

You Talked. We Listened. Let's Act!

THE SURVEY SAYS...



www.heartandsoulofessex.org



Choose Our Future Survey - SUMMARY

July 23, 2013

During 2012 and into early 2013, Heart and Soul of Essex engaged more than 500 Essex community members in conversations and activities designed to explore what matters most to the people who live or work in our community. During this period of exploration, participants identified six priority values for Essex: **Local Economy, Health & Recreation, Community Connections, Education, Thoughtful Growth, and Safety.**

To engage even more people, Heart and Soul of Essex invited community members to participate in a survey. We wanted to learn whether the shared values resonate with a wider group of community members. We also wanted to gather ideas about how to put the values into action. People of all ages answered our survey, including at least 352 people who hadn't yet participated in any Heart & Soul of Essex activities, and 541 in total. The survey results affirm that we "got it right" among Heart & Soul participants, and that the values resonate across a wider portion of our community as well.

People submitted over two hundred action ideas. The ideas cover a wide range of topics including governance, events, infrastructure, and more. We present them, unfiltered, in the pages of this report. They are organized by one of the six key values. People also submitted general comments, and below we outline several themes that emerged.

Keep Essex Affordable - Living in a community that is affordable for people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds is important to many survey respondents. There is a special concern about family members who are approaching retirement. They express a need for sensible spending on local programs in order to allow relief from high and climbing tax rates.

Engage the Community in Shaping Education - Several respondents are interested in increasing the amount of parental and community involvement in shaping the future of our schools.

Embrace Diversity - Many survey participants echo what we heard during Neighborhood Conversations about diversity, which we included in the description of the "Community Connections" value. Respondents want to see Essex embrace people of all ages from a variety of religious, cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Support Local Businesses - When it comes to the economy, many respondents are especially interested in supporting small, local businesses.

Create Unity and Address Tax Equity - Several survey respondents say that it will be difficult for Essex to come together as a community until we address tax equity between the municipalities. Several respondents also suggested the need to be more efficient with our resources by combining municipal services and school districts.

These themes, as well as the action ideas (presented below), will inform our work as we bring the community back together to plan for action.

Local Economy



Our residents contribute to a vibrant economy by working for and patronizing a diverse mix of businesses, from small, locally-owned enterprises to international corporations. We are committed to fostering an environment that produces a world-class workforce and a strong economy for years to come.

Action Ideas

- Local shops
 - A breakfast diner
 - A coffee shop
 - More local shops/destinations in the village where people might meet and linger: (coffee shop, burrito shop, book store, ice cream parlor, etc.)
 - Work with developers and building owners to attract the type of local businesses that are wanted in Essex to ensure the local economy will become more vibrant.
- Instead of just waiting for businesses to come to 5 Corners it would be great to come up with an idealized list of who we would LIKE there and try to COURT those businesses.
- Stores in Fort Ethan Allen
- Essex “dollars” to spend at local businesses
- Local agriculture, local foods, all things local
- Promote the retail business more; 4 times a year publish an updated business map in the Essex Reporter

Health & Recreation



We value public places for outdoor and indoor recreation for all ages and abilities. We treasure Indian Brook reservoir, neighborhood parks and the chance to connect by bicycle or on foot. Community institutions provide education and programs to support healthy lifestyles.

Action Ideas

Infrastructure

- Disc golf course
 - A rec center for youth ages 10-17 in Essex Town to give kids something to do in Winter
 - Funding and building a state of the art Field House and indoor pool complex preferably co-located with the Essex Tree Farm. .
 - At Sand Hill build an indoor, public recreation facility that includes a competition-sized pool similar to UVAC facility in White River, a turf rec field and a fitness gym.
 - Indoor swimming pool
 - Indoor 50 meter by 25 yard racing pool that could be open to everyone.
 - Located at the high school or Maple Street
 - Affordable Community Health Center
 - More trash cans
 - Community gardens
 - Improve all existing recreational areas and make them accessible to all residents.
 - Pick up trash, more activities for everyone (families)
- Has anyone linked up with any bank or realtor to see if there could be land that we could rent (to eventually own) for a community garden

Events

- Treasure hunt for a cash prize in downtown Essex Junction. Each person can pay \$5 to get in and the winner will get all the money.
- I would like to have the senior center offer more activities that appeal to younger seniors, such as birdwatching, garden club, chess, maybe some exercise equipment and/or a senior rock band.
- Keep up community events such as summer movie nights at the Five Corners Farmers Market location.
- Libraries could host adult literacy classes, poetry jams, and writers workshops.
- Continue the Block Party and Farmer's Market
- libraries to host adult literacy classes, poetry jams , and writers workshops

Community Connections



Our deep connections with each other make Essex special. Neighbors help each other during good times and bad. We value diversity and welcome everyone. We build our sense of community at local events such as the Memorial Day Parade, Five Corners Farmers Market, and Winter Carnival. Our local newspapers and online forums give us plenty of ways to stay in touch. Residents participate in local government and volunteer.

Action Ideas

Events

- Summer Concerts in Essex Center area.
- It would be great to use the old church or theatre in the Fort where I live. I'd love to see that theatre show art house movies on Friday nights!
- Hold quarterly potluck or coffee gatherings in many parts of the community so that residents can meet one another. ideas: at the recycling station, in the senior center, at EJRP, at Memorial Hall, etc.
- Host more block parties, farmer's markets and other community builders
- Explore the possibility of a farmer's market in the Center to compliment the one in the
- Institute community clean-up days each season, not just the first Saturday in May. Maybe walk-a-thons where groups walk together to pick up debris. Getting rid of litter is a quality of life issue and maybe highlighting the problem will impact the litterbugs among us who think it's okay to toss their cigarette butts or beer cans out the car window. Cleaner roadways will make it more of a pleasure for runners, walkers
- With neighborliness being the goal would like a day set aside where neighbors would give a token to the neighbors on either side
- Neighborhood contests
- Town sponsored community garage sale
- Community events focused on diversity and to welcome newcomers
- Community scavenger hunt that would encourage visiting different areas or history throughout town and village
- Community holiday card exchange
- Community pub crawl
- Farm to table breakfast/lunch. Promote backyard gardening & then have a way for people to donate the excess of their gardens.

Gathering Places

- Build a community kitchen and/or community gathering place that is open to all Essex residents.
- Community arts space/creative space/art festival

Participation and Communication

- Village wide community calendar including activities and schools
- Small community grants/projects - Set up a fund and have people apply for grants to do smaller area improvements.
- An I love Vermont or I am a Vermonter campaign...what makes us special: community-minded, independence.

- Town phone directory (for homes, businesses, organizations, civic entities and services)
- A publicly accessible list of priorities that will be taken seriously when setting town and school budgets.
- Make Town Meeting a forum that can be used to more truly express and act upon the wishes and opinions of the people of the Town. Moving it to a weekend and allowing motions from the floor would be great first steps.
- Invite residents to help with town projects, such as bike paths, etc. Hold social events to add to attractiveness of teaming/volunteering
- Provide more community based opportunities for students in the high school age group to become more involved
- Meet your local state representative/senators and community leaders day
- Increase voter turnout by putting more local initiatives on local ballots and hitting the streets to drum up participation.
- Helping Hands
 - website where folks who need an item or task done who are not able can post, and where the rest of us can look up who needs help.... would be great for everyone and bring the community closer together...
 - Shared community tools
 - shovels, ways to use things we need only once)
 - Would also love to see a barter or for free posting board via internet so we can find good homes for items we no longer want or need. Would be preferable giving things to others in the village or town vs dumping at goodwill...
 - Skills bank for community resources
 - Neighbor helping neighbor day – people who need help paired with people who can give help
 - Car-sharing – zip car to cut back to single car family
- Block party in a box
- E-mail specific to Upland and connecting roads

Governance

- Elected mayor
- Let's also raise the Conservation Committee to commission status. We have an Economic Development Commission and a Planning Commission, both focused on making Essex as much like Williston as possible, while the CC has only advisory power. We need some push back if our natural places and historical sites are to be preserved.
- Combine the Village and the Town into one (1) Essex community
- Change formal postal address to Essex, VT 05452, so everyone gets the point that they live in Essex -- a 250 year old town -- first, and EJ, EC, etc. second.
- Change the way the USPS refers to the town, so that people in Essex have that name in their addresses.
- Consolidate the Town and the Village. There is a schizophrenic feeling to having two of many things. People need to get over themselves and do what is best, which for a small population is to realize we do not need two separate governments.
- Build a bridge between budgets and quit duplication of spending.
- Combine municipal and school districts in Essex and Essex Junction, so we actually become one community.
- Combine the village and town stat!! It's ridiculous that it's such a huge issue that is really just a "no brainer"!
- Combining the Brownell and Essex Free Libraries into one entity with two branches.
- Combining the Essex and Essex Junction Rec. Departments
- Same card catalog for both libraries
- Need more services, especially for mentally ill and homeless



Education

Essex invests time, energy, and resources to ensure that our highly respected schools meet the needs of everyone in the community. We are proud to support learning that extends beyond the traditional classroom and includes the arts, athletics, and vocational instruction. Community programs and libraries offer diverse and affordable opportunities that prepare residents of all ages for lifelong learning and for work in an evolving economy.

Action Ideas

Educational Infrastructure

- Funding and building a state of the art field house and indoor pool complex preferably co-located with the Essex Tree Farm
- Natural playgrounds on all school playgrounds

Curriculum

- Lots of community service projects
- Gardening projects for the kids
- Recess for ADL
- Try to influence the school system and board to get a new math program
- For the Essex Town schools to offer instructions for advanced or gifted learners
- Maintaining strong academic programs at EHS
- An affordable education alternative in Essex for those that do not thrive in the mainstream public schools
- Anti-bullying curriculum in schools and among school residents
- Walk to school program (support families and students in getting to school via active transportation)
- Change curriculum to include other cultures and societies

Educational Improvements

- Better checks and balances on school board and superintendent's office
- Better evaluations of teachers specifically at Hiawatha Elementary School.

Community Education

- Encourage the use of libraries
- Little Libraries could somehow promote the use of the local libraries as important resources and community centers.
- Teach citizens more about Essex. Specifically about history and its natural resources



Thoughtful Growth

We value wide-open spaces and tight-knit neighborhoods, rural roads and vibrant downtown streets. Essex is a place where we can enjoy a beautiful view, walk in the woods and go out to eat without ever leaving town. We support a diverse housing mix, opportunities for business development and a transportation system with a variety of options including a connected network of walking and biking routes.

Action Ideas

Downtown Infrastructure/Beautification

- Decorations in town for a couple of holidays per year
- A park filled with donated art
- More water fountains around town
- Beautification projects that the public can be involved in
- Create incentives to help area businesses spruce up their exteriors, especially in the downtown area
- Put a moratorium on the construction of any more large apartment buildings.
- Permanently close off Railroad Ave - make this a “little church street” with markets every week where local craftsmen can share and sell their trade; have food stands and live music
- Do over the area around the rail/bus station to be more interesting, prettier, and perhaps safer
 - \$4million for updating the train station and surrounding area. (\$3 mill for the station improvements shown in concept last year and another million for spin-off projects).
- Help property owners take away the structures/rubble to improve aesthetics
- Green Space
 - Build green space right in the center of the Village near 5 Corners
 - Preserve green space by building up instead of out
 - Create a village green with trees, grass and shrubs in the Village, former Chittenden Bank lot .all utilities within the village should be underground
- Bring artists here—creativity breeds more creativity
- Make the 5 corners intersection more attractive - there is too much pavement in the intersection and in the parking lots of surrounding businesses.

Governance

- Update zoning regulations and building codes to favor construction types that will last for generations (brick over wood)
- Create a town ordinance that includes a subjective element so that our civic leaders can use their authority to deny business and projects that diminish the quality of all of our lives.
- Institute form-based codes
- Strengthen and enforce building and zoning regulations and institute design review

- Free village pickup – a day where everyone could put at the curb everything they don't want or use in their home (other than toxic or dangerous items)
- Noise Pollution
 - Create and enforce noise laws
 - Reduce vehicle/motorbike noise pollution
 - Eliminate or reduce the train whistles during the night

Environmental

- More trees downtown
- A comprehensive energy plan for both town and village
- Incorporation of green energy building standards
- Regularly scheduled green-up days – quarterly
- Promote recycling at the Soccer fields
- Roof top and wall gardens in concrete jungle areas and at schools

Agriculture/Food

- Edible front yard contest
- Offer grants and incentives to keep farmlands farmland and encourage more "truck gardens" to raise edibles other than field corn or hay
- Keep up the community gardens for vegetable growing
An additional Farmer's Market in the town-maybe at Lang Farm or one of the schools

Recreation Infrastructure

- A plan to make tree climbing more accessible for kids
- A bike share program
- Build more mountain bike trails
- Indoor recreation facility in the Town
- A way to walk into Maple Street Park without walking through the parking lot (dangerous for kids), like adding a sidewalk by apartments on the right

Transport/Transportation Infrastructure

- Submit grant proposals to get the train running through St. Albans, to Montreal, and back, with two commuter runs per day.
- Make Route 15 and Route 2a four lane parkways
- Finish the Circ highway/build a Circ alternative; bridge over the river to connect Essex to Williston
- Use more merges instead of lights around town in future planning; use roundabouts instead of stop lights e.g. at the intersection of South St and Rt 15.
- Synchronizing the traffic lights and allowing traffic to flow faster in (morning) and out (evening)
- More street lights on 117 (to help bikers)
- Make places more accessible for people with different abilities
- Find a way to slow traffic on Pleasant St. We need real speed bumps.
- Bus Service
 - A direct bus line from Essex Center to Burlington with no detours

- Provide express bus service from the Lang Farm shopping area and from Rt 15 shopping areas near CVE to MCHV bus access area and to downtown Burlington Cherry St station
- An Essex link to Mega bus to connect people from Boston and sites along the route to the train to Montreal
- Make bus and rail service function with peak commute transit times equal to off peak transit time.
- A bus that goes both directions from village to town, not just in a loop.

Walkways & Bikeways

- Crosswalks
 - More crosswalks: River Rd to Pinewood Manor, intersection at Rt 128 and Rt 15, top of Sandill Rd.
 - Make crosswalks safer; keep freshly painted
 - Create a way to cross the Circ safely
- Sidewalks
 - Sidewalks enabling EHS students to walk down Pinecrest (not in the road)
 - Widen sidewalk on Sandhill out to Route 15
 - Finish sidewalks from bottom of Sand Hill to the neighborhood past the power station
 - Sidewalk along Rt 128
 - Sidewalk connecting Chapin and Meadows Edge to Rt. 15
 - Sidewalk along the north side of Rt. 15 on the east side of the intersection with Old Stage Rd.
 - Sidewalk from 4 corners on towers to Clover Drive.
 - Sidewalks along Rt 15 from 5 Corners to Essex Library in Essex Center; to Allen Martin Pkwy
 - Sidewalk on Rt 117 to connect Pinewood and 5 Corners/EHS
 - Sidewalk going down River Road in the opposite direction, to connect Pinewood with Essex Green.
- Bike/Walk Accessibility
 - More bike lanes and sidewalks to connect neighborhoods.
 - More safe walking and biking on Rt 15 – make Town easier to walk in like Village
 - Make the 289, 2a, Susie Wilson intersection safe for bikers.
 - River walk/path to highlight the falls and canoe/kayak access
 - Identify all the active healthy activities in the Essex community, movies, parks, Fitness edge, pools, schools, restaurants and connect all of them for bikes and pedestrians
 - Wider bike paths along Maple St.
- Pedestrian/Recreation Path Locations
 - Build a family friendly 6' wide bike path between the 5 corners and butler corners.
 - Build a pedestrian bridge across the Circ from the pinewood trails to the path going to the Essex schools.
 - Walkable, safe path on River Road (not just from Pinewood, but originating at Sand Hill)
 - Walkable, safe path on Rt. 15 (Essex Way to Main Street)
 - Path from Countryside to Lang Farm
 - Rec path from Colchester Pond to Indian Brook
 - Path from Inn at Essex to Indian Brook

- Bike and pedestrian paths across Essex and from 5 Corners to Essex Town, along Rt 15
- Pedestrian and bike access to IBM
- Connect Pinewood, Lang Farm, and Corduroy/Kiln/Mason/Woods End area neighborhoods with bike/people paths
- Bike Path Locations
 - Bike lanes/bike path between Essex Junction and Burlington (Pearl St. to Susie Wilson Rd, Colchester, Winooski, etc.)
 - Bike path from Burlington to Essex Junction and Essex Town
 - Bike path or lane from Essex Center to Autumn Knoll
 - Include bike path plans in Crescent Connector (between Park St. and Maple St.)
 - Bike paths from areas around 5 Corners to ADL to enable student bike commuting
 - A bike path from Rustic Drive in Pinewood to Sydney Drive in Lang Farm
 - Bike lanes on Old Stage Road, Towers Rd to allow more kids to bike to school and safe passage to Westford
 - Bike Path on 128 from Weed Rd. to Essex Free Library
 - Bike path through CVE open to the public
 - Separate bike path along Circ
 - Bike path between Pinewood Manor and Countryside
 - Bike paths from neighborhoods to elementary schools
 - Mansfield Ave needs a bike lane and a center line on the curvy part
 - Clearly-designated bike trail from where it dumps into Countryside, through five corners and connecting to new Williston trail; connect same trail from Saybrook/15 along 15 to Essex Town Pool area
 - Bike Path: back of ADL through the woods over to the power lines across to link Brickyard road to bike path crossover at the light and follow to backside of EJHS and in the woods by the fields and connect with the Tree Farm
 - Bike path from 5 Corners to Fletcher Allen
 - Bike path/route from Lang Farm/Countryside to Tree Farm soccer fields
 - Bike path from Pinewood Manor to 5 Corners.
 - Bike path along South St to Hiawatha
- Create or maintain bike paths within the communities by having outhouses, more garbage cans, painting graffiti

Maintenance of Existing Buildings

- Aesthetics – fix up old buildings
- Help available for homeowners to maintain and renovate homes and businesses
 - Apprenticeship program for students learning carpentry, plumbing, landscaping, etc.
 - Create a source for loans/grants to help with home repair/renovation.
- Build a memorial to the town's founders and people from the town that have gone on to undertake creative endeavors.

Safety



Essex is a safe place where neighbors watch out for one another. We value an active, visible police force and strong fire and rescue services. Upgrades to our physical infrastructure will allow us to move about our community with comfort and security.

Action Ideas

- Longer police reports in the Essex Reporter

Parks

- Have people circulating throughout the park (Maple Street)
- Surveillance at parks or at least police presence
- Parks have emergency phones for people without cellphones

Infrastructure

- Lighting
 - Street lighting should be improved in the neighborhoods within the Junction. Lighting is too low in regards to safety.
 - Survey needed for safety lights
 - Better lighting on Pearl Street from 5 Corners to South Summit
- Better stop lights
 - Crosswalks/light for fairground neighborhood
- Open the parking lot behind the Lincoln Inn (so that traffic from 2A to Rte 117 can circumvent the lights) to relieve some of the congestion
- Sidewalk maintenance
 - All sidewalks plowed, not just one side of the street.
 - Clean sidewalks in winter to permit safe walking for everyone
- Crossing gates at all railroad crossings

Education

- School equipped with emergency button to alert police 911
- Mandatory visitor check-ins at schools (move to safety)
- Have school busses in Essex Jct pick up at various neighborhoods to lessen the traffic at the area schools (esp the middle school which creates a ton of traffic at 5 corners).
- Surveillance system in library

Heart & Soul Survey

Heart and Soul of Essex talked with almost 350 people who live or work in Essex during 43 Neighborhood Conversations. Thanks to those of you who participated! We are using what we heard during those conversations to create a vision and set of values that will inform community planning, decision making, and action in the future. During the conversations, participants consistently identified six values important for Essex: education, local economy, thoughtful growth, health and recreation, community connections, and safety. We want to make sure these values are yours! Your voice is important. Please take a minute to let us know what you think about these values, AND to share YOUR ideas for action.

How important is this value for Essex?

EDUCATION - Essex invests time, energy, and resources to ensure that our highly respected schools meet the needs of everyone in the community. We are proud to support learning that extends beyond the traditional classroom and includes the arts, athletics, and vocational instruction. Community programs and libraries offer diverse and affordable opportunities that prepare residents of all ages for lifelong learning and for work in an evolving economy.

1 2 3 4 5

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SAFETY - Essex is a safe place where neighbors watch out for one another. We value an active, visible police force and strong fire and rescue services. Upgrades to our physical infrastructure will allow us to move about our community with comfort and security.

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Is there an important Essex value missing from this list?

What is your action idea for making Essex the best it can be?

Be specific! Be specific! For example, instead of submitting an idea to improve the appearance of new buildings, suggest enacting a code so new buildings in the village center look similar to existing historic buildings. Or, instead of suggesting a new coffee shop, suggest a coffee shop in Essex Center that serves baked goods and has an open mic night.

Please tell us a bit about yourself so we can make sure we are reaching many different people in our community.

What is your connection with Essex?

- I live in Essex in the village
- I live in Essex in the town outside the village
- I work in Essex but I don't live here
- I don't live or work in Essex

Have you participated in a Heart & Soul of Essex activity?

(Launch Party, Neighborhood Conversations, Essex Trivia or the Heart & Soul Photo Booth)

- Yes
- No

What age are you?

- 12 – 18
- 19 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 64
- 65+