



Diane Clemens promotes "YES on Separation" at Honk-and-Wave event

Separation Passes

by Irene Wrenner

Door-to-door canvassing and municipal financing assisted the pro-Separation effort in getting out the Nov. 2nd vote.

Turnout didn't meet the activists' advertised 60% target, but 45% of Village voters spoke: 3070 voted Yes and 411 voted No on the proposed charter for the City of Essex Junction.

The legislature must approve this charter before a new City can form.

FY23 Tax Increase Projections

See inside for highlights of Town and Village Budget work sessions.

Public Demands Diversity on EWSD Board but Campaign Based on Leaked Info Fails

by Irene Wrenner

The public outcry at the November 9th Essex Westford School District Board Meeting indicates a leaked executive session decision.

A subset of the Board met on Nov. 1st in executive session to select a Board appointee from the final four applicants. Their recommendation — for the larger Board to appoint Robert Carpenter — was then conveyed in confidential communications to finalists and Board members.

Before the Board made that recommendation in public on Nov. 9th, five meeting attendees spoke directly or indirectly against Carpenter's appointment because of his gender and skin color. Several members of the public expressed frustration, disbelief, or horror that three female candidates, one of whom identifies as a person of color, had not been selected.

In addition, a letter-writing campaign sought to overturn the Board's intention before it was made public. A *Retorter* investigation uncovered emails sent to the Board from fourteen residents just before its Nov. 9th meeting.

A number of them pointed to the Equity Policy, expecting that its recent passage might guarantee more diversity on the School Board. Some writers bemoaned the ap-

(Continues on page 3)



Essex Westford School District Board meets on Nov. 9th in the Essex High School Library

\$132: Projected Village Tax Increase

by Irene Wrenner

10 highlights from the November 4th Budget Work Session:

1. A 13.2% municipal tax increase is proposed for Village taxpayers (\$132 per year for a \$300K property). The Trustees may cut corners to shave one or two percent off the increase between now and the Village budget vote in April. An additional FY23 Town tax increase is being discussed by the Selectboard (see page 4), and will be voted on in March.
2. Sarah Macy, Finance Director, has resigned, effective December 3rd.
3. More than 3 new Village staff positions need funding, including a Village Manager and Assistant/HR Manager.
4. Essex Junction Rec & Parks (EJRP) will transfer a customer services rep from Town Rec.
5. Brownell Library seeks to convert a part-time position to full-time to provide standard services and consistent hours.
6. The Village Public Works Garage needs replacement very soon. Other infrastructure issues are becoming acute as well.
7. The Wastewater Treatment Facility needs the Town IT Department to support a tech issue that they cannot contract out due to security and firewalls.
8. Essex Rescue seeks an increase to \$220K from \$75K. Currently, all of that expense is billed to the Town. Nearly half would be paid by City taxpayers beginning in FY24.
9. The Village sets aside just 10% of operating expenses for contingencies. To align with industry standards, Finance Director Sarah Macy said, "The Village should consider ... raising that limit to at least 15%."
10. Grand list growth is anemic, causing taxes to rise higher and faster than ever.

This six-hour meeting was live-streamed and recorded by the Essex *Retorter*. Watch Parts 1 and 2 via their respective links on our [Facebook page](#).

Uncommon Coffee Takes Home 1st & 3rd in Latte Art Contest



Latte Art by
Noah Zuanich

by Ken Signorello

Three baristas from Uncommon Coffee competed in a Latte Art Throwdown on Halloween in Burlington. Uncommon Coffee's own Noah Zuanich and Kyle Hunn took 1st and 3rd place, respectively.

Approximately 15 competitors from around Chittenden County participated in the first such event since pre-COVID times.

Three judges considered clarity, originality in design, difficulty level, and symmetry, if intended, in their blind assessment.

Maya Crowley, Uncommon Coffee owner, plans to host her own latte art throwdown in the near future. Her spacious shop is open daily and located in the Essex Experience at 19 Essex Way.

Diversity (Continued from page 1)

pointment of a white male to the Board a few months ago and now another was in the works. Still others promoted the promise and skill set of a passed over candidate.

"I don't want to pay for a school system that is not actively trying to dismantle white supremacy," wrote Deb McAdoo in her letter to the School Board and administrators. "We must have a school board that reflects all community members in order for all to feel adequately represented."

"[This pending appointment] makes me question everything you do going forward, as well as your past decisions," wrote Resa Mehren. Both McAdoo and Mehren live in the Village. This vacancy was for an outside-the-Village representative.

Interviews for both the summer and fall vacancies were conducted in executive session. Therefore, only EWSD members understood the qualifications that each of the four finalists would bring to their table and the reasons for their choice.

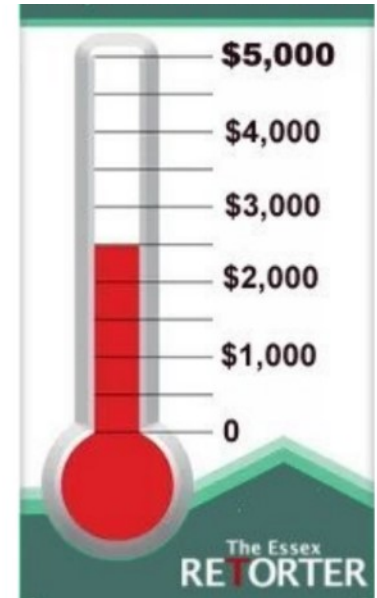
After the School Board, as a courtesy, notified the female finalists about the pending selection of someone other than themselves, one or more applicants demonstrated an inability to maintain confidentiality, and, in turn, mobilized a campaign on their own behalf.

Instead of simply announcing the selection committee's recommendation on Nov. 9th, the School Board, including student

members, deliberated in executive session for 82 minutes. Then they came back into regular session and moved to appoint Robert Carpenter by a vote of 6.5 to 1.5.

Adding diversity to the School Board is an ongoing challenge. At a meeting of the Essex Democrats on Nov 17th, two white residents — a male from the Village and a female from outside-the-Village — announced their candidacy for EWSD Board seats in the April election.

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Seniors Honor Native American Heritage Month

by Paula Sargent

On November 17th the Essex Senior Center hosted a luncheon and program to celebrate the indigenous identity and culture of our Native Americans.

Blake Getchell, a staff member at the Senior Center, and her mother, Tammy, an employee of the Village of Essex Junction, delighted their audience with traditional Mi'kmaq singing and dancing.

Blake shared her rich heritage of growing up in Maine with her mom and dad, Rick Getchell, a Mi'kmaq tribal chief. Blake also showcased many artifacts that her family has collected.

She introduced the seniors to the ancient purification ritual known as smudging, plus such ceremonial herbs as sweetgrass, sage, and cedar.

Present for the event were Blake's grandparents, James and Marilyn Butler. Mrs. Butler had created the traditional ceremonial dress that Blake wore for the presentation.



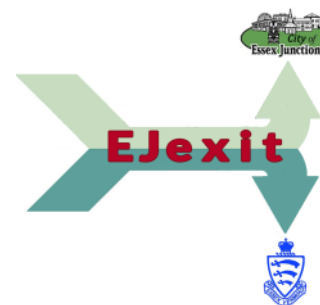
\$76: Projected Town Tax Increase

by Irene Wrenner

10 points from the Nov. 9th and Nov. 15th Town Budget Work Sessions:

1. The latest projected tax rate increase is 5.4% for Town inside and outside the village residents (\$76 per year for a \$300K property). Budget refinements continue. This number will likely change before being sent to voters in March.
2. Essex Rescue has increased its funding request to \$241,046 from \$76,300.
3. The Town needs to replace three buildings: public works, fire station, and pool/community center.
4. The Fire Department has critical needs for more volunteers, a radio upgrade, overnight quarters, and a ladder truck, which aren't included in the FY23 budget at this point, although the radio upgrade is getting some attention.
5. The Unified Manager continues to promote a local option tax as an alternative revenue source, although the Selectboard appears not to favor it.
6. \$30,000 is budgeted for Equity work in FY23. This fiscal year's entire Equity funding was spent in six months.
7. The Police Department has three open officer positions. A fourth vacancy has been converted to an administrative position: Community Affairs Liaison.
8. Changes to the management of the jointly-owned, 99-acre Tree Farm are not expected for FY23. This renowned recreational facility is currently run by the not-for-profit Tree Farm Management Group at zero cost to taxpayers. Both the Town and Village have seats on the Tree Farm Management Group board.
9. Committee and commission member stipends will be paid, beginning in January, at a yearly cost of \$34,970.
10. FY21 yielded a surplus of \$1,695,492, due to reduced expenses and varied sources of unexpected revenue. These include \$72,936 in FEMA grants, \$112,977 in recording fees, \$346,669 in COVID relief, and \$677,347 in savings from unfilled police positions. This fund balance will be allocated by the SB to reduce future taxes and cover unanticipated expenses. The \$90,661 allocation toward Merger costs has been re-directed toward Separation expenses.

The Nov. 9th meeting was live-streamed and recorded by the *Essex Retorter* via our [Facebook page](#). The Nov. 15th meeting was recorded by [Town Meeting TV](#).



Municipal Boards Continue to Revise Separation Plans

Town Selectboard members, at the request of the Village Trustees, regularly review changes to a number of proposed agreements as to how departments would operate if the legislature approves Essex Junction's City Charter next spring.

Recent staff departures are expected to alter the language of several agreements and accelerate the split between the Town and Village operations, whether or not Separation becomes law.

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news@essexretorter.com

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Bruce Post's opinion column returns next month.