergovernmental costs (such as county taxes) that Essex Junction would be required to pay as an independent city."

The Village Trustees aren't even seeking a fully **self-governing** future.

In their ongoing meetings with the Town Selectboard, they are negotiating which services they might share.

These include Property Reappraisal and Finance (short term) and Stormwater Management and Police (long term).







## Black Holes & Democracy

**Before reading this column, examine these two definitions and then take the test.**

1. What is an Executive Session?  
"Part of a public meeting from which the public is excluded."  
(Vermont Secretary of State)
2. What is a Black Hole?  
"A place in space where gravity pulls so much that even light cannot get out. ... This can happen when a star is dying." (NASA)

**TEST:** Select all that apply.

- ☐ Black holes exist in outer space
- ☐ Executive sessions are frequently used by the Essex Selectboard
- ☐ Both keep light from getting out
- ☐ All of the above

**(Answer found below)**

With Essex Junction hurtling toward a November vote to separate from Essex Town, the Selectboard has largely frozen the public out of its deliberations over the Separation issue.

Instead of holding a creative, public dialogue with citizens about the possibility of a new Town of Essex without the village, the board has retreated, shutting off the microphones at 81 Main, turning out the lights and heading upstairs for closed door conversations among themselves, the town attorney and selected staff. As Charlie Rich once sang, "Oh, no one knows what goes on behind closed doors."

Beginning June 7, 2021 — as Separation discussions were ramping up — the SB held eleven meetings, on its own or jointly with the Village Trustees. Ten out of those eleven meetings concluded with the board sequestered in

executive sessions. At its August 2nd session, the board spent about as much time meeting in secret — two hours — as it did in public.

This kind of secrecy is not exactly what the Vermont Constitution prescribes. In particular, Article 6, one of the most heralded sections of that constitution, reads: "That all power being originally inherent in and co[n]sequently derived from the people, therefore, all officers of government, whether legislative or executive, are their trustees and servants; and at all times, in a legal way, accountable to them."

The late philosopher Mortimer Adler reminded Americans "that citizenship is the primary political office under a constitutional government. In a republic, the citizens are the ruling class. They are the permanent and principal rulers. All other offices that are set up by the constitution are secondary."

Why, then, do I feel like a second-class citizen and not a ruler?

One reason: executive (read secret) sessions.

Is this normal? It shouldn't be. Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos has admonished: "Remember that executive sessions should only be used for extraordinary circumstances ... Abusing the law of executive session is offensive to the purpose of open meetings. Boards should close their meetings rarely." Ten out of the last eleven meetings ain't rare.

Vermonters tend to believe their myths; they imagine a Norman Rockwell world of idealized images that represent the best of what we could be but obscure the reality of what we have become. One of those myths is embodied in Rockwell's painting of a Town Meeting in Arlington, where he lived. One individual stands up to make a point while everyone else turns to listen. Power to the people.

We can improve our government. We can strive for the ideal that our Vermont Constitution consecrates



and Mortimer Adler enshrines: the citizen as the primary ruler of our government.

So long as the SB keeps meeting in executive sessions, though, our democracy is slowly, inexorably being sucked into a black hole from which no light escapes.

**Answer to the test:** All of the above

*Bruce S. Post, a former Selectboard member, often writes and lectures on Vermont environmental history.*

## The Essex **RETORTER**

Published by  
Essex Retorter LLC  
12 Main St.  
Essex Jct, Vermont

[news@essexretorter.com](mailto:news@essexretorter.com)  
[www.EssexRetorter.com](http://www.EssexRetorter.com)

© 2021 All Rights Reserved

*Your Retorter reporters and editors bring you "the rest of the news" on Essex municipal government via the web in a timely fashion.*

*The Essex Retorter needs YOU and your [donation](#) to stay in print and online. Thanks!*