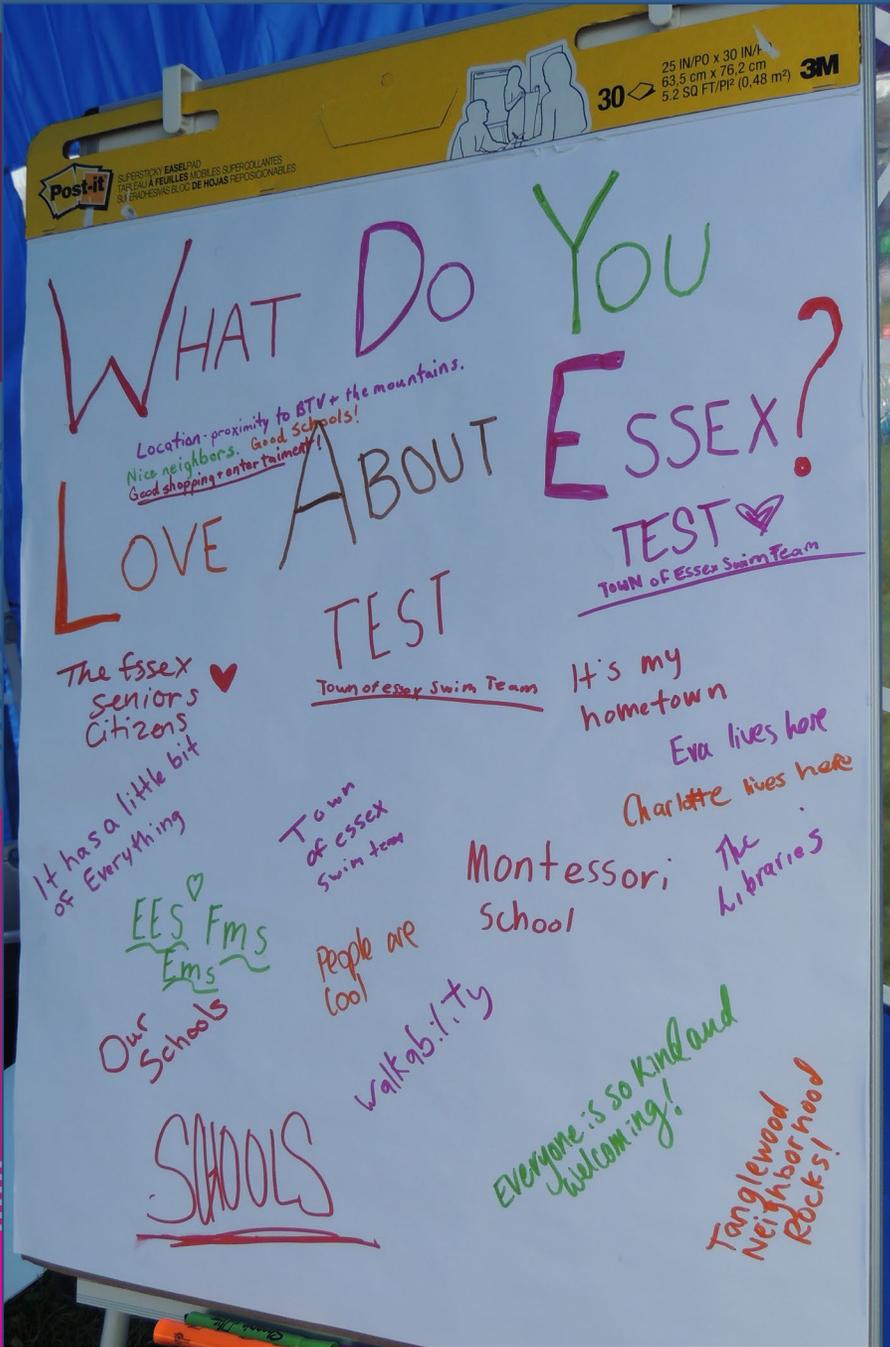
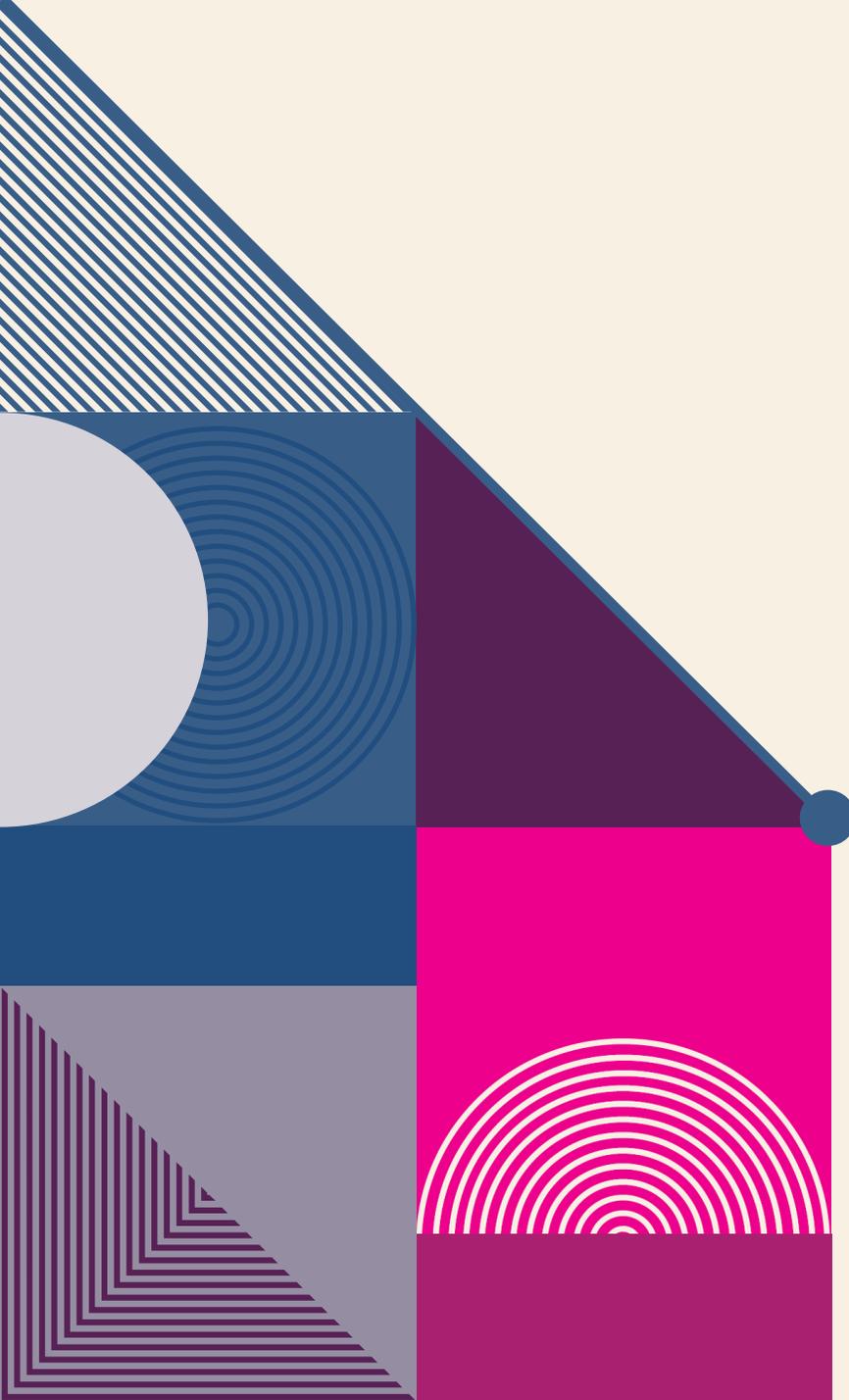


DECLARATION OF INCLUSION: PROGRESS REPORT

Essex Town Selectboard
October 6, 2025





AGENDA

- Dec of Inclusion review
- Progress report on implementation
- The Town as an employer
- Next Steps
- Possible suggestions



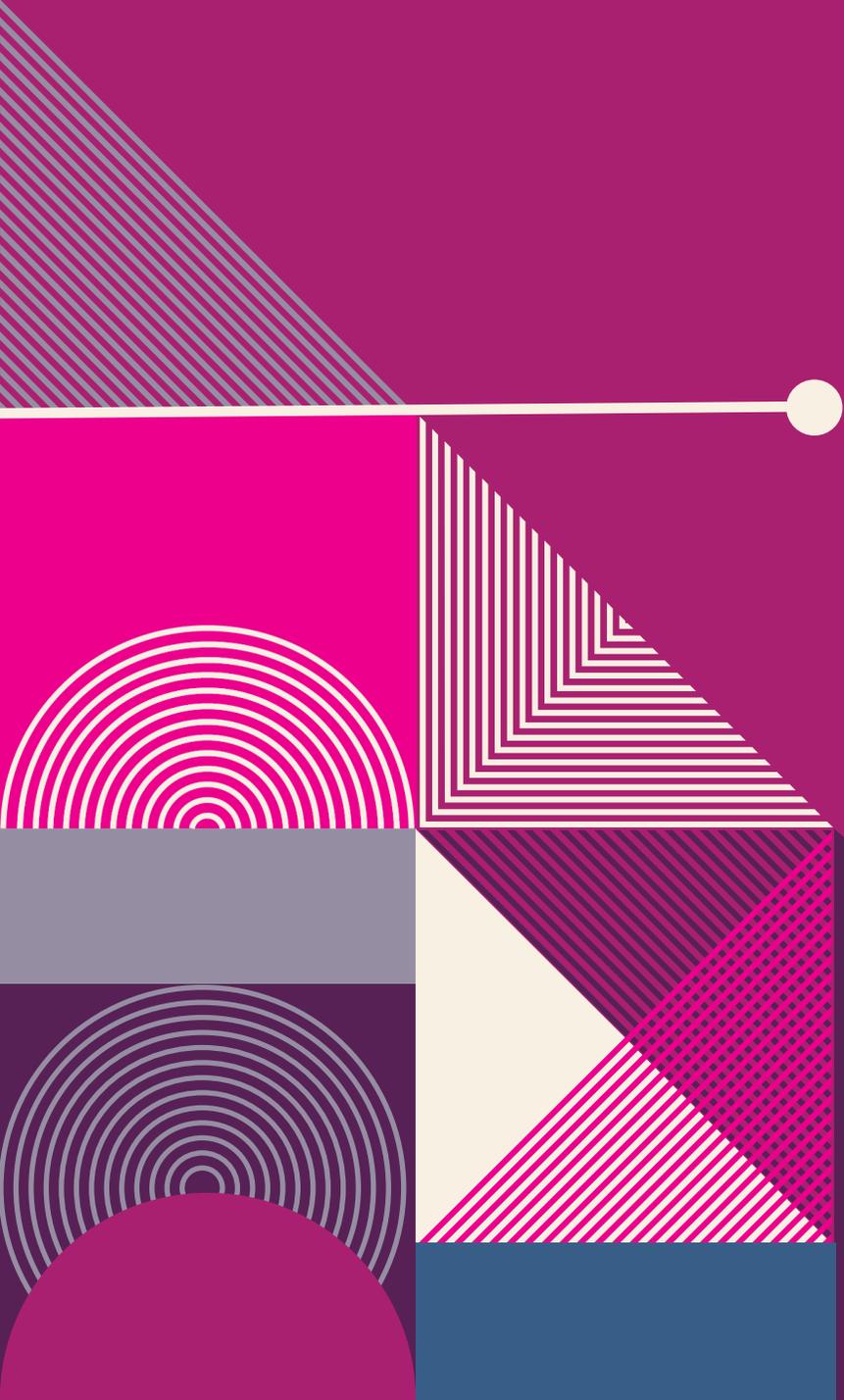
DECLARATION OF INCLUSION



DECLARATION OF INCLUSION

Adopted June 2023

Key quote: We welcome all people, regardless of ethnicity, color, religion, national origin, gender identity or sexual expression, age, or physical and/or mental capabilities, to participate in governance. We understand that our community is best served when all residents feel included and have a sense of belonging with equitable access to town services and facilities.

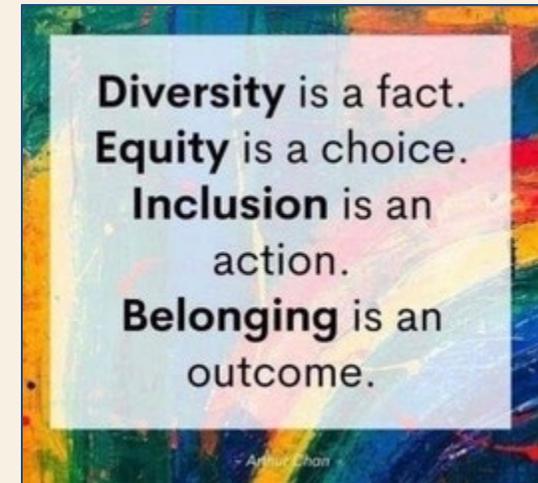


FALL 2025 PROGRESS REPORT

Implementation Actions

FOCUSED ON IMPROVING:

- **A**ccessibility of Info & Services
- Sense of **B**elonging for Residents
- **I**nclusion in Governance
- **D**iversity in Voices Heard
- **E**quity in Policy Outcomes



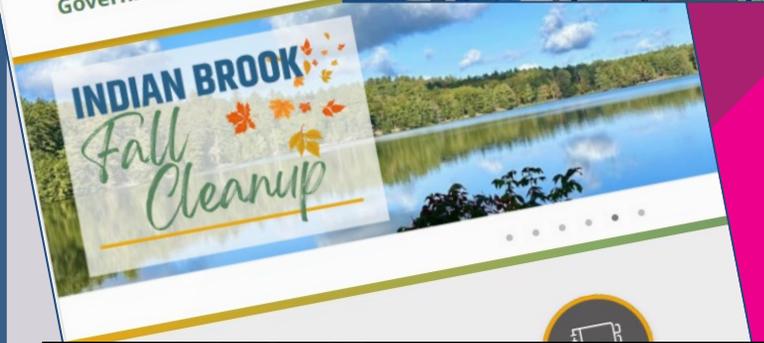
KEY ACTIONS: ACCESSIBILITY

- New Town Website improving ADA compliance and ease of use - quick links to budget information, Town charter, Departments
- Requiring **all** Committee meetings to be recorded and held as hybrid, neither of which are required by Open Meeting Law
- Public To Be Heard - Every Selectboard Meeting
- Annual Work Plans published for each department
- Town Meeting Showcase - boards & committees, staff departments, and other Town-affiliated groups available to public
- Creation of Community Liaison position within EPD, who is dedicated to connecting with members of underrepresented groups as well as the public as a whole
- Installation of ADA accessible picnic tables in Town parks
- Scholarship fund to increase access to Parks programming
- Impressive collection of "Large Print" Books in Library
- Grants & Town funding dedicated to improving road & sidewalk connectivity (Route 15), ADA compliance (library, Indian Brook)



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KEY ACTIONS: BELONGING



- 30+ Free Community Events this year, in all seasons: Community Day, Farmer's Market, Fire Open House, National Night Out, Town Meeting Showcase, Adopt A Soldier, Whimsical Walk
- Creating opportunities where residents can weigh in on decisions that shape the community (SB goals, PCAB survey around policing, CTC survey on Conservation Reserve Fund, EPR community gardens survey, Econ Development survey)
- Open Houses offered by Town Departments to invite the Public to be more comfortable in public spaces they support
- Supporting Health & Human Services organizations that serve Essex residents (\$161,000 was assigned in FY25)
- Local student art featured in public spaces at Town Offices
- Programming developed for all ages and abilities (EPR, Library)
- Annual contributions to Historical Society & Winooski Valley Park District to enhance cultural and recreational culture of Essex
- Senior Van Leisure Trips - Fall Foliage Tours, Farmer's Market

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KEY ACTIONS: INCLUSION

- Public outreach is key component of initiatives: Upper Main Conceptual Planning, Economic Dev & Rec Needs Focus Groups, Transportation Plan & Keystone opportunities built into process, Public hearings, Public coffee chats
- Ensuring EBT funds can be used at the Farmer's Market
- Senior Bus Service - fully ADA compliant transportation to support access to local shops
- Sand Hill Pool passes for check-out at the Library
- ADA compliant website & process for requesting alternative materials
- Reducing age for members of advisory boards
- Library services provided offsite to local Senior care homes, daycares
- Town programming offered for all ages (EPR, Library)
- Nursing pod located in Town Offices
- Community newsletter keeping residents informed of important dates & events
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PROGRAMMING



Fall is right around the corner!
Let's take a ride!
Friday, Sept. 26th
-18am Departure for
leaf peeping from 81
Main St.
-Lunch at 158 Main in
Jeffersonville.
-Shopping and treats at
the Maple Outlet in
Cambridge
Registration: \$10, lunch and
shopping are at your own cost.
Essexparkandrec.org 802-878-1342



KEY ACTIONS: DIVERSITY OF VOICES

- Staff education provided regularly, aimed at ensuring staff is trained to meet the varied needs of our “customers”
- Staff member responsible for handling requests for accommodations to access meetings, buildings, or media
- Specific to Police: training for all staff on handling race based incidents, properly handling calls involving hate speech, recognizing cultural differences, and de-escalation tactics
- I Speak Cards at customer service windows to ensure equal access for those who speak or sign a language other than English
- Community Justice Center work around elevating victim voices in conversations around local policing and responses to criminal activity
- Involving EWSD students where practical in local government, through partnerships (CTE) and providing volunteer and internship opportunities
- Over 45 appointed Board & Committee Members advising the Selectboard, supported by a stipend policy



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KEY ACTIONS: EQUITY

- Fair & Impartial Policing Policy – Ongoing Policy Reviews
- Community Justice Center work promoting justice for those affected by crime, and allows those responsible for harm to accept responsibility and work to repair
- Partnership with Howard Center to integrate mental health care into public safety services
- Extensive free programming offered
- Visible ways for public to report alleged ethics, Open Meeting Law, or ADA compliance violations, process for investigations
- Installation of RRFB crosswalks to elevate visibility of non-vehicle traffic
- Sidewalk investments to improve ADA compliance
- Library provides free, welcoming space to grab a coffee, use wireless, borrow books, movies, computers and hot spots, get tech help, try out the Library of Things, get a recommendation
- Through Library, free digital subscriptions available for all residents to online classes, streaming services, audiobooks
- On-going support for public transportation options (GMT)



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THE TOWN AS AN EMPLOYER

A SMALL COLLECTION OF EXAMPLES



Regular Salary Studies, Retention Bonuses	Exit Interviews	Open Door Policy	Competitive Benefits, many without employee contribution
Support: ergonomic equipment, talk-to-text tech, standing desks, WFH	6 Weeks Paid Maternity Leave	EAP Program	Inter-departmental hiring teams
Regular Performance Evaluations	Intranet for all Policies	Wellness Incentives	Meet & Greet for new staff
2 personal days, allowing the time and flexibility to celebrate cultural or religious events	Inclusive hiring practices: job descriptions, audience	Health & Wellness Committee, Safety Committee	Employee Protections clearly outlined in handbook, contracts
Golden Thumb Awards	Staff Appreciation Events 2x/yr	Employee Coffee Chats	Training & Professional Development

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NEXT STEPS



- Continued progress on improving accessibility to information and services; incorporating inclusive practices into policy, and expanding communication efforts to reach wider audience
- ADA/Inclusion Plan - audit of public spaces, identify barriers, set measurable goals, assign accountability
- CCRPC Engagement Manager - Community Engagement Database, Language Access Plans
- Also...

"NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US"

Have ideas about how the Town can better include and inform you, or improve your ability to access Town services?

Please share them!

Karen Adams, ADA Coordinator & Deputy Mgr

Kadams@essex.org

802-878-1341