



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of Sept. 11, 2023

Report covers from August 19, 2023 to September 8, 2023

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

No items.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Migration of Outlook 365 e-mail to New Provider

Our Outlook 365 e-mail system was provisioned by AZ Datacomm in Arizona. The Town migrated to this provider as part of our upgrade from our old, legacy e-mail system to the Microsoft platform back in 2021. As the Board may recall, the plan for this fiscal year is to move our Outlook 365 tenancy from AZ Datacomm to the new vendor that is supporting the North Shore Regional IT Collaborative (INNO4) – migration was completed on August 30, 2023. Concurrently, since Microsoft is requiring some license changes, our new provider implemented those changes during the move. The new system is up and running and I am assessing the cost of adding other Microsoft web-hosted applications within Office 365 to our tenancy. Changes were made within the FY24 IT budget that will allow for these additional applications. We will likely introduce the Office 365 applications in the near future.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Employee and Volunteer of the Year Award Nominations

All employees and major boards and commissions have been informed that nominations for Employee of the Year and Volunteer of the Year are open through September 21, 2023. The Board will choose one recipient in each category, without mentioning names, at its next meeting. Winners will be recognized at the Fall Town Meeting.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Schedule for Summer Camp/Enrichment Services Procurement

I have finalized the schedule for the procurement of a summer camp/youth-adult enrichment services contractor for the next five years. The Request for proposals will be released on October 2, 2023 and proposals will be due by October 19, 2023. The Board will have until as late as January 31, 2024 to select a contractor.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Roadway Resurfacing Work, Route 22 and Route 133

As the Board may recall, the Board agreed to allow MA DOT to have its own contractor resurface portions of Route 22 and Route 133 in Essex at no cost to the Town. We are told that this work will begin on or about September 18, 2023 and that work will start on Route 22. The work on Route 133 will follow.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Decorative Street Lighting Project Update

(*)

The project for the subsurface preparation of the downtown area to accept the installation of decorative street lights is out to bid, with bids due on September 21, 2023. The plan was to get that work done and then use the Ipswich Light Department to install the actual poles and lanterns. However, after getting a quote on the cost of the poles, lanterns, and accessories, it is apparent that additional funds will be necessary before the light installation phase moves forward.

It is necessary to therefore accomplish the subsurface work this fall, seek additional funding for the lights and Ipswich's labor at the Fall Town Meeting, order the lights over the winter, and have Ipswich conduct the installation in the spring. Ipswich has confirmed that the light department is still interested in and capable of taking on the light installation project and is currently developing a labor estimate using the plans that have been finalized for the subsurface work. A pre-bid site visit with interested subsurface preparation contractors was held on September 6, 2023.

***Recommendation:* Board vote to put the lighting installation on hold until the spring, contingent upon Town Meeting approving additional funding for the project.**

(4) Delay of Essex River Dredging

As noted previously, the single bid on the Army Corps of Engineer's Essex River Dredging Project was too high for the available funding. As such, the Corps has opted to delay the project for an entire year while the necessary additional funding is sought. Presently, the Corps is anticipating the commencement of dredging in the fall of 2024. Even though the delay of the project is disappointing, it may give the private marinas that wish to piggyback on the Federal channel dredging project the chance to complete their own permitting efforts. If dredging had gone forward this fall, the private marinas were very likely not going to have permission to dredge their own areas of the river, adjacent to the Federal channel. Senator Tarr is hosting another coordination meeting among local, State, and Federal officials and with the marina owners on September 13, 2023.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

E. Insurance

(1) Additional Retiree Health Insurance Offering (*)

Presently, retirees from the Town of Essex who have reached the age of 65 have the ability to elect one of two retiree health insurance plans. The HMO option, known as Managed Blue for Seniors, is the lowest-cost option and the Town pays 75% of the premium (in parity with the Town share for active employees who have elected the HMO). The PPO option, known as Medex II, comes at a higher cost and the Town pays 60% of the premium (in parity with the Town share for active employees who have elected the PPO).

Our insurance provider, the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) would like to offer a third option, known as Medex Advantage. Like Medex II, Medex Advantage is a PPO and is not constrained by where a retiree chooses to live. The chief difference is that an advantage plan involves the insurance carrier taking the primary risk, instead of the Federal Government (such is the case with Medex II). Allowing the third option to be put in place has no down side to the Town and may actually save the Town a small amount of money, since the overall premium is lower versus Medex II. If the Selectmen are interested in allowing this third option (at a 60% Town share), the Treasurer will reach out to all of our eligible retirees, offer information and webinar resources, and switch those who elect the new plan over during this year's coming open enrollment period. There will be no obligation for any retiree to make any changes at all.

***Recommendation:* Board vote to offer this third retiree health insurance option, at a 60% Town share.**

F. Facilities

(1) Paglia Park Restoration

Now that the bridge replacement project has ended, the bridge contractor is responsible for getting grass established. An attempt at grass establishment was made but the seed did not take well. As such, it is necessary for the contractor to reseed the area before the Town begins to restore Paglia Park. In the meantime, I have had a plaque produced for the Paglia family (which licenses the land to the Town) that will be mounted on a rock at the entrance to the park. I selected a suitable rock with the Superintendent of Public Works (which has now been placed on the site) and former Selectman Andrew Spinney has volunteered to properly affix the plaque. Once grass has been better established, the elements of the park can be brought back in place in accordance with the plan that has been approved by the Paglia family.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) School Budget Collaboration Group Meeting Summary (*)
Chairman Pereen and I participated in the subject meeting on August 24, 2023. The meeting featured a discussion regarding how the fiscal year 2025 budget will be introduced and vetted in the coming months. The group agreed to keep providing summaries of the collaboration meetings to all parent boards and to plan for an all-boards meeting (two boards of selectmen, two finance committees, and the school committee) in the near future (September 19, 2023 is the tentative date). The group is interested in what each of the two boards of selectmen feel will be within reach concerning a budget increase for fiscal year 2025 and, in Essex, it appears that an override, a structural change to the Regional Agreement, or cuts by the District may need to be implemented in order to have the capacity for any increase over 2.5% (to Essex). The next Budget Collaboration Group meeting will be held on September 12, 2023.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Review of Draft Fall Town Meeting Warrant (*)
I have developed a preliminary draft of the Fall Town Meeting warrant in accordance with the Board's guidance.

Recommendation: **Board review and discussion of the preliminary draft Fall Town Meeting warrant.**

K. Legal Issues

(1) Further Review of Boundary Between Senior Center Property and Abutter (*)
As the Board may recall, an abutter to the Senior Center claimed in the past that part of the handicapped parking spot to the right-front of the Senior Center is actually on their land. The Board asked me back in May to reach out to the abutter to request some adjacent deed references after the abutter sent the Town a plan from their surveyor that differed from information we had on file in Town Hall. The survey provided in May was a stake-out survey where most of the stakes were set by the surveyor (not placed by others in the past and found by the surveyor).

On August 30, 2023 an attorney hired by the abutter contacted me to say that a second survey has been completed recently (a full instrument survey) and that she would send it over for the Board's review. The office has not received the survey at the time of printing of this report.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

L. Grants

(1) Risk Management Grant Award

As the Board may recall, the Town had applied to our insurer (the Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association – MIIA) for a risk management grant in the amount of \$9,375 for four additional body-worn cameras and associated networking equipment and licensing. The grant has been approved and the Police Department will soon order the new equipment, which will provide useful backup when other units are down for servicing.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

M. Emergency Planning

(1) Regional Community Wildfire Protection Plan Status Meeting Summary

I participated in the subject meeting on September 6, 2023 along with Gloucester's chief administrative officer and the town administrators from Manchester and Rockport. The meeting featured a discussion with respect to progress made in making contact with area land conservation organizations to determine whether these organizations will contribute toward the development of a Regional Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Given that August is such a popular month for vacations, not all organizations have had a chance to review the proposal. As such, the administrative group described above will convene again toward the end of September. To date, the consultant responsible for the plan has produced a draft of the first three chapters of the plan, which are under review by all four communities.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

N. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, all day on August 25, 2023 and September 1, 2023 and for portions of the day on August 28 and 29 and September 7, 2023.

(2) Labor Day Holiday

The office was closed on September 4, 2023, 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.