

# Voters Elect a Diverse Slate of Candidates to School Board

by Irene Wrenner

Marlon Verasamy became the first Black citizen to win a seat on the Essex Westford School Board in the April 12th election.

He ran for the Essex Junction seat against another Black man, Juan Coleman. Both agreed, said Verasamy, that they would be “bringing history to the Board” regardless of who won.

Winners of the two Town seats were incumbent Robert Carpenter and Milton teacher Laura Taylor, who unseated long time incumbent Al Bombardier.



Verasamy, Carpenter, and Taylor made their support of the EWSD Equity Policy a focal point of their campaigns.

The School Board budget and [related questions passed](#), as did the Village of Essex Junction budget and its proposals for retail cannabis, a local option tax, a \$3m bond for a waterline replacement, [among others](#).

Raj Chawla, incumbent, won a contested race for the lone Village Trustee seat on the ballot.

(Diverse Board continues on page 4)

## Spongy Moths Poised to Repeat Last Year's Defoliation

by Ken Signorello

The moth formerly known as “gypsy” caused significant defoliation across town last spring, but the devastation was especially noticeable at Indian Brook Park and the Pinewood development off River Road.

Female spongy moths have laid hundreds of eggs in each egg mass, ready to hatch any day now and potentially cause a repeat defoliation.

As a member of the Essex Conservation & Trails Committee (CTC), this reporter has reached out to homeowners associations to meet and review options to mitigate the risk. To date, eight neighborhoods have

met to determine their strategy for dealing with this threat.

The CTC has also produced a fact sheet which may be found on the [Town website](#).

The Town and State have adopted a wait-and-see approach before treating public land.

A wet spring could boost a naturally occurring fungus and virus that may keep the moth population in check, as they have in prior years.

Trees can withstand one or two years of defoliation before those under stress show mortality from the effects of the insects' feeding.

(Spongy continues on page 2)



**Disclosure:** Ken Signorello is a Conservation & Trails Committee member

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## Spongy

Moths are just one CTC focus.

## Essex Adopt-a-Tree Program

With the emerald ash borer likely to kill many green ash trees planted in Town rights-of-way, the Conservation & Trails Committee has developed a program that will support newly planted replacement trees.

The [Adopt-a-Tree Program](#) "is a public-private partnership created by the Town of Essex to promote a healthy, vibrant, and diverse urban forest. Community members take on basic responsibilities to care for trees, and help keep an eye out for major tree problems to which the Town should be alerted."

## Come to Indian Brook Park

Saturday, May 21, 2022

for the annual

## Spring Clean-Up Day

1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

(Bad weather date: May 28)



## Annual Spring Clean-up Day

[Indian Brook Park Annual Spring Clean-Up Day](#): Saturday, May 21st from 1 pm to 3 pm (Bad weather date: May 28th.)

## Crabapple Tree Grant

CTC has received a Greening Schools grant from [VT Urban & Community Forestry](#) to plant a crabapple tree on the Essex Middle School campus.

# Separation Charter Signed into Law

by Irene Wrenner

It's official: the Governor has signed H.491, the Essex Junction Separation Charter, into law, making Essex Junction the 10th Vermont city.

On April 20th, celebrants gathered with signs for a honk-and-wave at Five Corners, dancing to the tune "[We Built This City](#)" by Starship.

Exactly 100 years ago, the last Vermont village split from its town: the City of Winooski left Colchester.

Separation of Essex Junction Village has been voted down in decades past. A call for Separate-and-Share was made by two Outside-the-Village



City supporters celebrate at the Five Corners

residents in 2019 but the concept did not gain traction until after the failure of the 2021 Merger vote(s).

Although the City and Town budgets won't fully separate until July 1st, 2023 after a year of transition, the City of Essex Junction will become an official municipality on July 1st, 2022.

# Trustees Plan to Celebrate Independence

by Ken Signorello

The Trustees are planning a celebration of Village Independence. They agreed to ask Our Village Our Voices (OVOV) to submit a proposal for under \$40,000 to organize an independence day party.

The tentative date for the celebration is July 1st, the day the Separation Charter is scheduled to take effect.

Among the ideas floated were a \$14,000 fireworks display and [\\$35,000 to bring the Village People](#) to Essex Junction for a concert.

Interim Village Co-Manager Brad Luck suggested that [federal ARPA funds might be used](#)

rather than Economic Development funds for this once-in-a-lifetime, once-in-one-hundred-year opportunity.

Also discussed at their April 13th meeting: The Trustees plan to include a salary range of \$105K to \$130K in their ad for a new Village Manager.

Interim Co-Manager Brad Luck announced the hire of a new Communications Director, Ashley Snellenberger. She will be moving here from Arkansas and will start employment with the Village on May 2nd. Her background is in communications for school districts.

(Independence continues on page 4)

# New Senate Districts Break Up the Chittenden 6-Pack

by Ken Signorello

The Senate Committee on Reapportionment recently approved its final description of new legislative Senate districts. That description was then added into H.722, a bill about the new House Districts.

After passage by both houses, Governor Phil Scott signed the new districts into law on April 6th.

One of the biggest changes in this year's bill is the dissolution of Chittenden County's six-member Senate District. With more than 120,000 constituents, Senate candidates found it difficult to campaign, and Senators were hard-pressed to represent the interests of more than 100,000 people.

The former six-member district has been divided. Three Senators will represent Burlington, Winooski, Essex Junction, and a southern part of Essex Town — as detailed in white on the bottom map — in a new Chittenden Central (CHI-C) district, shown in grey on the top map.

Three other Senators will represent South Burlington, Shelburne, Charlotte, Williston, Jericho, Underhill, Bolton and others (not shown here but visible on [the state's website](#)).

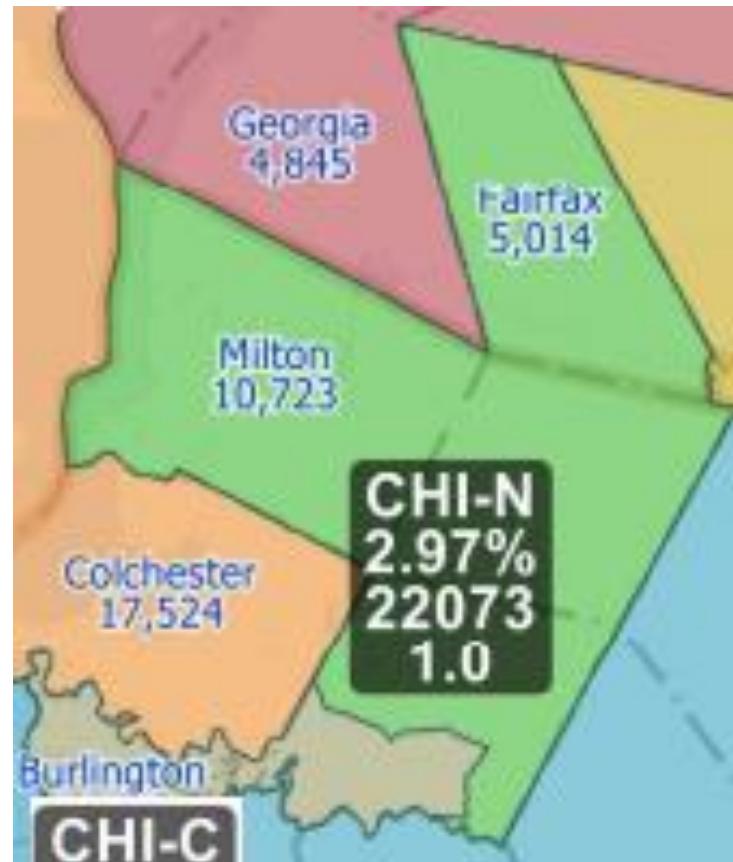
Population growth over the past ten years provided the opportunity for adding an extra Senator to Chittenden County.

Rural / suburban parts of Essex Town that are generally north of Route 15 will share that new Senator with Milton, Westford, and Fairfax.

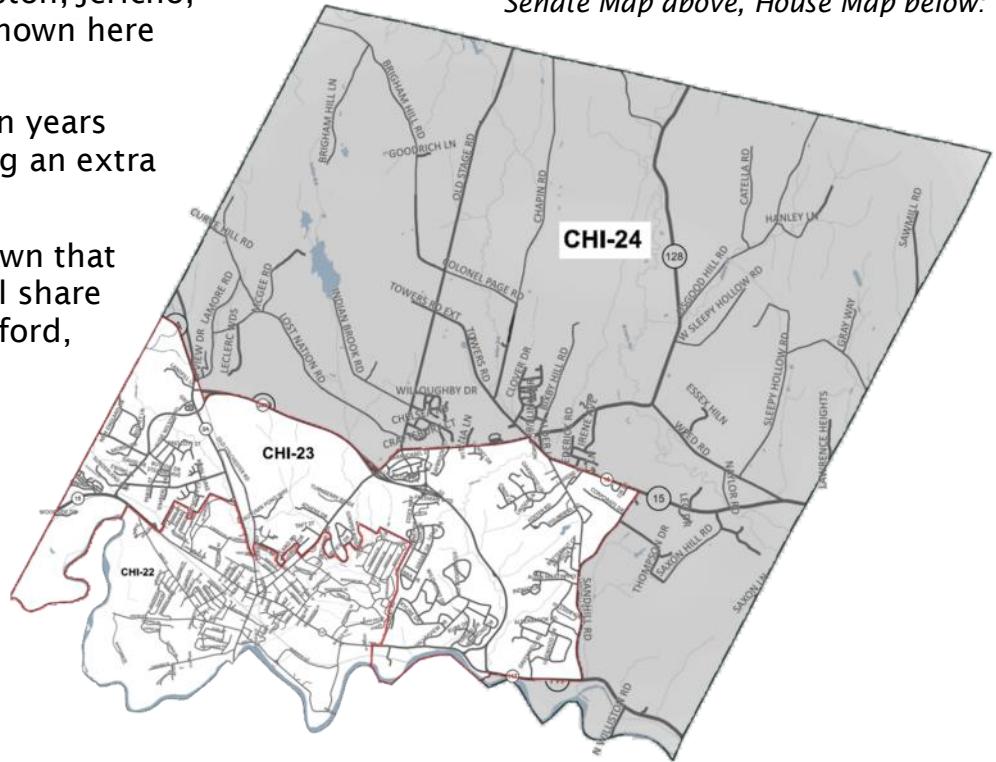
The Senate district map at the top of the page shows Westford and Essex Town, respectively below Fairfax, but neither are labeled.

The green Chittenden-North (CHI-N) Senate district's southern boundary follows the contours of the new House district in Essex Town and Essex Junction.

The House map at the bottom of the page shows street-level detail of where the Senate / House lines are drawn within the current Town of Essex, including Essex Junction. The House districts in white are part of the Senate's CHI-C. The House district in grey is part of CHI-N.



Senate Map above, House Map below:



(Continued from page 1)

**Diverse Board**

Marlon Verasamy spoke with the *Retorter* a week after his historic victory at the polls.

He described the Equity Policy as a “living document” that will continue to be refined.

He sees the Black Lives Matter flag as “[a message of solidarity](#) that students chose to represent other students of color.”

Among his concerns, Verasamy cited reading scores of elementary school students, which are predictive of high school graduation prospects.

The 7-minute video of this interview is available via the *Retorter* website and [YouTube](#).

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**Independence**

Trustee Meetings will be moved to 2nd and 4th Wednesdays in the new fiscal year to avoid potential conflicts with school board meetings.

The Trustees decided to advertise all vacant and expiring committee seats. In the past, committee members with expiring terms were automatically renewed. The Selectboard made a similar policy change, after residents asked for greater diversity on committees.

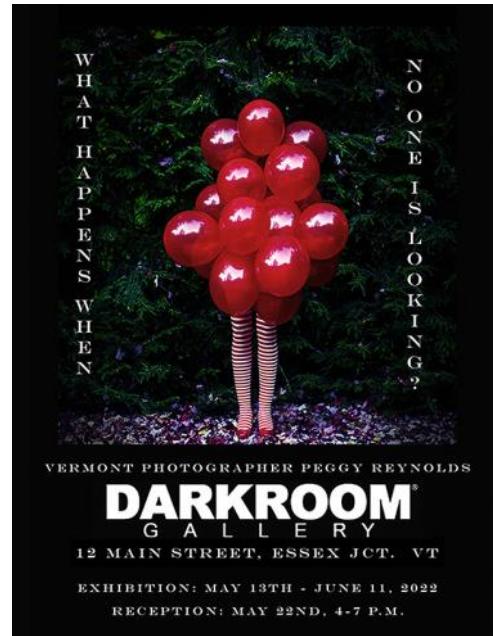
**Bixby Hill Sugar Makers Savor History**

by Irene Wrenner

Essex residents Joe and Laurie Jordan are long-time producers of maple syrup. They tap thousands of trees off Bixby Hill Road, as well as in the town of Jericho. They employ such modern equipment as vacuum pumps, reverse osmosis, and miles of plastic tubing that brings gallons of sap into their collection tanks late in winter.

However, they have not forgotten maple sugaring’s “low-tech” origins. In fact, they collect artifacts and photos from earlier days. Laurie Jordan, a former elementary school teacher, can’t resist sharing the oral history of this quintessential Vermont business when you visit their cozy museum.

The *Retorter* caught up with Laurie and Joe on March 19th as sap was boiling, thermometers measuring, and timers occasionally beeping. Our under-10-minute interview is available via the *Retorter*’s website and [YouTube](#).



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**The Essex RETORTER**

Published by  
Essex Retorter LLC  
12 Main Street  
Essex Jct, Vermont 05452

[news@essexretorter.com](mailto:news@essexretorter.com)  
[www.EssexRetorter.com](http://www.EssexRetorter.com)

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