



## Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of Dec. 27, 2021

*Report covers from December 11, 2021 to December 24, 2021*

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

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### A. Town Department Reports/Requests

#### (1) Chebacco Lake Coalition Meeting Summary (\*)

I participated in a meeting of the Chebacco Lake Coalition, along with Selectman Phippen, on December 14, 2021. The Coalition, through the Town of Essex, has a total of \$30,000 in State and Town funds for the design and permitting necessary to eventually clear out the Alewife Brook stream channel in the upper reaches of the brook. Members of the Coalition are presently reviewing proposals from engineering firms concerning taking on that work.

The group also discussed a major development that has been proposed in the Town of Hamilton and will seek assistance from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) with respect to reviewing that proposed development's possible impact on several Town public water supplies. Also, the group discussed continuing interest in partnering with the Ipswich River Watershed Association (IRWA) to further the goals of the Coalition. Other topics included water quality monitoring and broadening the base of the Coalition.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

#### (2) Manchester Essex Regional School District Tentative Budget Hearing (\*)

The Board of Selectmen and members of the Essex Finance Committee participated in the subject public hearing on December 15, 2021. I was also in attendance as were officials and personnel from the Town of Manchester and from the District. Generally, the District is striving to bring the fiscal year 2023 overall town apportionment figure in at 3.5%, which presents a budget gap of \$648,000.

Subsequent to the hearing, during a budget collaboration group meeting which I attended with Selectman Bradford and Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick, the District shared preliminary calculations for the specific apportionment figures for each of the two towns. These calculations presently have Essex at a 4.97% increase over fiscal year 2022 and Manchester at a 2.67% increase (each community is about \$128,000 on either side of the 3.5% overall increase). The apportionments continue to be driven by declining enrollment of Manchester pupils and increasing/less declining enrollment of Essex pupils.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## **B. Computer Systems**

### (1) Board of Assessors' Software System Configuration

Recently, the Assessors' Clerk was unable to access a new report form that she needed to utilize within the AssessPro assessing software used by the Board of Assessors. I reviewed the matter with our software vendor and we narrowed it down to an incompatibility between the operating system of her virtual client and the dedicated application server. As such, I was able to develop a process allowing her to log directly into the server using the Windows RDP protocol and use a copy of the client portion of the software directly in that location. Her system is again working well.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) On-Line Building Permit and Related Trades Software

As the Board will recall, the Town has purchased on-line software for handling the application for and the approval of building, plumbing & gas, and electrical permits. I participated in a project rollout planning call with personnel from OpenGov (the vendor supporting the software) on December 20, 2021. Essex's platform has been set up and our first step will be to have our third-party expert (who manages the identical system for the City of Gloucester) go in and create all the necessary forms for Essex. Thereafter, I will work with Essex personnel and the vendor to have the necessary training completed.

I also worked concurrently with our GIS vendor to provide OpenGov with data that will link the OpenGov platform to our GIS. Further, I obtained (from the Assessors) and edited an Essex parcel data extract to make it conform to the standards that OpenGov was expecting. As a final step, after conferring again with OpenGov, I mapped the field names in that file to the field names used by the OpenGov software so that our data would import into the new system properly. The system will likely be offered to the public in late January or early February but we will need to see how the setup process goes before being more certain about timing.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

### (3) Replacement of Battery in UPS Unit, Senior Center

During a recent State elevator inspection/test at the Senior Center, it became apparent that the uninterruptible power supply (UPS) unit powering the Center's communications systems had a failed battery. I keep spare batteries on hand and I went and swapped out the failed battery for a fresh one. The system is again operating normally.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

## C. Personnel

### (1) Safety Committee Meeting Summary

I participated in the subject meeting on December 23, 2021, as a member of the Committee. The meeting featured a discussion regarding training that various departments are conducting or may conduct in the future. Our insurer's representative attended the meeting and he discussed some additional ways that the Town may be able to get insurance premium credits for new training. The Chief of Police updated the group on the purchase of a search drone with a grant from our insurer and the Board of Health Administrator discussed the status of COVID cases, vaccinations, testing, and possible plans for a new, indoor mask mandate in Essex. Further, our insurer's representative reviewed a safety topics handout that he brought with him and distributed copies for all departments.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Additional Town Administrator Calendar Year 2022 Goal (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board approved all six of my specific goals for calendar year 2022 and asked that I consider adding a seventh goal pertaining to proposing to the Annual Town Meeting in May of 2022 the creation and governance of an Affordable Housing Trust. I have developed the following, draft goal for the Board's review and discussion:

Continue to work collaboratively with the Board, the Town Planner and the Essex Housing Coalition to prepare a proposal to establish and govern an Affordable Housing Trust for Essex, which the Annual Town Meeting can consider in May of 2022. If the proposal is approved by Town Meeting, I will work with the same team to set up the Trust and get it actively engaged in planning for funding and potential projects.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

### (1) Old Fire Station Site Restoration Update (\*)

Chairman Pereen and I attended construction update meetings associated with the restoration of the old fire station site at 24 Martin Street on December 14 and 21, 2021. The site work subcontractor, through our general contractor, delivered pricing for the lump-sum change order that will enlarge the building slab, install a hose connection, and install a sub drain system. The pricing for that work seemed excessive and we asked our Project Manager to work with the general contractor to provide more backup and breakdown of costs. The site subcontractor also provided the time and materials tally for the work associated with the drain line that needed to be replaced. That also seemed excessive and some of the backup materials seemed to contradict what we experienced on the site. We are working

to get more information by meeting time. Options will include going forward at the pricing offered (if no reductions are made), reviewing revised pricing (if offered), or narrowing the lump-sum scope down to just increasing the size of the slab, with very minor modification of the existing site drainage system.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Conomo Point Seawall Replacement Project Update

Selectman Phippen and I participated in a construction update meeting with representatives of the general contractor and our consulting engineering firm for the Conomo Point seawall replacement project on December 15, 2021. The contractor has mobilized for the project and plans to demolish the existing seawall in short sections (25-50 feet) and pour the new wall before moving on to each new section. The next formal construction meeting will be January 5, 2022.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Route 133 Essex River Bridge Replacement Project Update

I participated in a construction meeting with respect to the subject project on December 21, 2021. Preparation for the construction of the temporary bypass bridge is underway (various segments of the structure have arrived in Essex and are being stored nearby, until needed) and the temporary bridge is still expected to be open to traffic sometime in March of 2022. In the meantime, the existing bridge will remain fully open to traffic.

Actual field work with respect to the ground preparation for the temporary bridge will begin on January 3, 2022. The temporary bridge will sit on “micro-piles”. Micro-piles are the modern equivalent of driven piles and are cored into the ground and screwed into the underlying bedrock. The piles are hollow pipes about 11 inches in diameter and probably extend 32-34 feet into the ground. After the piles are fully in place, grout is poured into them to form a solid center. Since the piles will be cored, and not driven, the project will not carry the noise usually associated with driven piles. Mass DOT and the general contractor for the project will provide the Town with further updates as events warrant.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

(4) Commencement of Design Work for Public Water Supply Well Improvements

At the last meeting, the Board awarded the design and oversight contract for the improvement and modernization of the Town’s three public water supply wells to EA Engineering, Science, and Technology. EA has since signed the contract with the Town, Chairman Pereen has countersigned it, and the Board of Public Works has co-signed it. We expect the following project schedule over the next few weeks:

- Data Acquisition – weeks of December 20 and 27, 2021

- Kickoff /Design Requirements Meeting – Week of January 3, 2022
- Site visit – Week of January 3, 2022
- Development of Alternatives – Weeks of Jan 10 – 28, 2022
- Rough Order of Magnitude cost estimate – Week of January 31, 2022
- Presentation of Proposed Alternatives – Week of February 7, 2022

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

## **E. Insurance**

No items.

## **F. Facilities**

### (1) Senior Center State Elevator Inspection and Testing

The Senior Center elevator was tested by the State Elevator Inspector on December 21, 2021. I had arranged for representatives of our fire alarm company and our generator company to be present, as required, for the testing. The elevator passed inspection.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Town Hall Split System HVAC Repair Update

As the Board may recall, one of the three condenser units within the Town Hall HVAC system had failed toward the end of the summer and we have been awaiting the delivery of a new compressor to get that condenser unit back on line. We are still waiting for the compressor (due to supply chain delays associated with COVID) and the system was operating properly on the other two units (providing cooling into the early fall and backup heating until recently). The system was not functioning at all as of the week of December 6, 2021 and we plan on having the technician look at this new issue when he comes out to install the new compressor. We use the natural gas heating system in the building as our primary means of heat, so we do have the ability to wait for the part.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

### (3) Completion of Privacy Fence to Right of Public Safety Facility

As reported previously, due to an inconsistency in the project design plans, the privacy fence separating the new public safety facility from the neighbor to the right did not come all the way out to meet that abutter's existing front fence. Our general contractor received pricing on this final section of fencing but did not want to contract for the work given the ongoing dispute with respect to the facility's roof. As such, with the general contractor's acknowledgement, we were able to directly contract with the original fencing subcontractor and the fence will be completed as soon as possible.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

## **G. Fiscal/Budget**

### (1) Continued Review of the Selectmen's FY23 Operating Budget Package (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board discussed a preliminary draft of the FY23 operating budget package that I had developed. I have revised the package in accordance with the Board's guidance.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

### (2) Continued Review of the Selectmen's FY23 Capital Budget Update (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board discussed a preliminary draft of the FY23 capital budget update document that I had developed. I have revised the package in accordance with the Board's guidance.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## **H. Complaints**

No items.

## **I. Meetings Attended**

No items.

## **J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations**

### (1) Continued Review of Possible Article Topics for the Annual Town Meeting (\*)

I have revised the Annual Town Meeting draft topics list in accordance with the Board's guidance from the last meeting.

*Recommendation:* **Further Board discussion as necessary.**

### (2) Examples of Affordable Housing Trust Bylaws (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board reaffirmed its intent to present an Affordable Housing Trust bylaw to the Annual Town Meeting in May of 2022. The Board asked that I reach out to surrounding communities to see what others have already adopted and to the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (MHP) to get examples of bylaws from low to medium to high complexity. Shelly Goehring of MHP was able to provide three examples of bylaws with varying degrees of complexity and pointed me toward other bylaws operative in surrounding communities. The collection of examples that the Board now has to work with should provide an excellent way to pull desired features into a custom bylaw proposal for Essex.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Continued Formulation of Essex Parking Sticker Regulations

At the last meeting, the Board reviewed comments from the Town Clerk with respect to the promulgation of parking sticker regulations after the Clerk reviewed an early draft of the regulations suggested by Chairman Pereen, Town Counsel, and myself. The Board asked that Town Counsel review the valuable comments and insights of the Town Clerk so that the draft could be updated for further review. Town Counsel will make additional recommendations in light of the Town Clerk's comments and he plans to discuss her insights early in the new year.

*Recommendations:* I will update the Board as necessary.

**K. Legal Issues**

No items.

**L. Grants**

(1) Possible Green Communities Grant Project for Fiscal Year 2023 (\*)

As the Board is aware, the Town has historically applied for and received funding through the Green Communities grant program for improvements to the Essex Elementary School. The final phase of installation for a new building automation system in that building is presently wrapping up. The Town also used the program to update its street lights to use LED lamps. For fiscal year 2023, the Town Planner is working with our consulting engineer to determine if a need exists to update major water and sewer pumps and equipment to more modern, energy efficient models. If prospects look good, it may be necessary to fund an assessment in the spring and go for actual implementation funding in the fall of 2022.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) National Grid Incentives and Rebates for Water Supply Well Project

Now that the Town has commenced the design process for the modernization and improvement of its three public water supply wells, I have put our energy efficiency representative from National Grid in touch with our consulting engineer for the project and with the Town Planner. It is possible that the Town will be able to reduce the cost of the project with incentives or rebates from National Grid. Our Town Planner will coordinate this analysis going forward.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Award of State Cybersecurity Awareness Training Grant

As the Board will recall, we recently applied for the subject grant to train users with respect to staying vigilant with good cybersecurity protocols. We have been

awarded the grant and the State will commence a year-long training program for all Essex computer users with bi-monthly lessons.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

#### **M. Emergency Planning**

No items.

#### **N. Other Items**

##### (1) Christmas Holiday

The office was closed on December 24, 2021, in observance of the subject holiday.

*This report is available at **[www.essexma.org](http://www.essexma.org)** on the morning after any regularly scheduled Essex Board of Selectmen's Meeting.*