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Memorandum

**TO: Brendhan Zubricki, Town Administrator, Town of Essex
 Greg Federspiel, Town Administrator, Town of Manchester by the Sea**

FROM: Robert Halpin, Senior Associate, Collins Center for Public Management

DATE: March 26, 2019

RE: Manchester/Essex Regional/Shared Services Review – Early Action Opportunities

The project team from the Collins Center for Public Management recently completed a series of interviews with department heads and other officials of the Towns of Essex and Manchester by the Sea as part of Shared Services Review for your two communities. The Scope of Services for this project directed the team, at approximately the conclusion of this phase of the project, to report any suggestions or ideas for shared services that were revealed that might be readily implementable prior to the conclusion of the complete review. The purpose of this memo is to outline a variety of such suggestions and ideas.

1. Manchester Harbormaster’s Microsoft Access Database for improving the Boat Excise Tax Commitment and the renewal of annual Mooring and Slip assignments

MGL c. 60B, s. 2 provides that each community shall annually assess boats and vessels which are habitually moored or docked within that community for the privilege of utilizing the waters of the Commonwealth. While the local board of assessors has responsibility for determining the assessment value of such boats and vessels and levying the excise tax, the local harbormaster plays an important role in identifying such boats and providing the most accurate list possible to the assessors.

Each community executes an annual renewal of all mooring permits and slip (dockage) assignments. That list is an important input into the development of the annual tax commitment by the assessors. Additionally, each community receives a listing of boats and vessels that may be habitually moored in that community from the MA Environmental Police, the accuracy of which may be unproven.

There are two leading, commercially available online mooring and slip renewal software packages, notably OnLine Mooring and Mooringinfo.com (which the Town of Essex is considering using). The Manchester

by the Sea harbormaster developed a no-cost alternative utilizing the Microsoft Access database application and has been able to link the database to the Town's website and online renewal page. In addition to annually updating the annual mooring and slip assignment list, he can move the list of vessels provided each year from the MA Environmental Police into the database, and can sort for and remove duplicates. He can convey an accurate list of boats and vessels which he believes are subject to the boat excise tax in Manchester by the Sea to the assessors. He believes that this process has improved the completeness of the list from which the assessors work and has reduced the amount of time they spend administering abatement applications from boat owners due to errors or inaccuracies with the underlying list. The harbormaster is prepared to assist the Town of Essex harbormaster and assessors to determine whether the database and renewal management process would add to the efficiency of boat excise tax renewals. Essex may be moving to Mooringinfo.com in the spring of 2020, especially if this web-based application can be offered at no cost to the Town (customer fees would instead support the undertaking). A study of the logistics of the Manchester program versus the Mooringinfo.com platform will likely play a major role in what Essex chooses.

2. On-call Utility Contractor for Public Works Emergencies

The Essex department of public works highway department is supervised by the superintendent of public works, and consists of five full-time employees, including a foreman, three equipment operators, and a laborer. Water Department personnel are dedicated to running the treatment plant/sourcing functions. The highway department work crew finds itself frequently called away from the regular roadway maintenance and repair and response to residents' requests for service whenever a water main break, sewer line failure or backup, or similar emergency occurs. The emergency may divert all of the highway department's resources for the duration of the emergency and results in a substantial backlog in the street maintenance and repair and residential service functions.

Manchester by the Sea maintains an open "time and materials" contract with a North Shore-based utility contractor and, in the event of a water or sewer infrastructure emergency, calls upon that contractor for operators and machinery to respond to the emergency. Manchester by the Sea is preparing to rebid the annual contract for this emergency, on-call utility contractor and would consider adding the Town of Essex DPW to the contract. In the opinion of the project team, such an arrangement would be of substantial assistance to the DPW, and would allow for improved efficiency and effectiveness in the maintenance and repair of Town roads and response to residents' call for service.

3. Recreation Fields in Essex and the Manchester/Essex youth athletics program

There are existing youth athletics programs administered by the Manchester by the Sea recreation department and non-profit youth athletic organizations. The programs serve the youth of both Manchester and Essex on athletic fields largely located in Manchester by the Sea. They are experiencing logistical difficulties in scheduling the fields currently in use, due to high demand for field time. There are

two parks with facilities located in the Town of Essex. Depending on the nature and schedule of each activity, it is possible that Essex could offer field space when existing programs being run in Essex are not in session. Maintenance of the fields by new programs will be an important factor, since increased use will require increased upkeep. There is an opportunity to expand use of these assets for active recreational uses benefiting each town.

4. Regional IT Initiative

In order to advance a proposal to establish shared information technology services across the North Shore region, the towns of Essex, Manchester by the Sea, Middleton, Hamilton, Wenham, and Topsfield have begun a cooperative effort to assess, evaluate, and inventory their respective IT infrastructure, software, and staffing. The assessment is intended to advance further discussion between this group, and the Town of Danvers to regionalize a system of IT services across all seven communities, with the Danvers data center taking the lead in managing the resulting network. The Town of Essex is currently receiving IT services from the Town of Danvers. The communities have received a quotation of \$80,342 to conduct this IT regionalization study and are pursuing a grant to fund the study. Since many smaller towns do not have dedicated IT staff, this regional model holds the promise of providing a menu of IT services to participating communities at an affordable cost and provided by an experienced municipal partner within the North Shore region.

5. Hazardous Waste Collection Drop Off/Disposal

In the recent past there had been a regional, cooperative procurement of Domestic Hazardous Waste Collection (Site Set Up) and Disposal Services. The most recent contract expired, and the contract could not be renewed through a subsequent regional, cooperative effort. As a result, collection and disposal costs for domestic hazardous waste increased significantly. The Towns of Manchester by the Sea and Essex had been participating in the regional procurement. To provide some relief from the increased fixed costs of setting up and overseeing the collection sites in each town, Manchester by the Sea health department and the Essex department of public work, who carry out these domestic hazardous waste collections in their respective communities, are moving towards a joint collection effort in which they spread those fixed costs between the two towns. The plan being advanced in the year ahead is to conduct one collection event in Manchester by the Sea for the benefit of each town. While the towns can jointly share the fixed costs, each town will remain responsible for the disposal costs associated with products delivered by their respective residents.

6. Regional Municipal Accounting Software

The town accountants for Essex and Manchester by the Sea each have substantial private sector accounting experience with custom software and, to varying degrees, each expressed frustration with the

inflexibility of municipal software packages. For instance, to have more flexibility in producing reports, the accountant prints a file to a spreadsheet which in turn is then uploaded into a standalone report generator (Crystal Reports), which is then used to produce a report. In addition to being time-consuming, the process is prone to error. The accountant from Manchester was more restrained in her comments on their software. The two towns might wish to cooperate on the development of a regional proposal to the Community Compact IT grant program and, with the support of additional small-town accountants, pursue a regional municipal software improvement initiative geared towards the needs of smaller towns.

7. Regional Energy Initiative – On Bill Credit Adjustment/SMART program

The Massachusetts legislature recently enacted and the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources recently implemented a new clean energy initiative named the Solar MA Renewables Target (SMART) to create the next iteration of state government support for further development of solar energy generation. It does so through a new, on-electric-bill crediting system that will help solar developers provide deeper savings on customers' electric bills. The new program, known as Alternative On Bill Credits (AOBC), allows solar developers to allocate solar net metering credits to multiple offsite customer accounts, including municipal governments and facilities, and for the first time have those net metering credits valued at the full value of the existing electric supply component of their bill. Since the credits are applied directly to the bill, there is no need to change electrical suppliers. These contracts between a municipality and a solar developer are an important financial tool for developing a solar generation facility. However, there is no actual outlay or commitment until the facility is constructed and generating electricity.

The Town of Manchester by the Sea has conducted its due diligence of this new program and recently entered into an Alternative On Bill Credit agreement with Sunrise Solar and expects to see a substantial savings on electricity costs. It is prepared to share its analysis and experience in evaluating this program with the Town of Essex, which should be able realize similar savings.

8. Regional North Shore Dredging Equipment Initiative

State Senator Bruce Tarr has been leading an effort to create a regional entity stretching from Cape Ann to the New Hampshire state line to assist coastal communities in lowering the costs of local coastal dredging of harbors, estuaries, and rivers. Last year, the Baker/Polito administration created a \$50 million grant program to assist coastal communities with these unique costs. Senator Tarr envisions a regional proposal for the purchase and ongoing ownership of dredging equipment. While each municipality would continue to absorb its share of the operation of the equipment, initial subsidized purchase and shared ownership of the equipment itself would lower each municipality's total cost of dredging. The Northeast Coastal Coalition, which includes communities ranging from Manchester by the Sea to Salisbury, may be the vehicle for supporting this effort, which may transition in the future to a specialized, council of governments-type organization. Both Essex and Manchester by the Sea are part of this new coalition and should continue to be active participants.

9. Ipswich Electric Light Department Equipment and Streetlight Maintenance

With the purchase of existing street light fixtures, which in turn will allow Essex to convert street lights to LED technology in 2019, Essex became responsible for the maintenance of the light fixtures. Manchester has already completed the identical project. Neither town owns the type of utility bucket truck required for this maintenance and lacks the manpower (presumably in the DPW) to perform the task. Both towns are in discussion with the Ipswich Municipal Light Department to provide these maintenance and repair functions on a time plus materials basis.

10. Cape Ann Housing Partnership

At the joint kick off meeting for this shared services study on January 31, 2019, the subject of housing affordability was raised as a topic of concern and as a hope that the project would explore regional approaches to promoting affordable housing. The Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce has been hosting meetings to explore regional approaches to the challenge of housing affordability in the region. The next meeting is March 29, 2019 where shared /regional services models and approaches to affordable housing will be reviewed. In the meantime, the Cape Ann Chamber may identify consensus on what a regional approach to affordable housing might undertake as activities and tasks. This consensus could then be compared to regional models and examples elsewhere.

11. Coastal Resiliency and Municipal Readiness

Both Manchester by the Sea and Essex are actively engaged in regional coastal resiliency and climate adaptation activities. The risks associated with rising sea levels manifest themselves in different ways in each community. Essex on the one hand has a substantial marshland and river environment representing one set of risks, while Manchester by the Sea has a coastline consisting of rocky outcrops and ledges. Nevertheless, each community recently became certified under the MA Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grants program. Essex has received two MVP Action Grants and is presently wrapping up work with respect to those projects. Manchester by the Sea has received one grant related to storm surge enhanced flooding on Sawmill Brook and is working on a second application related to this first effort. Each is now eligible to apply for grants to address specific aspects of their unique vulnerabilities. Therefore, they should move collaboratively to understand their approaches and solutions and look for opportunities to work collaboratively whenever possible.