



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of Sept. 13, 2021

Report covers from August 21, 2021 to September 10, 2021

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Essex Housing Coalition Meeting Summary (*)

The Community Engagement Director from the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) hosted a remote Essex Housing Coalition meeting on September 9, 2021. The meeting featured participation by personnel from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and Action, Inc. Chairman Pereen and I were in attendance. The group reviewed ideas for a possible, small affordable housing project in Essex and discussed how other communities have successfully used an Affordable Housing Trust to accumulate public and private funding over time.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Cell Tower Proposal Hearing Summary (Board of Appeals)

The Essex Zoning Board of Appeals held its fourth installment of a continued public hearing concerning a variance application for a cell tower proposal along Eastern Avenue on September 1, 2021. The Board was able to wrap up testimony with respect to the matter. The Board plans to consult with counsel and will deliberate over the matter at a final continuance of the hearing on October 4, 2021.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Annual Computer System Network and User Testing

Each year, the Town hires a third-party consultant to perform external penetration testing on the Town's Internet interface, along with performing phishing and social engineering testing for Town computer system users. I have contacted our consultant for this year's testing round and that should occur by sometime in October.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Employee and Volunteer of the Year Award Nominations

I released the annual call for nominations for the employee of the year and the volunteer of the year on September 1, 2021. Nominations are due by September

23, 2021 and the Board will consider nominations at their meeting of September 27, 2021.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Public Safety Facility Roof Defect Update

At the last meeting, the Board briefly reviewed the report of our roofing consultant with respect to the anomalies that can be observed with the roofing shingles at the new public safety facility. The major cause of the problem appears to have been the warping of the underlying nail boards due to exposure to moisture. Subsequent to the last meeting, I transmitted the report to our general contractor and its surety company, our architect, and our project manager. We have scheduled a meeting on September 15, 2021 for all parties to discuss our consultant's findings.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Old Fire/Police Station Demolition Update

(*)

Asbestos abatement work within the old fire and police station at 24 Martin Street commenced with contractor mobilization on September 8, 2021. The abatement work is a necessary precursor to the demolition of the building, which should be accomplished by late-September. The Town's own fiber optic connection has been physically disconnected from the building and water and electricity connections will be disconnected after abatement work wraps up. The gas meter has been removed from the building and National Grid will soon turn off the gas at the street. Telephone and cable/Internet connections will be removed soon as well. I have already started the power disconnection process with National Grid since the utility has a design/engineering step to complete before a crew actually goes out to disconnect the service, post-abatement. I have also provided the Essex Water Department with a ballpark timeline so that department personnel can also begin to prepare for that service disconnection.

Chairman Pereen and I participated in a project meeting on September 7, 2021 and we learned that the contractor is presently targeting project completion for on or about October 26, 2021 (about a week later than anticipated by the contract). If abatement work goes more quickly than expected, the contractor may be able to make up some time.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Recurrence of Town Hall Roof Leak

A small section of roof adjacent to the third-floor stair landing and the entrance to the Town Hall auditorium has experienced leaks during certain wind and rain conditions in the past. The contractor that performed the building renovation in 2017 has been back to the building with a lift on two separate occasions to perform extensive waterproofing and we had not experienced any problems for quite some time. Recent, heavy rain, with wind, during the week of August 16, 2021 caused more leakage. Interestingly, no leaks were experienced during the remnants of Hurricane Ida during the week of August 30, 2021 (4 inches of rain). At the last meeting, I briefly discussed the problem with the Board and the Board agreed that we should engage the same roofing consultant who has been reviewing the public safety facility roof situation to review this Town Hall issue.

I made contact with the consultant and the Essex Fire Department (for the use of the ladder truck to reach that part of the building) and we will arrange for a water test of the suspect section of roof in mid to late-September, once our consultant's schedule frees up.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Town Hall Door Latch Malfunction

The latch on the door that leads from the second-floor back hallway to the second-floor back stair landing in Town Hall (a critical exit door) began to stick, making it difficult to open that door. After reviewing the matter, it was apparent that the latch was no longer retracting fully. I contacted the locksmith who originally installed the Town Hall locks and he noted that this problem can occur over time. He visited the Town Hall on September 8, 2021 and replaced the hardware.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

No items.

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

(1) Chebacco Lake Collaborative Meeting Summary

(*)

The Chebacco Lake Collaborative, which is a diverse group of stakeholders organized by Senator Tarr, met virtually on August 24, 2021. I participated along with Selectman Phippen. The Coalition seeks to improve the environmental

quality of Chebacco Lake and its watershed. I was able to update the group about the relatively new presence of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) in the lake, which results in a recommendation to avoid water contact until a given algal bloom has subsided. My information came from the Chief State Toxicologist after I was asked to review the issue after the last Coalition meeting. Generally, improving land use practices to reduce runoff laden with nutrients is the best approach to minimizing the changes for future blooms.

Also, the group discussed progress on cleaning out the Alewife Brook by the Apple Street Bridge, working toward a full Notice of Intent for similar cleanout work farther upstream, and pulling together a scope of work for an engineering firm to help with the design of a channel restoration project in an area where basic cleanout will not succeed. With respect to the engineering project, the Town Meeting put aside \$10,000 to help with such an effort and Senator Tarr was successful in obtaining a \$20,000 legislative grant that can also be used in that way. The group plans to keep working on Alewife Brook ongoing channel clearing to promote lake flushing, near-term monitoring of the lake for nutrients, oxygen, and temperature, and long-term study of the hydrology of the watershed, including groundwater.

***Recommendation:* Board discussion relative to the potential use of the Town funding for engineering work.**

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Review of Preliminary Draft of Fall Town Meeting Warrant (*)

I have developed a preliminary draft of the Fall Town Meeting warrant in accordance with the Board's guidance from past meetings. The Board will be considering signing a final version of the warrant at its meeting of October 18, 2021.

***Recommendation:* Board review and discussion with respect to the draft warrant.**

K. Legal Issues

(1) Renewal of Parking and Pedestrian Licenses at Village Restaurant (*)

Every two years, the Town and the owner of the Village Restaurant consider the renewal of licenses that allow the public to transit across the Village Restaurant property to and from the municipal parking lot and the Village Restaurant to allow patrons to park on a small section of its parking lot that happens to be on Town property. These licenses are now up for renewal and the owner of the Village Restaurant has signed them.

***Recommendation:* Board countersignature of the two licenses.**

L. Grants

(1) Engagement of Subject Matter Experts, Local Rapid Recovery Grant (*)

As the Board may recall, the Local Rapid Recovery Grant Program (LRRP) is presently assisting both Essex and Manchester to review the regulatory and planning/promotional environments in each community versus the needs of local businesses. A group consisting of business leaders and personnel and officials from both towns has arrived at a series of focus areas for additional work to occur in. The planning firm of Dodson & Flinker has developed a draft “project sheet” for each focus area and has worked through the grant program to line up a “subject matter expert” for each area.

Thus far, the new Town Planner Dana Menon and I, along with Manchester personnel and business leaders from both towns have participated in discussions with subject matter experts in the following categories:

9/1, 2-3PM: Shared Marketing/Branding (Laurie Zapalac, Zapalac Advisors).

9/2, 11AM-12PM: Cultivating Desired Businesses (Jeff Levine, Levine Planning Strategies).

9/2, 2-3PM: Lighting (Laurie Zapalac, Zapalac Advisors).

9/7, 11AM-12PM: Shared Economic Development Position (Heather Gould, BSC).

9/8, 11AM-12PM: Winter Events & Placemaking (Jonathan Berk, Bench/Patronicity).

9/8, 2AM-3PM: Wayfinding (Amelia Casey & Jason Schriber, Stantec).

9/9, 11AM-12PM: Debrief from subject matter expert sessions and plan next steps.

The various discussions were very helpful and will be used by each subject matter expert to update the project sheet for each focus area. Dodson & Flinker has coordinated a second, remote public forum for the evening of September 29, 2021, at which all of this work will be presented to the public for input and discussion.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Press Coverage of Conomo Point Seawall Replacement Project

A reporter for the Boston Globe reviewed the recent announcement by Governor Baker of projects that were funded as part of the fiscal year 2021 Dam & Seawall Replacement or Removal grant program. The reporter decided to highlight the

Conomo Point Seawall Replacement Project in Essex and sent a photographer to capture the area after interviewing Selectman Phippen and me about the project. Chairman Pereen and I were present for the photos. The Town is presently under contract with GZA Geoenvironmental to kick off the construction bidding process in the near future, with the hope of commencing work in early November. The Globe story was set to run on September 12, 2021.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Massachusetts IT Grant Application

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that the Town should seek an award under the Massachusetts IT grant program for the installation of equipment in the Town Hall auditorium that will allow for cable TV coverage, interactive coverage, and improved local audio for public meetings held there. I met virtually on August 24, 2021 with personnel from 1623 Studios with respect to applying to the IT grant program for this installation. The application window opens on September 15, 2021 and closes on October 15, 2021. 1623 Studios plans to fully develop the application and provide it to me for submission early during that time period.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(4) FEMA Grants Webinars

I participated in a FEMA grant overview webinar on August 31, 2021, which highlighted a number of Federal grant programs that will soon become available for the new grant cycle. Of particular interest are the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). Both of those programs are possible funding sources for the elevation of the Apple Street roadbed at the Southern Avenue end of Apple Street (which floods during extreme storm tides). I also participated in a BRIC webinar on September 8, 2021. This presentation provided more specific information with respect to BRIC, including important milestones and prerequisites. Also see the FEMA Statement of Interest (SOI) in item L6, below.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(5) Award of Community Compact Grant for Zoning Bylaw Study (*)

The Governor's office has funded the Town's application for a Community Compact grant for a study of the Essex zoning bylaws, in the Town's full requested amount of \$45,150. The Commonwealth has presented the grant award paperwork to the Town for signature and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has presented its own contract to the Town for engagement in this important work. Work on this project is expected to begin in October.

Recommendation: **Board signature of the grant contract with the Commonwealth and of the MAPC contract to undertake the work.**

(6) Statement of Interest, BRIC and HMGP Grants

As the Board may recall, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) did not encourage the Town to apply for the subject grant program last year. MEMA is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to determine if FEMA will allow the use of predictive data as a basis for completing the necessary Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) – a prerequisite for both the BRIC and the HMGP programs. Last year at this time, FEMA did not allow the use of such data and, while the flooding on the Southern Avenue end of Apple Street does not happen often now, State data predicts that the frequency will rise sharply in future years. I have filed the required Statement of Interest (SOI) with MEMA and we will learn soon whether we can include future predictions in the cost analysis this year. If not, we will likely have to wait again, until FEMA does incorporate such inclusion.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

M. Emergency Planning

(1) Update of FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps and Associated Products

Since changes and exceptions to FEMA flood maps and associated products are always ongoing, FEMA periodically releases updates to documents that have experienced changes over time. FEMA has reached out to the Town and will hold a remote Consultation Coordination Officer (CCO) meeting with appropriate Town personnel on October 5, 2021. The meeting will go over any changes with respect to Essex products and personnel will have a chance to ask questions or provide any other input.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

N. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, on August 30, 2021 and September 3, 2021 and for portions of the day on August 24-26, 2021.

(2) Labor Day Holiday

The office was closed on September 6, 2021, 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.