

Hello, my name is Andy Watts. I am Chair of the Essex Town Selectboard. First, I would like to thank Representatives Marybeth Redmond, Alyssa Black and Tanya Vyhovsky for sponsoring H.95 on behalf of their constituents. I would also like to thank Chair Sarah Copeland Hanzas and the other members of the House Committee on Government Operations for inviting me here to speak today.

I am here to advocate on behalf of the Essex Town Selectboard and the voters of the Town of Essex in favor of approving the resident initiated and voter approved Essex Town charter change frequently referred to as "3+3." Our residents have made it clear that they would like district based representation rather than our current at-large representation model. This Charter change was discussed in the prior biennium as H.944. This discussion resulted in a letter dated May 29, 2020, from the Gov Ops Chair and Vice Chair expressing concerns about board transition, reapportionment, and the even number of members.

The Selectboard responded on August 18, 2020, with answers to each of the expressed concerns. Regarding board transition, relative to H.944, additional language has been added by the sponsors of H.95 indicating that once the charter change is approved, two members would be elected at Town Meeting each year, one from each District. This would effectively add the 6th seat in 2024 as that is the next year when, under our current charter, only one seat is open.

Regarding reapportionment, the Selectboard provided its preferred language based on the examples the Gov Ops Committee provided from Barre, Montpelier, and Rutland.

Regarding the question of an even numbered board, based on Robert's Rules of Order, a tie vote is a failed vote. Since this is a procedural consideration, it does not necessitate changing the charter to accommodate it.

The letter from the Chair and Vice Chair of Gov Ops also mentioned revisiting this question once a merger plan is approved. As I am sure you are aware, two different merger plans were voted by the Village and Town. The Village vote passed but the Town vote failed twice by very thin margins.

Even so, the vote in favor of 3+3 from March of 2020 still stands and I am here asking that you take up consideration of H.95 and I am asking for your support in moving it through approval of the General Assembly. If you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them or if you have any suggested changes to the charter proposal, the Selectboard would be happy to work with you on them.

Thank you.