



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of February 26, 2018

Report covers from February 10, 2018 to February 23, 2018

Items requiring Board vote or discussion are noted with an asterisk (*)

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Town Building Committee Meeting Summary

The Town Building Committee met jointly with the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee on February 15, 2018 to review comments and input received at the public safety building public forum held back on January 24, 2018. The jointly-assembled boards entered executive session relative to the potential purchase, exchange, lease, or value of real property for future public safety building siting purposes, which took up the entire evening.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary at this time.

(2) Joint Meeting of the Economic Development & Strategic Planning Cmtes.

The Board appointed eight individuals to the new Economic Development Committee (EDC) at the last meeting. The EDC will first meet in joint session with the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) to be provided with some direction. This meeting will likely take place on or around March 19, 2018.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Additional Workstation in Town Clerk's Office

Town Clerk personnel often use a separate State computer system while they are concurrently working with files on the Town's system. The Clerk's office already had two Town network workstations but someone working on the State system had to go across the room to get to a Town workstation. As such, I installed a third Town workstation and a switching device so that a user can toggle between the State system and the Town system using a single mouse, monitor, and keyboard. This third Town position will also help when the Clerk's office has three workers present, which does occasionally occur.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary. Total time – 1 hour.

C. Personnel

(1) Commencement of Employment by New Town Clerk

The Board determined on February 15, 2018 that Ms. Pamela Thorne should be offered employment as the next Essex Town Clerk. I formally offered her the

position, on behalf of the Board, on February 16, 2018, and she has accepted. The required CORI and drug/medical testing will soon be completed and Ms. Thorne will be available to begin work on a full-time basis as of March 19, 2018. Prior to that time, she will work on a per-diem basis to begin coming up to speed with operations of that office.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Northeast Coastal Coalition Future Meeting

The Board had requested that I continue to be engaged with the subject Coalition, which is coordinated by Senator Bruce Tarr and his staff. On behalf of the Board I offered to hold the first meeting of 2018 in Essex. The Senator was pleased with that idea and the meeting will be held at the Essex Town Hall on Friday, March 23, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Potential Town Participation in Affordable Housing Acquisition (*)

At the last meeting, the Board briefly reviewed a preliminary proposal from Harborlight Community Partners to cooperate with the Town on the acquisition of an existing, three-family house in the downtown area for the purpose of creating more affordable housing in the Town. The Board asked that I obtain additional details from the organization relative to levels of funding sought and how the project would provide affordable housing. Presently, it is my understanding that Harborlight will explain to the seller that, even though there is no commitment whatsoever from the Town at this point, it will take at least through Town Meeting in May, if interest does materialize. If the seller desires to wait until the Town's consideration process is complete, I will have more details by meeting time. If not, then this prospect will likely be abandoned.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Finalization of Request for Proposals for Centennial Grove Master Plan (*)

At the last meeting, the Board briefly reviewed a revised complete Request for Proposals for a firm to develop a Master Plan for the Centennial Grove. The Board wanted more time to review the document and to determine whether other elements should be added, for discussion at the present meeting.

Recommendation: **Board vote to finalize the content of the RFP.**

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Requests for Additional Memorial Benches at Conomo Point

As the Board is aware, five parties have sponsored memorial benches at the new Conomo Point park. Since that time, others have come forward also requesting to sponsor benches at the Point. At the last meeting, the Board agreed that all interested parties should be put on a waiting list until we know more about the existing collection of benches and whether some can be replaced. I plan to review the present benches with someone with ties to the Point later this spring and the Board may proceed when we have a better understanding of the situation and have enough sponsors to make this next phase of work more economical (bulk preparation and bench purchasing).

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Regional School District Budget Group Meeting (*)

I attended the subject meeting on February 12, 2018 to discuss the recent settlement of the fiscal year 2019 operating budget proposal and to discuss the status of recommendations for the Manchester Memorial Elementary School replacement project.

Relative to the operating budget, the District had announced that it was working out how to meet appropriation increase targets of 2.65% to Essex and 3.65% to Manchester (likely with a combination of cuts and use of reserves). However, we have recently learned that those targets were not accurate, since they were figured by the District from incorrect data for the present, fiscal year 2018 apportionments (a clerical error). The actual increases will be 3.24% for Essex and 3.31% for Manchester.

Relative to the school building project, which will be presented to voters in the fall, the District has settled on a preferred scope and design scenario that will translate to, at maximum, about \$13.9M as the Town's share, after deducting State subsidies. The District is now working to firm up various project aspects and hopes to decrease the overall cost from the initial estimate.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Final Judgment

No items.

K. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Further Review of Draft Annual Town Meeting Warrant (*)

The Board briefly reviewed the status of the draft warrant at the last meeting and expected further discussion at the present meeting.

***Recommendation:* Further Board discussion of the draft warrant, with the Finance Committee.**

L. Legal Issues

No items.

M. Grants

(1) Fiscal Year 2019 Possible Coastal Resilience Grant Application

Personnel from Northeastern University and a local environmental firm are interested in working with the Town on a coastal resilience implementation project that would use oyster reefs to protect and enhance areas of the Essex River salt marsh system. Many areas of the marsh bank are degraded through the absorption of tidal and storm energy. Oyster reefs could be constructed just offshore and the area between the reefs and the degraded marsh bank could be backfilled with suitable sediment from the River channel, to create new marsh areas. In the future, the reefs will absorb the tidal and storm energy and keep marsh degradation in check. This type of project could be started on a small scale, through a piloting effort.

Given that the Army Corps of Engineers is presently studying various potential avenues for beneficial sediment re-use in our system, this concept was discussed at a meeting involving the Corps and personnel from the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) on February 12, 2018. It appears that everyone is generally in agreement that such a project could be beneficial, but that more details are necessary. As such, on February 15, 2018, those interested in the grant application began to review the prospect of an application and will reach out to CZM to gauge whether effort should be invested at this point. At the last meeting, the Board agreed to authorize the Chairman to sign a grant application if the grant proponents decide to move forward.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Massachusetts Bays National Estuary Program Grant Application (*)

At the last meeting, the Board discussed a time-sensitive request to support an application by the Ipswich River Watershed Association (IRWA) to the subject grant program. Known as the FY18 Healthy Estuaries Grant Program, the project would work in the five Great Marsh ACEC communities to assess and prioritize aquatic barriers (clogged/undersized culverts, etc.) and would prepare the most important projects for possible implementation funding. All work would go toward improving the Town's resilience to future environmental changes, since areas with poor drainage/flow passage will help to more effectively dampen and contain flooding. The Board agreed that I should sign the letter of support for the grant, for ratification at the present meeting.

Recommendation: **Board ratification of the Town's participation in the grant application.**

N. Emergency Planning

(1) Cape Ann Emergency Planning Team Monthly Meeting

Essex hosted the subject meeting on February 21, 2018. The meeting featured ongoing discussion relative to preparations for public forums sponsored by our present Coastal Resilience Grant. Forums will occur on April 11 (Ipswich), April 17 (Gloucester), and April 25 (Essex) to highlight for the general public how emergency planning and coastal resilience planning can complement each other. Each host community will encourage its own personnel to attend and we will line up various local speakers. More information regarding the workshops may be found on the Town's [website](#).

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Regional Dispatch Center Monthly Meeting and Budget Public Hearing

I presided over the subject meeting on February 23, 2018, as Chair of the Executive Advisory Board and Finance Advisory Board. The meeting featured a public hearing relative to the proposed fiscal year 2019 operating budget for the Center, which was subsequently approved. The Center will operate for a fifth fiscal year at the original, per-capita rate of \$16.26 (translating to about \$58,000 for Essex, as opposed to the roughly \$80 per-capita rate it took to run our own center).

A recent management and operations audit of the Center commissioned by Sheriff Coppinger has pointed up many issues that need to be addressed with respect to the Center. It is possible that the State 911 Department may even develop a plan to take over operation of the Center. Despite the need for improvement and possible reorganization, through fiscal year 2019, the Town will have saved over

\$1.5M in comparison to the cost of running our own dispatch. We have received excellent service and access to technology that was not and would not be available to us in a local center.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

O. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, on February 14, 2018.

(2) Presidents' Day Holiday

The office was closed on February 19, 2018, in observance of the subject holiday.

This report is available at www.essexma.org on the morning after any regularly scheduled Essex Board of Selectmen's Meeting.