



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of July 26, 2021

Report covers from July 10, 2021 to July 23, 2021

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

No items.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Replacement of Cable Modem in Town Hall

The Comcast cable modem in Town Hall has experienced several malfunctions requiring a physical restart over the past few weeks. Recently, I contacted Comcast to have the modem analyzed and Comcast agreed that it needed to be replaced. The work was completed on July 21, 2021 and the new unit, which can handle higher capacity if needed in the future, seems to be working well.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Process for Replacement of Part-Time Town Planner (*)

With Town Planner Matt Coogan moving on to a job that will make his part-time work for Essex infeasible, it would be advantageous to find a replacement. It is likely that other town planners in the area may be interested in this part-time position. As such, the position could be advertised and various planners in the area could be directly told about the opportunity.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Review of New Public Safety Facility Roof by Roofing Consultant (*)

Jack Skypeck of Northeast Roofing Consultants (NRC) conducted his first site visit at the new public safety facility on June 15, 2021. He gained access to the roof via an access hatch and began to observe the roof construction and the nature of various defects that are still very visible. He plans to visit the site again in the coming week to work with the general contractor and the roofing subcontractor to perform some "test cuts" (removal of some shingles and underlayment) in obvious problem areas, for inspection purposes.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Chebacco Lake Coalition Meeting Summary

I participated in a meeting of the Chebacco Lake Coalition (a diverse group of Chebacco Lake watershed stakeholders coordinated by Senator Tarr) on July 16, 2021. Senator Tarr announced the likely award of \$20,000 from the State Legislature for Chebacco Lake watershed environmental studies (which could be paired up with a recent Town appropriation for the same). The Coalition was recently successful in getting the approval of the Essex Conservation Commission for limited hand clearing of a section of stream channel near the Apple Street Bridge. However, the Commission is requiring a full Notice of Intent for other areas and the Lake Association will assist with its development and submission.

The group also discussed a Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) grant application being coordinated by the Ipswich River Watershed Association that would fund a dedicated staff person to help better coordinate issues in the Parker, Ipswich, and Essex River watersheds. Members of the Coalition were very supportive of the application and most are participating in the signature of a letter of support.

Further, the group discussed the topic of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) blooms. Chebacco Lake experienced a bloom last summer (rendering the lake essentially unsuitable for water contact) and there is interest in better understanding the phenomenon and how to regulate it if it should recur. Senator Tarr's office put me in touch with the Chief Toxicologist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and I will work with the Board of Health Administrator to increase the Town's understanding of what might be done and what options are available for regulation of a given event.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Award of Contract for the Demolition of the Old Fire/Police Building (*)

Bids for the demolition of the old fire/police building at 24 Martin Street were due on July 21, 2021. Only a single bid was received and the apparent low bidder was Encore Contracting Services of Lawrence, with a bid price of \$185,800. Our Project Manager is presently vetting the bid and he will likely recommend by meeting time that the demolition contract be awarded to Encore.

Recommendation: **Board vote to award the demolition contract to Encore Contracting Services.**

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Preparation of Sumac Drive Lot for Resident Parking (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that resident parking should be allowed in the Town-owned vacant lot on Sumac Drive at Conomo Point. I walked the property with a representative of an abutter on July 19, 2021 since it was necessary to agree where the Town's property ends and the abutter's property begins. With all of the rain we have had recently, it was evident that most of the frontage that residents would use to access the lot was quite wet, which would probably translate to tire ruts and possible stuck vehicles during wet times (especially if people are trying to maneuver boat trailers). It seems that this frontage will need to be improved to support vehicle crossing if the notion of resident parking in this area is to be successful.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Closure of Municipal Tennis Courts

The Board of Public Works recently discussed the condition of the municipal tennis courts at Memorial Park and asked whether the courts should be closed until repairs can be made (a long-term situation, requiring funding). I discussed the matter with our insurer and our insurer agreed that our liability is more substantial given our knowledge of the court defects. As such, the DPW has closed the courts until repairs may be made.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Removal of Generator from Old Fire Station Site

The generator that served the old fire/police station was removed from the site on July 16, 2021, in preparation for the demolition of the building.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(4) Removal of Fiber Optic Spur from Old Fire Station

The old fiber optic connection between Town Hall and the old fire/police station was properly decommissioned on July 20, 2021, in preparation for the demolition of the building. The twelve-pair connection that was feeding the old building could be used for a new building on that site in the future or could be used for additional future capacity within our system.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(5) Final, Pre-Demolition Walkthrough of Old Fire/Police Station

The Chief of Police, Fire Chief, and I walked through the old fire/police station at 24 Martin Street on July 20, 2021. Together, we reviewed whether any other items of importance remained in the building since a demolition contractor will soon take control of the site. The Fire Department was still in the process of

removing some items and more work can be done if the selected demolition contractor was expecting other minor items to also have been removed.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

No items.

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

(1) Meeting with Congressman Moulton

Congressman Moulton stopped by my office on July 14, 2021 to discuss issues that are important to the Town. Given that Federal funding is going to be necessary to implement future Essex River dredging and the elevation of the Southern Avenue end of Apple Street, we focused on those topics. Generally, the Congressman indicated that he would look into the criteria used to allocate such funds. FEMA and Army Corps of Engineers grants in particular operate largely under older rules that don't necessarily fully incorporate the forward-looking aspects of climate change.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Further Review of Draft Fall Town Meeting Topics

(*)

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

Recommendation: **Further discussion of the draft topics list as necessary.**

(2) Review of Draft Police Body and Cruiser Camera Use Policy

(*)

At the last meeting, the Board inquired about progress at the Police Department relative to the development of a cruiser and body camera use policy. The Department has been working on the policy and has offered a draft for the Board's review and discussion at the present meeting.

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

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Regional IT Grant Coordination Meeting Summary

Now that all of the participating communities have signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for regional IT services through the Town of Danvers, the group is beginning to determine what Danvers could be most helpful with in the short term. I participated in a coordination meeting on July 15, 2021. Essex and Wenham are already connected to the Danvers datacenter and Manchester will soon be. Other communities like Topsfield, Middleton, and Hamilton are planning projects for new fiber connections to Danvers. While the next offering from Danvers is still not yet certain, it may involve VOIP telephone service, improved cybersecurity, or even remote computing.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Regional Municipal Cost Comparison Grant Meeting Summary

As the Board is aware, prior to COVID, a group of area communities got together for the facilitation of a municipal cost comparison project coordinated by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). The project was put on hiatus during COVID but is now being actively managed again. The group met on July 15, 2021 and MAPC is still receiving data from some communities. The group plans to meet in the future to review the complete dataset and to establish reasonable standards of comparison.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Zoning Review Assistance from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council(*)

At the last meeting, I explained to the Board how the Town Planner had begun to investigate the prospect of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) assisting the Town with setting the scope of a Town zoning review. The Planning for MetroCommon Technical Assistance (PMTA) grant program was suggested as a possible avenue for technical assistance. The hope would be to work with MAPC planners during the summer and early fall so that the Fall Town Meeting could properly consider funding the actual zoning study for a professional planning firm to undertake. With the Town Planner's new, full-time job making it infeasible to stay on with Essex in his part-time capacity, I have followed up with MAPC regarding the matter.

I have learned that PMTA funding and MAPC staff time are both presently in short supply. However, one suggestion that MAPC had for the Town was to review a scope of services and Request for Proposals (RFP) that the Town of Rockport developed for its own zoning study recently. It is quite possible that the RFP could be adapted for use by Essex and MAPC has forwarded it along for our use. Secondly, on July 29, 2021, MAPC staff will provide a brief technical assistance Zoom meeting that will be intended to guide us further. We are

hopeful that we can receive at least some additional staff time in late-August or early-September even if we are not a recipient of PMTA funding.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

M. Emergency Planning

No items.

N. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, for a portion of the day on July 22, 2021.

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