

June 29, 2015

Committee Recommends Creation of Unified School District for Essex Junction, Essex Town, and Westford

After four months of discussion and analysis, a committee made up of 20 citizens from Essex Junction, Essex Town, and Westford, agreed to submit a proposal to voters this November to create a unified school district.

The central task of the Committee was to determine if school district consolidation would result in better outcomes and opportunities for students, at a cost that the three communities can afford today and into the future.

“This is an important first step. All three communities are very proud of the high quality education enjoyed by today’s students,” said Brendan Kinney, chair of the Committee. “A unified approach will expand upon this tradition of quality while also reducing costs through efficiencies of a shared system. The fact is, we can be better together.”

The Committee will now engage residents in a conversation about the proposal. “Our job at this point is to talk with as many members of the three communities as possible,” said Kinney. “We are planning a series of public forums beginning in September that will provide opportunities for discussion and input.”

The State of Vermont offers various tax incentives to communities that pursue school district consolidation. Under Act 46, a unified school district would enjoy five years of property tax savings of 10 cents the first year, 8 cents the next, 6 cents, 4 cents and 2 cents in the final year. Under Act 153, the incentives are for four years, starting with 8 cents and following the same schedule.

Residents of Essex Junction, Essex Town, and Westford will be asked to vote on the creation of a unified school district under Act 46. If Westford votes no, then a Regional Education District would be formed by Essex Junction and Essex Town under Act 153. Under either scenario, a new district would become operational on July 1, 2017. If either Essex Junction or Essex Town votes no, then no school district consolidation would take place. Both Essex Junction and Essex Town are required, since they share a high school.

“The current school governance structure is onerous and disjointed,” said Kinney. “Students in our three communities can be better served by having a common and aligned curriculum from pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade. And our analysis shows that there could be an initial cost savings in the short-term by merging the operations of central office functions and longer-term savings may be found through efficiencies and streamlined operations.”

For more information about the work of the Committee including a summary of Frequently Asked Questions, visit: <https://redstudy.wordpress.com/>