



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of January 28, 2019

Report covers from January 5, 2019 to January 25, 2019

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Strategic Planning Committee Meeting Summary

Town Planner Matt Coogan and I met with members of the Strategic Planning Committee on January 15, 2019. The Committee did not have a quorum present but used the time to receive progress updates concerning Strategic Plan goals over the past quarter. Next quarter, the Committee may make a recommendation to the Selectmen to add a tenth major theme to the Plan – Building Coastal Resilience.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Essex River Cultural District Enrichment Opportunity

On January 4, 2019, Rob Fitzgibbon of the Essex Finance Committee and Lee Spence of the Essex River Cultural District represented the Town of Essex at a Cultural Planning Lab, co-sponsored by the Essex County Community Foundation (ECCF), the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC). Support for the effort is being provided by the Barr Foundation. This was the first meeting being held as part of an effort to get community input for a subsequent Regional Arts and Culture plan.

The ECCF is interested in how cultural planning efforts can highlight cultural resources but also dovetail well with other municipal pursuits, such as economic development. As such, the ECCF highlighted its current Public Art and Creative Placemaking Grants which includes, Clam Skiff and Baskets, a recent award to the Essex Shipbuilding Museum. The Essex participants reported that some of the activities, like the identification and mapping of cultural assets, will be a useful tool for planning in Essex. Both the Essex River Cultural District Committee and the Economic Development Committee may be able to realize some of their own goals through this culturally-related work.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Senior Center Wi-Fi and Town Network Connections

Prior to the installation of the Fiber Optic Municipal Area Network (FMAN) which now connects the Town's computer infrastructure across all major Town buildings, the Essex Senior Center was a stand-alone site. The Center had its own Internet connection and offered public Wi-Fi on that connection, with the two

employees in that location utilizing stand-alone PCs. Now that the fiber connection back to Town Hall is available, I have worked with our consultant to roll out both public Wi-Fi and employee Town network connections via the resources at the Town Hall site. Senior Center VOIP telephones now also receive service via Town Hall.

Work included some basic network cable installation and reconfiguration in the basement and configuration of the control software in Town Hall. Council on Aging employees may now log onto the Town network wirelessly, from the Center, complete with file shares and disaster recovery capabilities. Council employees use laptop PCs since they frequently move around the building to meet the needs of seniors. The Director will determine at what pace the Center's employees transition over to the new services. The Comcast Internet drop in the Center will be discontinued after the transition is complete.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary. Total time – 2 hours.

C. Personnel

(1) Continued Collective Bargaining, EPBA and AFSCME

The management team engaged both unions in continued collective bargaining (EPBA on January 9, 2019 and AFSCME on January 10, 2019). Future bargaining sessions have been set up for January 30 (AFSCME) and January 31 (EPBA).

Recommendation: Board discussion in executive session per the posted agenda.

(2) Department of Labor Standards OSHA Webinar

The Board of Health Administrator (also the Town's OSHA Coordinator) and I participated in a webinar presented by the Massachusetts Department of Labor Standards (DLS) on January 23, 2019. The webinar highlighted the advent of the application of OSHA standards to municipal health and safety. While DLS has always had the authority to reference OSHA standards in its enforcement and compliance actions, a recent change in law will have the agency enforcing these standards in a much more structured way. During the webinar, we learned that the primary focus will be on promoting workplace health and safety, with actual enforcement being secondary. Over time, DLS will move into to a much more robust regulatory role.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Development of Proposal for Downton Parking and Signage

I discussed the subject proposed project of the Economic Development Committee (EDC) with the Town Planner and personnel from a traffic engineering firm on January 11, 2019. Presently, we are working to make contact with MassDOT so that we can better understand the permitting process, including its timeline and expected costs. I inquired to MassDOT as to whether digital as-built plans exist for the Route 133 Reconstruction Project from several years ago (as opposed to marked-up paper plans) and learned that digital plans do not exist. This fact will make the design process more labor-intensive. Presently, both the Selectmen and the EDC are in favor of proposing this project to the Annual Town Meeting in May.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Town Hall Emergency Generator Maintenance

The Town Hall generator recently generated an audible alarm that could be heard from the Town Hall parking lot. Upon investigation, the ground-fault power outlet within the generator enclosure had failed, translating to the inability of the diesel engine's heater to function. The alarm was a low-temperature warning and, fortunately, it was not extremely cold outside at the time. Our electrical contractor replaced the receptacle and the unit is working properly.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Historic Records Basement Vault Door Adjustment

The Town Clerk reported that the heavy door on the Town Hall basement vault was becoming increasingly difficult to open. It was apparent that two of the three lock bars that lock the door were rubbing on the door frame and that the door itself was binding at the frame. The DPW Superintendent slightly ground the ends of the two bars and sections of the door that were contacting the frame and better door operation was restored. The issue may have stemmed from vault settling over time, especially in light of the intense, construction-related vibrations about two years ago.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Town Hall Furnace Code Compliance

As reported in the past, when the new Town Hall high-efficiency gas furnace was installed as part of the recent building renovation, it did not include a high-water cutoff valve, due to its size and output. Even though our project designer indicated that this device was not called for by code, our insurance inspector disagreed and required it to be installed. The device has been installed for some time now but the inspector only recently returned to inspect the work (January 17, 2019). He agreed that we are now in compliance and the State will issue a certificate in the near future.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Review of Fiscal Year 2020 Operating and Capital Budget Proposals

At the last meeting, the Board finalized its operating and capital budget proposals to the Finance Committee for fiscal year 2020. The Finance Committee is presently reviewing budget proposals on a Town-wide basis and will be in touch with any questions or initial feedback. The Committee will meet jointly with the Board on February 25 and March 11, 2019. The final budget proposal is voted on by the Finance Committee in time to bring the budget book to print during the first week in April.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) School Budget Group Meeting Summary

(*)

Chairman O'Donnell, Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick, and I met with Manchester and School District officials on January 11, 2019 to continue to discuss the fiscal year 2020 operating budget proposal and the upcoming Memorial School construction project. The Board had finalized its recommendation for construction project financing at its last meeting and the School District will hold the final public hearing concerning the fiscal year 2020 budget on January 29, 2019. Presently, the finance committees and boards of selectmen in both communities and the School District officials all agree that level principal financing, along with the borrowing of most of the project costs now, rather than later, is the most favorable arrangement.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

(1) Massachusetts Municipal Association Annual Meeting and Trade Show

I attended the subject conference in Boston on January 18-19, 2019. The conference featured a variety of useful presentations and excellent networking opportunities with other municipal officials. Some sessions were eligible for premium credits from our insurer as part of the MIIA Rewards Program.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) February 11 Special Town Meeting Discussion and Draft Motions (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that a Special Town Meeting would likely be held February 11, 2019 to discuss the possible purchase or eminent domain taking of property for a new public safety building. The Selectmen met with the Town Building Committee on January 14 and 23, 2019 to review the options and ultimately agreed that the Town Meeting should consider the purchase of a private parcel at 11 John Wise Avenue. The owner is a willing seller and their $\frac{3}{4}$ of-an-acre parcel could be added to a portion of the Town's cemetery parcel abutting John Wise Avenue to provide ample space for a new fire station and appurtenant parking.

If this proposal is accepted by Town Meeting, the existing fire and police station at 24 Martin Street could be renovated or re-built as a police-only facility after the Fire Department moves to the new fire station on John Wise Avenue. Town Meeting will also consider authorizing a change in the purpose for which the needed portion of the Town-owned cemetery parcel is held (from the Board of Public Works, for cemetery purposes to the Board of Selectmen, for general purposes).

The Board voted to hold the February 11th Special Town Meeting at their joint meeting with the Town Building Committee on January 23, 2019 and the [warrant](#) has been signed and posted by a Town Constable. The warrant includes an article considering the purchase of 11 John Wise Avenue and an article considering the transfer of a portion of adjacent Town-owned property from the Board of Public Works, for cemetery purposes, to the Board of Selectmen, for general municipal purposes. The Town has retained an appraisal firm to conduct an appraisal of the parcel to potentially be purchased and results will be available by February 6. The Selectmen and the Town Building Committee will host a final public forum relative to site selection on February 6, 2019 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall.

Recommendation: **Board discussion relative to the upcoming Special Town Meeting, including the draft motions for the two articles.**

(2) Preliminary Annual Town Meeting Warrant (*)

I have developed a preliminary version of the Annual Town Meeting warrant per the Board's guidance at the last meeting.

Recommendation: **Board review of this preliminary document.**

(3) Proposed Tax Deferral and Reduction Programs for Senior Citizens (*)

The Essex Council on Aging has reviewed some elderly tax deferral and reduction programs that have been implemented by other communities and has interest in exploring similar programs in Essex. Selectman Spinney and I met with the Council on Aging Director, the Town Accountant, the Treasurer/Collector, personnel from the Assessors' office, and a representative of the Finance Committee on January 16, 2019 to discuss the Council's proposals in more detail. While many options exist, the group agreed that the first proposal to Town Meeting should perhaps be the measure that will help the most people and will give the Town a chance to evaluate its popularity and financial ramifications before offering other programs. To that end, the group agreed that a good first proposal would be to modify the income standards by which a taxpayer may qualify for an elderly tax deferral, since the present income range is very low and does not allow most people to qualify.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Shared Services Collaboration Grant Kick-off Meeting

The Manchester Town Administrator and I met with Bob Halpin from the Collins Center for Public Management on January 7, 2018. The Collins Center will be our contractor for an analysis concerning how Essex and Manchester might work together to reduce costs and increase efficiency. At the meeting, we covered a wide variety of services that the Center plans to review and both boards of selectmen met jointly that evening to agree upon the final scope for the project. The Chairman has signed the contract with the Collins Center and the two boards of selectmen plan to have a public kick-off meeting, which has been scheduled in the Essex Town Hall for January 31, 2019.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Essex Housing Coalition Meeting, CHAPA Grant

I will attend the second meeting of the Essex Housing Coalition on February 5, 2019, along with Selectman Phippen. The Coalition meets under the guidance of

the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) and includes a broad cross-section of community members. We are hopeful that this second meeting will allow the group to establish a framework going forward. The first meeting was more introductory in nature.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) MVP Action Grant Monthly Reports

I will soon file with the State the subject monthly reports for the month of January. Relative to the natural sediment deposition study, we are learning more about the study's results and application to possible, future engineered sediment deposition techniques. A preliminary presentation of the study's results is set for sometime in March. Relative to the mussel reef feasibility study, Northeastern University is moving through the available literature, now that students have been assigned to the project.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(4) Conomo Point Seawall Renovation Design Status (*)

Our designer working on the subject project under a State grant program has developed some preliminary options for the Board to consider. Options reside along a range of thoroughness and a range of aesthetics. In one respect, some areas could be repaired, with others being fully replaced, or most areas could be fully replaced. In another respect, the finished product could range from a simple but effective poured concrete wall to a hybrid wall with a concrete core and mortared stones as a façade that also pin back into the wall. The more thorough the renovation effort and the more aesthetically pleasing the finished façade, the more expensive the work will be. Further, if a façade is desired, maintenance costs over time will need to be factored into keeping the wall in good condition.

Recommendation: **Board review of the various options that have been provided by the designer. Basic decisions on how to proceed will be necessary to enter into the next phase of design.**

M. Emergency Planning

No items.

N. Other Items

(1) Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

The office was closed on January 21, 2019, 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.