ESSEX RESIDENT SURVEY – September 2019

This survey is to gather input from residents of the Essex community on the topic of a potential merger between the municipal governments of the Town of Essex and the Village of Essex Junction.

The objective of this survey is to determine what a proposal for a merged community could look like in terms of governance structure, representation, taxation, and identity.

This is a follow up to a survey that went out in July 2019 and a follow up to a series listening sessions that took place in August 2019. Regardless of whether you completed that survey or participated in the listening sessions, you can fill out this survey.

The Town of Essex Selectboard and Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees will evaluate feedback and determine a governance model proposal that may be placed on the ballot for Election Day November 3, 2020. There will be other opportunities for public input prior to November 3, 2020.

It is estimated this survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please drop off completed forms **by Monday, October 14, 2019** at any of the following:

- Town of Essex Municipal Building, 81 Main St.
- Village of Essex Junction Municipal Building, 2 Lincoln St.
- Brownell Library, 6 Lincoln St.
- Essex Free Library, 1 Browns River Rd.
- Essex Area Senior Center, 2 Lincoln St.
- Essex Junction Recreation and Parks, 75 Maple St.

Would you prefer to submit your response online?

Visit https://www.research.net/r/Essex2020 or scan the QR code image with your smartphone camera to be taken to the online questionnaire.

Please visit www.GreaterEssex2020.org for more information about a governance change vote in November 2020. The site will be updated regularly.

Current Municipal Structure

The Village of Essex Junction ("the Village") is a municipality within the larger municipality of the Town of Essex ("the Town"):

- *Residents of the Village are also residents of the Town. Village residents pay municipal taxes to both the Village and Town.*
- *Residents of the Town living outside of the Village ("the Town outside the Village") are only residents of the Town. Town outside the Village residents pay municipal taxes only to the Town.*

Q. At present, would you say that you are generally in favor, opposed, or undecided when it comes to the idea of merging the municipal governments of the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction? Circle one.

- Generally in favor of merger
- Undecided
- Generally opposed to merger

Q. Why would you say you are in favor, not in favor, or undecided?

Representation

*The following questions deal with **representation** and how a governing body in a merged municipality could be comprised.*

The five-member Town of Essex Selectboard and the five-member Village of Essex Junction Board of Trustees are presently elected "at-large" from their respective communities. Members of the Town Selectboard, regardless of where they live in the Town, which includes the Village, are elected by the entire community and are expected to represent the entire community; members of the Trustees, regardless of where they live in the Village, are expected to represent the entire Village.

Here is one way a governing body can be comprised to serve a unified municipality. Please read this description, sourced and modified from the National League of Cities website, and answer the questions that follow.

At-Large

All at-large members are elected to serve the same constituency, which is the population of the community as a whole. At-large election proponents favor having council members elected by the entire community because:

- *Council members in an at-large system can be more impartial, rise above the limited perspective of a single district and concern themselves with the problems of the whole community.*
- *Vote trading between council members is minimized.*
- *Well-qualified individuals are elected to the council because the candidate pool is larger.*

However, at-large elections can weaken the representation of particular groups, especially if the group does not have a community-wide base of operations or is an ethnic or racial group concentrated in a specific area in the community.

Q. If the Town and Village governments merge into a single municipality, I believe <u>all</u> members of the new, single governing board, regardless of where they live in Essex, should be elected <u>at-large</u> from the entire community. Circle one.

Agree / Disagree

Q. For what reasons do you agree or disagree with having a governing body where all members are elected at-large? Write your thoughts below.

Here is another way a governing body can be comprised to serve a unified municipality. Please read this description, sourced and modified from the National League of Cities, and answer the questions that follow.

Districts/Wards

These elections select one or more council members from a corresponding geographical section of the community, called a district or ward. District election proponents favor having council members elected to represent individual wards because:

- *District elections give all legitimate groups, especially those with a geographic base, a better chance of being represented on the town council, especially minority groups.*
- *District council members are more sensitive to the small but important problems of their constituents.*
- *District elections may improve citizen participation because councilpersons that represent a specific district may be more responsive to their constituency.*

However, councils elected by district elections may experience more infighting and be less likely to prioritize the good of the community over the good of their district.

Note: In a district/ward representative model, all districts and wards would need to be near equal in population to maintain balance. With that in mind, a ward may need to comprise a larger area than just your neighborhood or the area immediately surrounding your home.

Q. If the Town and Village governments merge into a single municipality, I believe there should be representative districts and members of the governing board should be elected from the districts where they live. Circle one.

Agree / Disagree

Q. For what reasons do you agree or disagree with having a governing body where representatives come from districts/wards? Write your thoughts below.

Q. If the Essex governing body was to have representative districts/wards, how likely is it you would run to represent your district/ward? Circle one.

Extremely likely / Very likely / Moderately likely / Somewhat likely / Not at all likely

Mixed System

Some municipalities combine these two methods by electing some council members at large and some from districts. An individual council member will either occupy a district or an at-large seat on the council.

Note: A governing body comprised of both at-large seats and district/ward seats would set different term lengths depending on the type of seat. For example, an at-large seat may be a four-year term whereas a district/ward seat may be a two-year term.

Q. If the Town and Village governments merge into a single municipality, I believe there should be a <u>combination</u> of both at-large seats and district/ward representatives. Circle one.

Agree / Disagree

Q. For what reasons do you agree or disagree with having a governing body where there is a combination of at-large and district/ward representatives? Write your thoughts below.

Q. Please rank your preference for which representation structure you would prefer in a merged municipality. Place an "X" in each column, one per column.

	1st Preference	2nd Preference	3rd Preference
All at-large seats			
All district/ward-based seats			
Combination of at-large and districts/wards			

Mayor

In council-manager governments (as presently exists in Essex) most mayors are considered "weak" mayors meaning their authority does not supersede the council's or manager's authority in running the government. However, mayors can be elected "at-large" from the entire community and can act as spokespersons for the government, and have other duties assigned by the council and the town charter. A mayor could be elected for having a vision for the Essex community. An Essex mayor could have a seat on the Vermont Mayors Coalition, which lobbies Vermont government on economic, legislative, and social issues, particularly those affecting the state's largest communities.*

(Sourced from National League of Cities)*

Q. In addition to a unified representative council and an appointed manager, Essex should have a mayor. Circle one.

Agree / Disagree

Q. Why do you agree or disagree that Essex should have a mayor? Write your thoughts below.

Voting

The next few questions focus on the topic of voting.

The Town of Essex government and Village of Essex Junction government both have "annual meeting" nights where voters assemble at Essex High School auditorium, discuss each municipal budget, add to or subtract from it, and approve the municipal budgets by voice vote.

These in-person meetings allow staff and elected officials to address resident questions and concerns before the vote occurs.

Many Vermont communities use the same process, but some have their budgets approved by the more familiar "Australian ballot voting" with voters marking a paper ballot and depositing it in a ballot box during all day voting. Australian ballot voting also allows for early voting and absentee ballots.

Q. I think municipal budgets should continue to be voted on by a voice vote during annual meetings rather than through Australian (paper) ballot voting. Circle one.

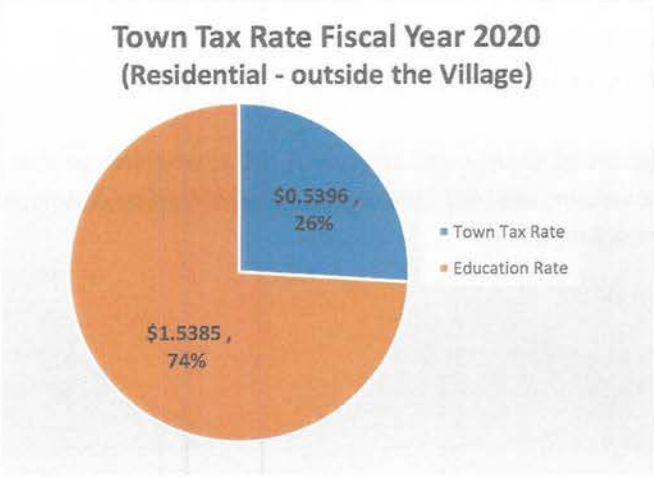
Agree / Disagree

Q. Why do you agree or disagree that municipal budgets should continue to be voted on by a voice vote at annual meetings? Write your thoughts below.

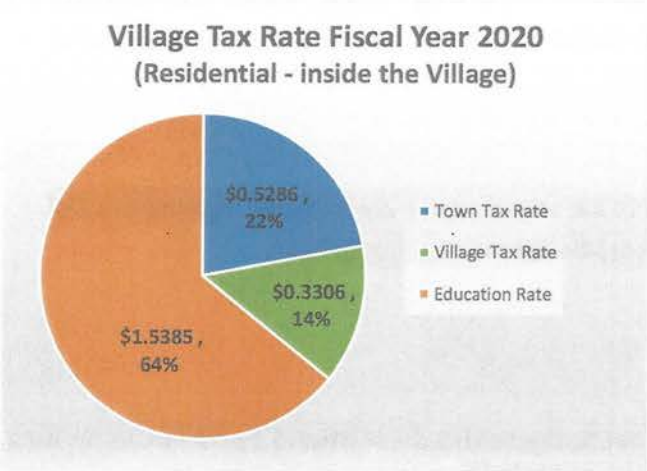
Taxation

The next few questions focus on the topic of municipal taxes. Only property owners in the Essex community pay municipal taxes. If you are renting, we would still like your input because your rent amount may be impacted by taxes your landlord pays on behalf of that rental property.

Residents of the Town outside the Village pay municipal taxes only to the Town.



Residents of the Village of Essex Junction pay municipal taxes to <u>both</u> the Village and Town.



**Does not include Town Highway Tax Rate, which is paid only by Town outside the Village residents.*

The amount Essex homeowners owe in municipal tax is based on the assessed home value:

- *A resident of the **Town outside the Village** with a home value of $280,000 pays a **total of $1,510.88 in municipal taxes***
- *A resident of the **Village of Essex Junction** with a home value of $280,000 pays a **total of $2,405.76 in municipal taxes***

The Town and Village coming together means the two different levels of taxation meet somewhere between the two. This requires the lower of the two rates (Town) to rise as the higher of the two rates (Village) falls.

Additional Considerations:

- *All residents of Essex, whether in the Village or the Town outside the Village, pay the same rate in education taxes. Education tax rates would not be impacted by merger.*
- *Only users of municipal water and sewer pay for these services. Residents in parts of Essex that do not have municipal water or sewer service do not pay for those services or their associated infrastructure.*
- *Any remaining debt owed by the Village municipality will stay with the properties in the Village. A temporary "Village Debt Assessment District" would be established and sunset once the debt is paid in full by Village residents.*

Q. In a merged government, all residents should pay municipal taxes based on a single tax rate, regardless of where in Essex someone lives. Circle one.

Agree / Disagree

Q. Why would you agree or disagree with having a single municipal tax rate for all Essex residents? Write your thoughts below.

Q. Merger that results in a single municipal tax rate may cause property taxes to increase for some residents. If a single tax rate for all residents in the community were to be achieved after a period of time of gradually evening out tax rates, what would be the ideal time frame? [Note: shorter time frames = higher annual increases for residents who receive increases.] Circle one.

- Immediate equal tax rate
- Equal tax rate achieved in no more than 3 years
- Equal tax rate achieved in no more than 5 years
- Equal tax rate achieved in no more than 7 years
- Equal tax rate achieved in no more than 10 years
- Equal tax rate achieved in no more than 12 years

Identity

The next two questions focus on the subject of community identity following a potential merger.

Q. If a new charter is created for a unified community named "Essex," I would like the former Village to be known as the unincorporated Village of Essex Junction, to help maintain its historic identity, but with no separate governing body or separate taxing authority. Circle one.

Agree / Disagree

Q. If the two municipalities merge, we should try to retain some aspects of our Town and Village identities, as long as it doesn't impact costs or the delivery of municipal services. Circle one.

Strongly agree / Somewhat agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat disagree / Strongly disagree

Development

The next few questions focus on the topic of development in the community and municipal services.

Q. How do you feel about development in the Essex community as a whole, as in the planning and construction of new residential and commercial buildings in the community? Circle one.

- I like the way the community is developing
- I dislike the way the community is developing
- There are both aspects I like and dislike as it pertains to development in the community
- I don't have an opinion

Q. How important is retention of the character of rural parts of Essex to you? Circle one.

Very important / Somewhat important / Not at all important

Q. How do you believe merger will impact development in the community? Circle one.

- Merger will positively impact development
- Merger will negatively impact development
- I don't believe merger will impact development
- I don't know enough to say

Services

Q. I'm concerned that merger will decrease services that contribute to my quality of life in Essex, for example, how often the streets are plowed or the availability of recreational programs. Circle one.

Agree / Disagree

Q. I'm concerned about the impact of merger on the following municipal services: Circle all that apply.

- Libraries
- Fire department
- Recreation
- Public works
- Senior center
- Planning and community development
- Reduction of employees
- Other (please specify):
- None of these

Public Outreach and Education

Should there be a public vote on a potential merger of the Town of Essex and Village of Essex Junction municipal governments, it will come in the form of an Australian (paper) ballot vote and occur on Election Day November 3, 2020. Prior to that, a presentation on a merger proposal would take place during the March/April 2020 annual meetings for both the Town and Village. Throughout 2020, the municipalities will provide information and education to residents on the topic of merger, while also seeking additional input and feedback from residents.

Q. How would you like to receive information pertaining to a proposed merger? Circle all that apply.

- Email (sign up for an email list)
- Mail sent to home
- At the Town/Village annual meeting
- In a public meeting outside of the annual meetings
- Town/Village municipal websites
- A website solely dedicated to the merger question
- Town/Village social media accounts
- Front Porch Forum
- Other (please specify):

Proposed Merger Options

Q. If the following proposed merger options were put up for a vote, which would you vote in favor of? Circle all you would vote 'yes' for.

- A single municipality with a representation structure that includes at-large seats only
- A single municipality with a representation structure that includes district/ward-based seats only
- A single municipality with a representation structure that includes a combination of both at-large and district/ward-based seats
- None of the above – I would not support any merger proposal
- I would prefer some other option for merger (please specify):

Q. Which would be your top choice for merger or non-merger? Circle one.

- A single municipality with a representation structure that includes at-large seats only
- A single municipality with a representation structure that includes district/ward-based seats only
- A single municipality with a representation structure that includes a combination of both at-large and district/ward-based seats
- None of the above – I would not support any merger proposal
- I would prefer some other option for merger (please specify):

Please tell us about yourself

Q. How old will you be on November 3, 2020? _____ years old

Q. Where do you live? Circle one.

Village of Essex Junction / Essex Town outside the Village / I live in Essex but not sure where

(For a listing of streets in the Village of Essex Junction and Town outside the Village, please refer to the end of this questionnaire. Village streets are lowercase, Town outside the Village streets are UPPERCASE.)

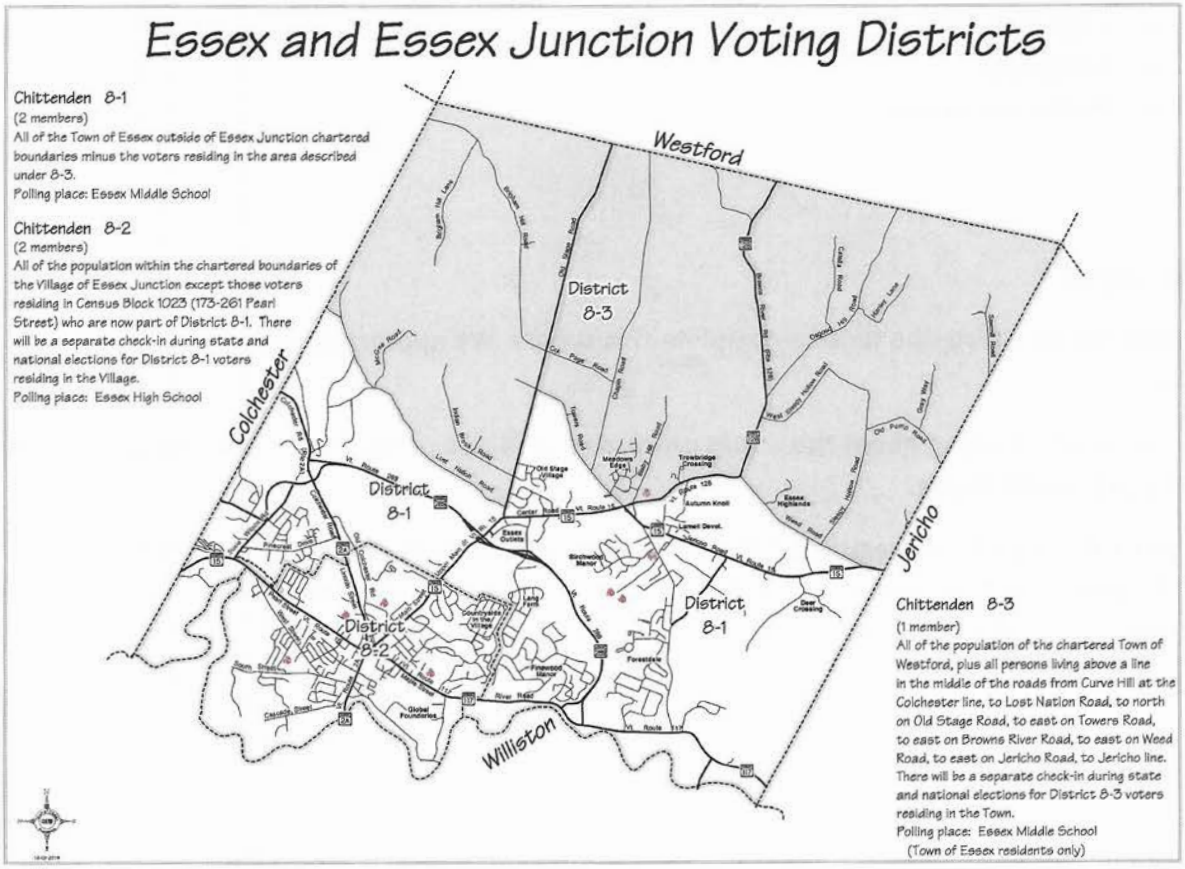
Q. Do you own or rent your primary residence? Circle one.

Own / Rent / Prefer not to say / Other (please specify):

Q. How long have you lived in the Essex community? _____ years

Q. Do you have children under 18 living in your household? Circle one.

Yes / No / Prefer not to say



Q. Are you currently registered to vote in the Essex? Circle one.

- Yes, District 8-1
- Yes, District 8-2
- Yes, District 8-3
- Yes, but I'm not sure of my district
- No

Q. How would you characterize the area in which your home is located? Circle one.

Rural / Suburban / Urban

Q. What was the combined income for all members of your household last year? Circle one.

- Less than $25,000
- $25,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000-$149,999
- $150,000-$199,999
- $200,000+
- Prefer not to say

Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. We appreciate your thoughts on this topic.

For more information about the entire process related to a potential merger vote, please visit **GreaterEssex2020.org.**

If you are currently not registered to vote in Essex, please visit or contact the Town Clerks Office at 81 Main Street or register online at the Vermont Secretary of State website (https://olvr.sec.state.vt.us/).

Town (outside the Village) = upper case and yellow highlight
Village = lower case
* = private drive
~ = proposed road

as of 01-11-2018

EXISTING ROADS IN ESSEX AND ESSEX JUNCTION

ABARE AVE
Abnaki Ave
Acorn Cir
Adams Ct
ALDER LN
ALDERBROOK RD
Algonquin Ave
ALLEN MARTIN DR
ALLEN MARTIN PKY
ANDREW AVE
Arbor Ter
Arlington St
Appletree Ln *
Aspen Dr
Athens Dr
Autumn Pond Way *
BAKER ST
BASHAW DR
Bass Lane *
Beech St
BILLIE BUTLER DR
Birch Ln *
BIXBY HILL RD
BLACKBERRY RD
BLAIR RD
BLUESTEM RD
BOBOLINK CIR
Briar Ln
Brickyard Rd
BRIGHAM HILL LN
BRIGHAM HILL RD
Brooks Ave
Brookside Ave
Brownell Dr
BROWNS RIVER RD
BURLINGTON RD *
BUSHEY LN *
BUTTERNUT CT
BUTTON DR
CABOT DR
Camp St
CARDINAL LN *
CARMICHAEL ST
Cascade Ct
Cascade St
Cascadnac Ave
CATELLA RD
CAVENDISH DR
CEDAR CT
CEDAR ST
CEMETERY RD
CENTER RD
Central St
CHAPIN RD
CHASE CT
CHELSEA RD
Cherokee Ave
Cherry St
Chestnut Ln *
Church St
CILLEY HILL RD
CINDY LN
CIRCLE DR
CIRCUMFERENTIAL HWY
CLAIRE DR *
CLARA HILL LN *
Clems Dr
CLOVER DR
COL. PAGE RD
COLBERT ST
COLCHESTER RD
COMMON, THE
COMMONWEALTH AVE
Corduroy Rd
CORPORATE DR
Countryside Dr
CRAFTSBURY CT
Cree Ave
CREEK RD
Crestview Rd
Curtis Ave
CURVE HILL RD
Cushing Dr
CYPRESS LN
DALTON DR
DAMON DR
DARTMOOR CT
DAVID DR
DEBRA DR
DEER CROSSING LN
Densmore Dr
DEVON HILL CT
DIANE DR *
DISCOVERY RD
Doon Way
DOUBLEDAY LN *
DOUGLAS RD
Drury Dr
Dunbar Dr
East St
East Williams St
Edgewood Dr
Educational Dr *
Elm St
ESSEX HIGHLANDS
ESSEX RD *
ESSEX WAY
ETHAN ALLEN AVE
EVERGREEN DR ~
EWING PL
Fairview Dr
FERN HOLLOW RD
FLEURY RD
FOREST RD
FORT PKWY
FOSTER RD
FOUNDERS RD *
FOX RUN RD
Francis Dr *
Franklin St *
FREDERICK RD
FREEMAN WOODS
Fuller Pl *
Gaines Ct *
GARDENSIDE LN
GAUTHIER DR
GENTES RD
GERO CT *
Giles Dr
GLENWOOD DR
GOODRICH LN
Grandview Ave
Grant St
GRAY WAY
GREENBRIAR DR
GREENFIELD CT
GREENFIELD RD
GREENFIELD ROAD EXT
Greenwood Ave
GRIFFIN LN *~
Grove St
HAGAN DR
HAMPSHIRE CT
HANLEY LN
Hawthorn Cir
Hayden St
HEATHERBUSH RD
Hiawatha Ave
HICKORY LN
HIGH VIEW DR
Hillcrest Rd
HILLSIDE CIR
Holy Family Pl *
Hubbells Falls Dr
Huron Ave
INDIAN BROOK RD
INDIGO LN *
IRA ALLEN DR
IRENE AVE
IRIS ST
Iroquois Ave
Ivy Ln
JACKSON HTS
Jackson St
JERICHO RD
Jones Ave
JOSEPH LN *
JOSHUA WAY
Juniper Ridge Rd
KANA LN *
KarsynReece Ln *
KELLOGG RD
Ketcham Dr
Killoran Dr

Kiln Rd
Kiln Rd *
Kiln Road Ext *
KIMBERLY DR
KIMO DR ~
Kings Ct *
KODIAK LN * ~
KURK DR
LAMELL AVE
Lamoille St
LAMORE RD
LANDFILL LN *
LANG DR
LASALLE RD
LAUREL DR
LAURETTE DR *
LAVIGNE RD
Lavoie Dr
LAWRENCE HTS *
LECLERC WDS *
LEO DR
LIDA DR
LILAC LN
Lillia Dr *
Lincoln Pl
Lincoln St
Lincoln Ter
LINDEN LN
Locust Ln *
LOGWOOD CIR
LONDONDERRY LN
LOST NATION RD
Loubier Dr
LYON LN *
Main St
Mansfield Ave
Maple St
Maple Street Ext *
MAPLELAWN DR
Maplewood Ln
MARCY DR *
MARGARET ST
MARION AVE
MARKET PL
Mason Dr
McGEE RD
McGregor St
Meadow Ter
Mill St *
Mohawk Ave
MORSE DR
Murray Rd
Nahma Ave
NAYLOR RD
NEW ENGLAND DR
Nicholas Ct *
North St
North Hillcrest Rd
NORTH WILLISTON RD
Oak St
OAKWOOD LN
OLD COLCHESTER RD
OLD PUMP RD
OLD STAGE RD
OLIVER WIGHT DR *
Oneida Ave
Onondaga Ave
Orchard Ter
ORLEANS RD ~
OSGOOD HILL RD
OVERLOOK TERR *
Owaissa Ave
PARIZO DR
Park Ave
Park St
Park Ter
PARTRIDGE DR
PATRICIA PL
PAYNE ST *
PEACHAM LN
Pearl St
PERKINS DR
PERRY DR
PETTINGILL RD
Pine Ct
PINECREST DR
PINEWOOD DR
PIONEER ST
Pleasant St
POINTE DR *
POMFRET LN
Poplar Ct
PRESCOTT ST
PRINCE DR ~
Prospect St
Railroad Ave
Railroad St
RAYMOND DR
Red Barn Rd *
RED PINE CIR
Redwood Ter
REPA DR
RICHARD ST
RIDGE RD
Rivendell Dr
RIVER RD
River St
RIVER VIEW DR
Robinson Pky *
RONALD CT
Roscoe Ct *
Rosewood Ln
ROSEWOOD TRL
Rotunda Ave
RUSTIC DR
RYAN ST *
SAGE CIR
SAND HILL RD
SAWMILL RD
SAXON HILL RD
Saxon Ln, Jericho
SAXONHOLLOW DR
SAYBROOK RD
School St
Seneca Ave
Shawns Way *
Sienna Ln *
Silver Bow Ter
SKYLINE DR
SLEEPY HOLLOW RD
SMOKE BUSH LN *
South Hill Dr
South St
South Street Ln *
South Summit St
SOUTHDOWN CT
Southview Rd
Spruce Ln *
St James Pl *
STANNARD DR
Stanton Dr
STEARNS AVE
STEEPLEBUSH RD
STONEBROOK CIR
SUFFOLK LN
Sugartree Ln
Summit St
SUNSET DR
SUSIE WILSON BYP
SUSIE WILSON RD
Sweetwater Ln *
Sycamore Ln
SYDNEY DR
Taft St
Tamarack Dr
TANGLEWOOD DR
THISTLE LN
THOMAS LN
THOMPSON DR
THRUSH LN *
Tiffany Ln *
TIMBERLANE DR
TOWERS RD
TURCOTTE RD
TURNBERRY RIDGE *
Tyler Dr
Upland Rd
UPPER MAIN ST
Vale Dr
VALLEYVIEW DR
Villa Dr
WALDEN WOODS
Walnut Ln *
Warner Ave
WASHINGTON CIR ~
Waverly St
WEATHERSFIELD BOW
WEED RD
Wenonah Ave
West Hillcrest Rd
WEST SLEEPY HOLLOW RD
West St
West Street Ext
Whipple Dr *
WHITCOMB MEADOWS LN
Whitcomb Rd *
WHITETAIL LN
WILDWOOD DR
Wilkinson Dr
Willeys Ct
Williams St
WILLOUGHBY DR
WINDRIDGE RD
WINOOSKI RD *
WINTERLANE CIR
WOLFF DR
WOODLAWN CT
WOODLAWN DR
Woodstock Ln *
Woods End Dr
WOODSIDE DR *
Wrisley Ct *
Wrisley St