



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of January 23, 2023

Report covers from January 7, 2023 to January 20, 2023

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I attended the subject meeting along with Chairman Pereen and the Town Planner on January 19, 2023. The meeting featured a discussion regarding the ongoing efforts in Essex working toward the establishment of a new sense of place, or a "brand". These projects included a Placemaking Plan, an off-season themed downtown event, and the installation of decorative street lights (with the majority of funding coming from State grants). The combined effort will make the downtown area more pleasing to both residents and visitors alike and will serve to stimulate the local economy. The Committee also discussed other priorities, including setting goals for the upcoming year.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

B. Computer Systems

(1) Preparing for Installation of Police Body Camera Management System

Essex police officers will begin wearing body cameras later this calendar year. Before cameras may be put into use, a server used to store video files and special docks that allow video files to be uploaded to the server need to be installed. To that end, Chief Francis, Sergeant Shamshak, Sergeant Bruce, personnel from the camera system vendor, and I discussed the deployment on a video call on January 11, 2023. System deployment will actually occur starting March 13, 2023 and will likely last for three days, inclusive of user training. I will begin working to set up integration between the new system and the Town's Windows active directory and I have provided information concerning the Town's IP scheme to the vendor. Prior to the deployment date, personnel from the vendor will be in touch to ensure that all back-end planning and website whitelisting has been implemented. Cameras will go into use sometime after training has been completed and I will work with the vendor to integrate a video backup server with the primary server elsewhere in the building.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) North Shore IT Collaborative Update

I participated in a meeting of the North Shore IT Collaborative on January 12, 2023. The Collaborative is now in the process of moving toward two-factor authentication for any work-related system. This will include the Town's web-based, Microsoft Outlook e-mail system, Windows logins on work devices

(including subsequent logins during the work day after a screen timeout), and connection to the Town's network via VPN (which is already requiring two-factor authentication). The system works by requiring a user to enter a code sent to his or her smartphone, in addition to entering standard, Windows login credentials. The Collaborative plans to first roll out two-factor authentication in Essex, since Essex is the smallest of the communities, making it easier to work out any initial issues.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

C. Personnel

No items.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) Submission, Apple Street Project (*)
Personnel from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) hosted a call on January 9, 2023, along with personnel from MEMA's technical consultant, Atkins Global. Both Chairman Preen and I were in attendance. The meeting was aimed at learning more about the various benefits of the proposed Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Culvert Replacement Project, in order to make the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) as competitive as possible. Atkins had already been successful in reaching a BCR greater than 1.0 (which is a prerequisite to even applying for Federal funding) but more details about the project and its benefits will increase the BCR. We learned that the current BCR requires the design to maintain the proposed finished roadbed elevation height throughout the entire project (both low areas) in order to stay in the favorable range. Design changes bringing the BCR down below 1.0 will automatically disqualify the project from further Federal funding consideration.

I was asked to provide MEMA with various documents and information related to the project and we were informed that several key project elements need to be addressed prior to June 30, 2023 including: **a) settlement of the acquisition of any necessary project easements, b) a definite plan for the non-Federal share of the project (10%), and c) local consent from the Planning Board to allow stone walls to be removed/relocated and trees to be removed along a scenic road.** With respect to the easements, it will be necessary to provide formal documents for consideration by each property owner once our engineering consultant has fully developed them. With respect to the non-Federal share, the present intent is to apply for another Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grant and I have submitted a formal Statement of Interest (SOI) so that we can get some advanced feedback from MVP grant personnel. This grant will be offered in the spring. With respect to the Planning Board consent regarding the scenic road matter, the Board should determine when that application should be submitted.

Recommendation: Board discussion with respect to project easements, the non-Federal share, and the timing of the Planning Board application.

(2) Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Culvert Replacement Project Update (*)

At the last meeting, the Board asked that I work further with our engineering firm for the subject project to finalize the firm's response memo to both Planning Board and general public comments and input with respect to the project. One key point was whether firm personnel are willing to, as professional engineers, specify a road width of anything less than the industry design standard of 20 feet (in accordance with AASHTO Geometric Design of Highways and Streets). The firm has responded that it will not produce a design that does not meet the standard, for both public safety and professional liability reasons. The full response memo is posted on the project web page at www.essexma.org/apple, along with the most recent version of the draft project plans.

The project itself is moving into the permitting phase and I have been involved with pre-permitting meetings hosted by our engineering team with the Massachusetts MEPA Office and with the Essex Conservation Agent. With respect to having the design plans reviewed by an arborist and by a landscape architect (a request made by the Planning Board), a local arborist has agreed to volunteer his time and between the Town Planner (who is a landscape architect) and a resident landscape architect who will also volunteer her time, we will be able to accommodate the Planning Board's request.

Recommendation: Board discussion as necessary.

(3) Solid Waste Hauling Contract (*)

At the last meeting, the Board voted to support the hiring of Commonwealth Hauling (the Town's present solid waste hauling contractor) to continue to haul solid waste from the Town transfer station to the Covanta waste-to-energy plant, starting July 1, 2023. Under this arrangement, recycling would continue to be handled by Dynamic Hauling, and the Town would contract directly with Covanta for the actual disposal of the waste. Further, the Board supported the possible exploration of the hiring of a number of part-time employees to cover the monitoring of trash being brought to the transfer station by residents (either that it is not construction/commercial waste or, if pay-as-you-throw is implemented, that all trash is in official Town trash bags). Another option is to hire Commonwealth to manage the station with its own personnel.

The Board of Public Works considered the Selectmen's recommendations at their meeting of January 17, 2023 and agrees that Commonwealth should be retained as the Town's solid waste contractor as of July 1, 2023. Further, the Board of Public Works favors using Commonwealth to actually run the transfer station, as opposed to the continued use of full-time DPW labor or the hiring of new, part-time employees.

Recommendation: Board discussion with respect to the timing of next steps toward entering into to a contract with Commonwealth for solid waste management and transport and with Covanta for solid waste disposal.

(3) Sale of Gregory Island Town-owned Lots (*)

At the last meeting, the Board asked that I determine from the Board of Assessors when the various Town-owned vacant lots on Gregory Island that have been authorized for sale were last assessed. It will be important to understand the current assessed values of the properties in order to establish meaningful lower limits on what the Town will accept for offers to purchase. The Assessors have been reviewing the data and I expect to have more information by meeting time.

Recommendation: Board discussion as necessary.

(4) Route 133 Essex River Bridge Replacement Project Update (*)

I participated in a monthly construction meeting with DOT / bridge contractor personnel on January 10, 2023. The contractor left the job site for the winter at the end of the week of January 9, 2023, after tying in the Town's sewer crossing over the new bridge on January 10, 2023. National Grid is working on gas line relocation to align with the new bridge and is expected to be in that process through mid-February. For about two of the four weeks of gas line work, traffic will be limited to one lane. However, the contractor does not expect any significant one-lane traffic impositions between the end of the gas line work and the end of the project. Also, although preliminary discussions were focused on getting traffic moving over the new bridge by the spring, the contractor mentioned that the opening of the new bridge will be dependent on when work is resumed, which may be later than initially anticipated. Presently, the contractor is aiming to have the new bridge open to traffic before July 4, 2023 (likely in June).

Recommendation: Board discussion as necessary.

(5) Conomo Point Stone Piers Renovation Project Update (*)

I spoke with personnel from GZA Geoenvironmental on January 13, 2023 concerning the status of the project that will renovate both stone piers at Conomo Point. GZA is presently finalizing the design and specifications for the project and has recommended a combination of repointing, pinning with rods, and holding stones together with bolted steel straps. While it would be convenient to either renovate or replace both sets of stairs on the large stone pier, it is likely that the Town does not have the funds presently to include that work (due chiefly to the expected high cost of the necessary steel stair railings). However, it is possible to have the stairs priced as an "add-alternate" during the project bidding process and the work can be either selected or denied based on available funds (including perhaps funding from the Conomo Point Association if the Association chooses to contribute). It is necessary for the Board to approve the recommended scope of work prior to plan finalization and bidding. It is expected that work will commence by April and be completed by mid-May, 2023.

Recommendation: Board review and approval of the proposed scope of pier renovation work.

(6) Essex River Dredging Project Preparation Update

The Army Corps of Engineers asked the Town to run an advertisement in the Gloucester Daily Times on January 13, 2023 in order to fulfill one of the first required steps toward collecting public input about the subject dredging project.

The Corps' present contact for the project has indicated the following as the Corps' overall plan at this stage:

- Schedule – The Corps in the process completing the final design, with an expected completion in mid to late-February. Work is anticipated to commence in the fall of 2023.
- Environmental Coordination / Permitting – The draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been released for public review with the opening of the 30-day Public Notice comment period. The Corps will soon be submitting to State agencies its request for a 401 Water Quality Cert (WQC) and MA Coastal Zone consistency determination for material to be placed in state waters.
- Dredging project documents and Plans & Specifications are being prepared, with an anticipated bid opening date in mid-June, 2023.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Further Discussion with Respect to Town Hall Bell Tower Roof Repair (*)

At the last meeting, Chairman Pereen indicated that she was working to line up a roofing contractor to repair the storm damage to the bell tower roof on Town Hall. She has now had the chance for a contractor to look at the job and will be able to update the Board on what is required.

Recommendation: Board discussion as necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) School Budget Collaboration Group Meeting Summary (*)

I participated in the subject meeting along with Chairman Pereen and Finance Committee Buttrick on January 18, 2023. Personnel and officials from the Town of Manchester and the Manchester Essex Regional School District were also in

attendance. The meeting featured a discussion regarding a process that could be initiated to review individual class sizes (as opposed to class size averages) and a plan for possibly funding the school budget deficit with overrides in both towns (as opposed to using District and/or town reserves), with an eye toward sustaining District budget growth for three years at a time. Selectman Bradford subsequently met with me, Chairman Buttrick, and Town Accountant Soulard to discuss the Town's specific assessment of this most recent collaboration group discussion. Chairman Bradford plans to make remarks and to make a recommendation on the District's operating budget needs at the present meeting.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

(1) Massachusetts Municipal Management Association (MMA) Annual Meeting

I attended the subject meeting in Boston on January 20 and 21, 2023. The meeting provides a good opportunity to network with other municipal personnel and to attend presentations concerning current municipal topics. Further, the meeting includes a full trade show with many vendors offering a variety of municipal products and services.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Continued Review of Annual Town Meeting Article Topics (*)

At the last meeting, the Board again reviewed the list of possible Annual Town Meeting topics. I have revised the document in accordance with the Board's guidance.

Recommendation: **Continued review of the Annual Town Meeting topics list.**

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Community Planning Grant Small Group Meeting Summary (*)

Chairman Pereen and I met with Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) personnel, the Planning Board Chair and Vice-Chair, and the Town Planner with respect to advancing the goals of the Community Planning Grant on January 17,

2023. MAPC will eventually develop recommendations for zoning changes to the Fall Town Meeting. A joint meeting of the Selectmen and the Planning Board will be facilitated by MAPC on January 25, 2023 to formally introduce the public to the project and to begin mapping out the process for the work.

At the meeting on the 17th, the group also discussed the Town's state of compliance with the new requirements of Chapter 40A, Section 3A, since the Town is a "MBTA-adjacent small community". All communities are expected to either be compliant with Section 3A or to file an "action plan" to become compliant with the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) by January 31, 2023. MAPC personnel had already run a tool known as the 3A Compliance Model (provided by DHCD) and found that the Town's mixed-use zoning district is likely adequate for the Town to achieve full compliance. To that end, the Town Planner is working with DHCD to submit a formal request for certification to DHCD (which will still require the filing of an "action plan" since DHCD is not yet ready to review requests for actual certification).

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Off-Season Event Sub-Working Group Meeting Summary (*)

I attended the subject working group meeting along with Economic Development Committee (EDC) Chairman Jody Harris, personnel from our project consultant (Civic Space Collaborative - CSC), and members of the business community on January 19, 2023. The sub-working group is assisting CSC to develop details with respect to a planned, off-season event in May of 2023 that is aimed at driving business to downtown Essex. Generally, the group is focusing on the weekend of May 19-21, 2023 with near-term marketing performed the weekend before, when the Town is usually full of visitors for Mothers' Day. The event will be spring-themed and will have a wide variety of activities including some offerings in public spaces and some offerings within local restaurants and retail shops.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Town Placemaking Plan Site Visit Summary (*)

Our Placemaking Plan consultant (Civic Space Collaborative – CSC) led a downtown site visit on January 19, 2023 to brainstorm ideas for a more cohesive and visually-pleasing collection of downtown public spaces. The Chairman of the Economic Development Committee (EDC) and several members of the business community participated in the tour. CSC will now review notes taken and suggestions made during the site visit so that some initial recommendations for the content of the Town's Placemaking Plan may be provided.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

M. Emergency Planning

No items.

N. Other Items

(1) Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Holiday

The office was closed on January 16, 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.*