

Village to Hire its Own Manager

by Irene Wrenner

The Village of Essex Junction plans to hire its own Manager, whether or not the Nov. 2nd Separation vote passes. Andrew Brown, President of the Village Trustees, posted the announcement to social media on October 23rd.

Shared Manager Evan Teich, whose contract with the Village and Town expires in February 2022, would no longer manage Village departments when his contract expires, per the posting.



Unified Manager Evan Teich

Brad Luck, Essex Junction Recreation & Parks (EJRP) Director, is one likely candidate for that opening. Luck coordinated the formation of the current Separation Plan and Projected Budget for a new City.

The press release reads as follows:

Village and Town to Discontinue Shared Management

Following two failed merger votes in March and April of this year, the Town of Essex Selectboard and the Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees have worked cooperatively on certain details of Village separation from the Town. During this time, the Village Trustees have been clear that, regardless of the outcome of Village separation, the Village plans to hire its own municipal manager.

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Road Salt Season Ahead: Supply Uncertain

by Irene Wrenner

Public Works Director Dennis Lutz presented the 2021-22 Winter Operations Plan for the Town and Village on October 4th and indicated that he may retire before winter 2022-23.

Using a sports analogy, Lutz alluded to the Elected Officials as the Managers of the Public Works team, residents as the fans, and the Winter Operations Plan as the plays that are called. Although fans may not agree with a coach's calls, they can read the plan

now to know what to expect and to understand why certain plays are called under certain conditions.

Lutz alerted the board that no one in the state had yet received confirmation on supply or pricing of road salt, which is critical to winter mobility.

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Little-Known Separation Facts

1. The average Village household currently pays \$925 to the Town for a variety of services: Management, Real Estate Assessment, Information Technology, Finance, Clerk, Human Resources, and Police.

2. Separation, if it passes, would save the average Village property owner \$195 annually at best — but not all in the first year, said Trustee Raj Chawla.

3. The estimated 7% savings are based on an FY22 budget — not an FY24 one. They don't include the expected cost increases which would compound between now and the earliest date at which Separation could take effect. Therefore, any expected savings would be eroded by annual increases of approximately 3% on the Town budget and 5% on the Village budget.

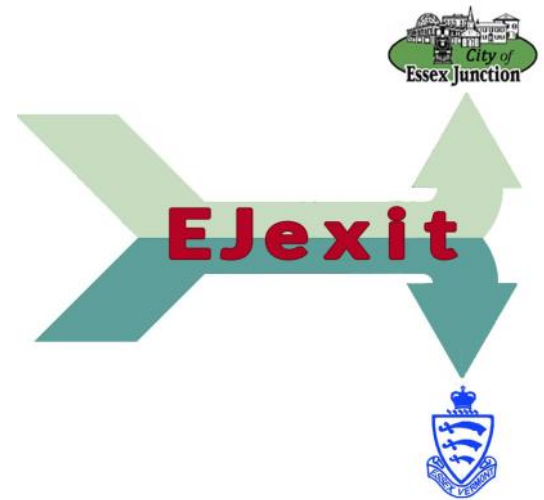
4. The customary 1% set aside for Human Services funding —

a hallmark of our community since 1986 — was not included in this proposed City budget. Thus, households will save \$24 at the expense of non-profit organizations which serve some of our most vulnerable residents.

5. Funding a million-dollar-plus renovation to Lincoln Hall with ARPA (American Recovery Plan Act) money via an exchange of Capital Funds, as discussed at the September 28th meeting, is not possible per ARPA guidelines. A bond vote would be needed in order to finance the renovation.

6. The EJRP after-school program is offered to students from the entire EWSD (Essex Westford School District) and will not be affected by Separation.

7. City residents would not lose access to Indian Brook



Reservoir. They could purchase day use passes during the summer season and have full access the rest of the year.

8. People received Separation ballots as early as October 8th. Some voted from home on the initial City Charter, before its language was altered on Oct. 12th by the Trustees.

9. Only half the Town (Village residents) is voting on Separation; half the Town (outside-the-Village residents) doesn't get to vote on Separation.

Salt (Continued from page 1)

The Town only has enough salt on hand to last a month or two of winter weather. (See [online version](#) of this article for updates.)

Long-time residents may recall when [Lutz netted](#) 17 seconds on a prime-time National Public Radio spot, commenting on Essex roads' "reduced salt diet" during the nationwide shortage in 2008.

Lutz said he continues to hope this year's salt orders will be filled. He suggested that the

Selectboard replace existing storage units and expand capacity for salt storage in the future to reduce the risk of running out.

While acknowledging the fact that the Town finally has two sidewalk plows in relatively good working condition, the Town won't necessarily have the personnel to deploy them.

He explained that several of the most experienced Public Works staff are close to retirement. According to Lutz, it's difficult to find potential new

hires with the skills and stamina to put in the requisite hours to safely and adequately clear roads and sidewalks.

Lutz has expanded the planned plowing routes to include more sidewalks in Essex Center. However, sidewalk plows are limited to paths that are at least four feet wide.

Lutz reminded the public that travelers need to exercise caution; crews work long hours during each storm but cannot promise to leave sidewalks or road surfaces completely clean.

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Brown Promises Tax Savings

by Irene Wrenner

Essex Junction Recreation and Parks (EJRP) Director Brad Luck presented a City budget based on the current FY22 budget at the September 28th Trustee Meeting.

Potential cost increases and savings are predicted to net a 7% decrease in taxes, if Separation were passed by the voters and then by the legislature.

That decrease would translate to \$195 on the average home valued at \$300,000, "but not in year one," said Trustee Raj Chawla.

Details are available at:
www.essexjunction.org/independence

During the public hearing on the proposed City charter,

Village resident [Andy Suntup](#) asked Village President Andrew Brown, "Are you close to 100% confident the taxes are going to go down that 7% you're talking about, when we have to pay for new employees, a new computer system? You know, everything that we don't have to pay 100% for as we share everything. Because if you're not approaching 99% confidence, it just seems like you've all spent a lot of time working on this and it doesn't make sense when [taxes are] the only thing people really do care about."

[Brown responded](#), "Yes, I am 100% confident, based upon the information that we have, that the taxes would go down by that amount."



View from Tower, October 2016

"Essex Yesterday and Today" Calendars to Raise Funds to Repair Fort Tower

To help raise funds to repair the roof and stairs of the historic water tower in Fort Ethan Allen, the Historical Society is selling 2022 calendars.

"Essex Yesterday and Today" features 12 historic buildings with brief descriptions and photos. Each calendar sells for \$15 (cash price) + \$3 shipping.

Order yours today via essex-communityhistoricalsociety.org or mail a check made payable to "Essex Community Historical Society" to PO Box 8388, Essex, VT 05451.

Manager (Continued from page 1)

The unified manager model functioned well while the two boards worked first towards service consolidation and ultimately merger of the Village and Town. The boards believe that it is no longer beneficial to operate under a unified manager model with the Village seeking independence. As such, the Agreement concerning the sharing of Unified Manager Evan Teich will not be renewed.

Mr. Teich's current contract is set to expire on February 25, 2022, at which time Mr. Teich will no longer serve as unified manager of both communities. Each board is in the process of assessing its future management needs for their respective communities and we extend our sincere appre-

ciation for the excellent service Mr. Teich provided both the Village and Town during our Merger efforts.

Questions should be directed to [Andrew Brown](#), President of the Village Board of Trustees at abrown@essexjunction.org, and [Andy Watts](#), Chair, Essex Town Selectboard at awatts@essex.org.

End of Mr. Brown's Press Release

Salt (Continued from page 2)

Lutz asked residents and haulers to be mindful when placing trash and recycling cans in the right of way during winter; trash cans left in the street slow down the road plowing process.

The Selectboard heeded Lutz' suggestion to increase the mailbox reimbursement fee to \$75, should a resident's mailbox be accidentally damaged by a snow plow.



The Destruction of Saxon Hill Forest

“Think globally. Act locally.” the bumper sticker goes. If you want to save the world, start with your own little corner.

Considering what has happened to the Saxon Hill Forest, we’ve failed miserably to act locally. Now, what was once called “the last frontier” in Chittenden County has been conquered, less a forest park, more an industrial park. Singer Joni Mitchell’s words could be its anthem: “They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.”

It did not have to be this way, and therein lies the saga of Saxon Hill: a sad tale of petulance, arrogance, deception and greed that has characterized our intermunicipal relations for decades.

According to a UVM study, the Saxon Hill area was more or less settled by the 1800’s. In 1900, the Village began purchasing the Saxon Hill land and constructing the first of four reservoirs.

By the early 1970s, Village Trustees began to chafe at the property taxes the Village paid the Town for the property. Local officials squabbled over the Town’s tax assessment. The Trustees looked to sell the land. Town and Village voters approved a referendum to keep it in public hands, a sentiment the Trustees ignored. By 1978,

most of the land was sold to developers.

Town Planning Commissioners of that era tried to balance environmental protection with economic development, setting up a special zoning district that would preserve most of the former watershed. Over time, developers have nibbled away at the edges, resulting in the degraded forest remnant of today.



The full story of Saxon Hill is too long to tell in a short column. Several supplemental documents are available via ER’s [website](#): Saxon Hill Forest History; Case Study in Degradation; and Backroom Deal.

This, though, is what I have learned: Saxon Hill is a cautionary tale about destroying forests at a time when it is critical to preserve such natural ecosystems.

Venturing into the forest’s history, I thought I could find respite, however briefly, from the perpetual power struggle between the Town and the Village. I could not.

Perhaps the ultimate irony is that the Village, whose leaders once set in motion the destruction of Saxon Hill Forest, now prides itself in being a Tree City. ([Tree City USA](#),

is a national program recognizing communities who actively manage and steward their public tree resources.)



Village leaders not only paved paradise and put up a parking lot, but also recently spent \$60,000 on a contaminated parking lot, which they have labeled a “Pocket Park”, in front of Firebird Cafe at Five Corners. Now they brainstorm ways to green up this slab of asphalt. Irony of ironies.

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

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