



## Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of February 6, 2023

*Report covers from January 21, 2023 to February 3, 2023*

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

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### A. Town Department Reports/Requests

#### (1) Economic Development Committee Tracking Template (\*)

At the last meeting, the Chairman of the Essex Economic Development Committee (EDC) discussed with the Board the concept of a tracking template that the EDC would like to put in place to coordinate its initiatives across all Town departments. The Board asked that the EDC Chairman share that draft document with the individual Board members and that occurred during the week of January 30, 2023. The Board has now had some time to review the concept and I have completed my review and have made some suggestions.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

#### (2) Affordable Housing Trust Meeting Summary (\*)

I attended the first meeting of the Essex Affordable Housing Trust on January 30, 2023, along with Chairman Pereen and Town Planner Dana Menon. The Trust organized itself with Selectboard Chairman Pereen also becoming the Chairman of the Trust. Visitors from Habitat for Humanity were present at the meeting and were interested in possible future collaboration if the Town had any vacant property under its control to offer (Habitat would build affordable units and the Town would provide the land). Two specific questions were asked to the Selectmen: 1) would the Selectmen support the use of the Town home page for a note indicating that the Trust can accept gifts of money or land for future affordable housing initiatives, and 2) would the Selectmen support a similar message going out with the next tax bill mailing in April. The Trust will meet again on March 6, 2023 to begin to shape its goals and agenda for the upcoming year.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary, including whether the website and/or the tax bill mailing may be used for the Trust's messaging.**

### B. Computer Systems

#### (1) Senior Center Wi-Fi Troubleshooting

The Council on Aging Director reported connectivity issues with the public Wi-Fi service at the Senior Center and attempted to troubleshoot it with our IT consultant. The issue required a higher level of knowledge to continue with the troubleshooting effort and I was able to assist the consultant with that additional work. The public Wi-Fi is now again working properly.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### **C. Personnel**

#### **(1) Preliminary Review of Fiscal Year 2024 Proposed Wage & Salary Scale (\*)**

I have developed a preliminary proposal for the fiscal year 2024 Wage & Salary Scale that the Board, in its capacity as Personnel Board, will eventually recommend to the Annual Town Meeting for approval. Generally, the document includes a two percent cost of living increase for all non-union, non-contract Town positions. However, a number of appointing authorities and employees (in situations where the Board is the appointing authority) have requested compensation increases greater than the recommended cost of living allowance. The Board may wish to begin reviewing the various requests and proposals.

***Recommendation:* Board review of the preliminary document in its capacity as the Personnel Board.**

### **D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects**

#### **(1) Downtown Lighting Engineering and Possible Future Expansion (\*)**

As the Board may recall, Chairman Pereen had been authorized by the Board to sign a contract with engineering consultant Stantec for the design and construction oversight associated with the decorative lighting construction project in the downtown area. After working out contract language with Stantec and Town Counsel, the Chairman signed the contract during the week of January 23, 2023 and I participated in a project kickoff meeting on January 27, 2023. Stantec plans to get right to work on the plans and specification for the project, which will proceed on two tracks. First, documents will be developed for public bid of all of the subsurface work required. We will be using the Ipswich Public Light Department to pull the wiring and to install all of the above-ground equipment. The advantage to using Ipswich is that prevailing wage is not required and any markup on equipment will be minimal. As such, we are presently working with Ipswich to ensure that any materials and labor that Ipswich will NOT be providing gets properly inserted into the public bid package for the subsurface work.

I have provided to Stantec the example light fixture and pole that the Economic Development Committee (EDC) and the Board recommended from equipment that is in place on Beacon Hill in Boston and Stantec will work to source similar equipment from three major suppliers. The EDC and the Board will have a chance to make a final selection on equipment style and we can move toward the purchase of the equipment and have the cost prior to even putting the subsurface portion of the project out to bid.

Further, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (DOT) had informed the Town that it may be possible for DOT to embed conduit for additional future

lighting in certain sections of new sidewalks that will be installed between Water Street and the Gloucester city line during calendar year 2023. DOT provided the Town with a map of the sidewalk project and asked the Town to mark up the map and provide a cost estimate for what the conduit work is expected to cost. After the Town submits that information, DOT will advise the Town as to whether any conduit work will be included in the sidewalk project using DOT funding. At this point, we have provided DOT with some cost per foot information from Stantec and we have inquired whether the installation of conduit and handholes could be completed along the entire sidewalk project.

***Recommendation:* Board discussion with respect to the recent downtown lighting project and with respect to what should be asked of DOT concerning future conduit placement should DOT indicate that conduit along the entire sidewalk project is not possible.**

(2) Solid Waste Contracting Plan for July 1, 2023 (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that Commonwealth Hauling should be retained for both the management of the Essex Transfer Station and the transport of solid waste to Covanta Haverhill for disposal, effective July 1, 2023. The Board also agreed that Covanta should be retained as the Town's disposal vendor (waste-to-energy via incineration) for the same timeframe. Further, the Board asked that the Board of Public Works (BPW) solidify its position on both of the above vendors and determine its stance on whether pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) will be implemented.

The BPW met on January 30, 2023 and agreed with the Selectmen's positions entirely. With respect to PAYT, the BPW is in favor of a hybrid approach that would involve the purchase of a transfer station sticker by any resident desiring to participate AND the purchase of individual, official Town trash bags that must be used in order to discard any refuse at the station. Trash bags would be produced by a third vendor, WasteZero. Recycling will continue to be supported by the Town's current vendor, Dynamic. Further, the Town's existing, trailer-style compactor would be replaced in-kind (and not replaced with a breakaway-style compactor).

***Recommendation:* Board authorization to begin contract discussions with all three service vendors (Commonwealth, Covanta, and WasteZero) and to replace the compactor in-kind.**

(3) Sale of Gregory Island Town-owned Lots

At the meeting of January 9, 2023, 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 have asked the Building Inspector to

rule out whether any of the lots in question would be considered buildable lots (which, of course, would tremendously affect the value).

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

(4) Conomo Point Stone Piers Renovation Project Update

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that the subject project should contain all of the base work that our engineering consultant (GZA) had recommended, along with two add-alternates (one for the relocation of the downriver set of stairs to the seawall, with railings and the other for the same work on the upriver side). The downriver location is more important for new access than the upriver location and this strategy will allow the Town to just complete one set of stairs if the project budget does not allow for two sets. GZA is in the process of finalizing design plans and packaging the design for bidding.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

(5) Route 133 Essex River Bridge Replacement Project Update

As reported previously, the contractor had 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 continues to work on gas line relocation/replacement to align with the new bridge and is expected to be in that process through late-February (schedule has slipped). For about three 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. The contractor may be able to resume work by early March.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

**E. Insurance**

No items.

**F. Facilities**

(1) Allen Property Boarded and Fenced for Public Safety

The Board recently determined that funding that had been set aside by Town Meeting in the past should be used to board up two dilapidated former residences and to fence off a garage and shed (both which appear to be structurally unsound) at the Allen properties on Southern Avenue. The Town is presently in the process of taking the properties for unpaid taxes and will likely auction the properties off after the taking has been completed. Even though the Town does not yet own the

properties, the Building Inspector and the Fire Chief recommended these precautionary measures to protect public health and work is almost complete. The Fire Department and the Police Department conducted interior sweeps of both houses before the boarding up process was allowed to begin.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

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

At the Board's meeting of January 9, 2023, 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 several contractors to look at the job and will be able to update the Board on what is required and what is recommended.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## **G. Fiscal/Budget**

(1) Final Fiscal Year 2024 Regional School District Operating Budget Hearing (\*)

I attended the subject hearing on January 24, 2023 along with the members of the Board, the Town Accountant, members of the Finance Committee, and many officials and personnel from the Town of Manchester and the Manchester Essex Regional School District. The hearing contained a presentation made by the District's Superintendent and its Business Agent. A central question Essex officials have is related to a proposal for the District to ask the two towns to both seek an operating budget correction via Proposition 2 ½ override and to seek athletic field renovation costs via a Proposition 2 ½ capital exclusion.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## **H. Complaints**

No items.

## **I. Meetings Attended**

(1) MassDevelopment/Cape Ann Communities Presentation (\*)

The Mayor of Gloucester hosted the subject presentation given by the State agency MassDevelopment (MD) on January 24, 2023. I was in attendance along with Chairman Pereen, Economic Development Committee Chairman Harris, and several other officials and personnel from other area communities. MD's Northeast Team provided an overview of MD programs including traditional lending services, brownfield financing, collaborative workspace programs, real estate services, and other services. MD also highlighted its new States Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI), which provides matching financing (with private lenders) to qualifying small businesses and their Property Assessed

Clean Energy (PACE) program that funds energy efficiency and clean energy investments in commercial property.

At the meeting, all participants had ample opportunity to ask questions and make connections with various MD staff. In Essex, the Board may want to explore the PACE program since it is something that the Town could put in place even if it is never utilized and it does not carry any risk for the Town. Under PACE, the Town ends up assessing and collecting betterments via tax bills for commercial improvements (strictly as a passthrough), which gives a business up to twenty years to repay, with the debt running with the property.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## **J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations**

### (1) Preliminary Draft of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that the list of potential Annual Town Meeting topics had been organized sufficiently to see a preliminary draft of the warrant. As such, I have put that document together for the Board's review.

*Recommendation:* **Board review of the preliminary draft of the Annual Town Meeting Warrant.**

### (2) Possible Special Town Meeting to Consider Purchase of 31 Apple Street (\*)

As the Board is aware, the owner of 31 Apple Street has approached the Town with a right of first refusal for the purchase of the property. Similar to 30 Apple Street (which the Town will soon own), 31 Apple Street was held in agricultural use and Chapter 61A of the General Laws requires that a right of first refusal be offered. Given that the Town's deadline to either accept or decline the offer occurs prior to the next scheduled Town Meeting (Annual Town Meeting of May 1, 2023), if the Board is interested in pursuing the purchase, a Special Town Meeting will be necessary to determine if funding will be appropriated. Given the Board's planned meeting schedule over the next few months, a Special Town Meeting could be held on April 10, 2023, just after the scheduled Selectmen's meeting for that evening. In addition, the Board will need to hold a public hearing on the proposed purchase, which could be accommodated at the Board's next meeting, on February 27, 2023.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## **K. Legal Issues**

### (1) Possible Off-Season Occupancy of Seasonal Conomo Point Property (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board discussed information provided that suggested that an individual might be living in a seasonally-restricted property at Conomo Point during the off-season. The property at 5 Cogswell Road was initially purchased

from the Town under an “installment sale” agreement that allowed the elderly resident to remain in the home on a year-round basis until that resident no longer resided there. Simultaneously with the payoff of the installment agreement, a new owner was established and the seasonal restriction took effect. The Board asked that this matter be discussed with Town Counsel. At this juncture, it is recommended that the Board send the property owner a warning letter reminding them about the seasonal restriction in the deed and inquiring as to what the owner’s off-season address might be.

*Recommendation:* **Board signature of a warning letter to the property owner.**

## **L. Grants**

### (1) Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Action Grant Monthly Report

I worked with our consulting engineer to develop and file the subject report pertaining to the Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Culvert Replacement Project during the week of January 30, 2023. The report featured discussion regarding the status of the design plans and the recent technical memo from our consultant with respect to public comment and Planning Board input.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Rural and Small Town Development Fund Grant Application (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that the Town should collaborate with the YMCA to apply for capital improvement funding for the Centennial Grove. The Economic Development Committee had recommended that improvements be made in order to maximize the value of the Grove to generate revenue for one-day event rentals. The first step in the process is the submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI) through the Commonwealth One Stop for Growth Portal, which the Board authorized the Chairman to sign. After collaboration with personnel from the YMCA and Chairman Pereen, I submitted the EOI to the State by the deadline of February 3, 2023.

The scope of the proposal outlined in the EOI includes such improvements as: new, central restrooms with flush toilets (served by tight tank) and new changing facilities; renovated and expanded restrooms with flush toilets (served by tight tank), potable water supply well, heating system, and general renovation for the lakeside cottage program space; general renovation of the large garage/program space; renovation or replacement of an existing dock adjacent to the public beach; new dock at the lakeside cottage; paving; site lighting; and handwash stations.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

### (3) Continued Preparation for Federal Funding for Apple Street Project

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that specific easement packages for easements sought from all seven Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Culvert Replacement Project abutters should be prepared and discussed with the abutters as soon as possible. Our engineering consultant expects to have those available for me to distribute to project abutters during the week of February 6, 2023 and I will be forwarding when received.

The Board also agreed that the Town should apply for State funding via the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program to cover the portion of the project (10%) that Federal funding (90%) will not cover. The MVP grant coordinator has been consulted about the Town's potential application via the MVP Expression of Interest (EOI) process and we expect to have a more detailed discussion with MVP concerning our possible application by late-February.

Further, the Board asked that need for a scenic road hearing before the Planning Board be addressed with the Planning Board Chairman as soon as possible. Our engineering consultant and Town Counsel will need to be involved in that hearing and our consultant expects to be ready to support the hearing relatively soon (presently preparing graphics that will help illustrate changes to stone walls and removal and replacement of trees).

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

### (4) Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) Placemaking Grant Update (\*)

Our State-assigned placemaking technical assistance consultant, Civic Space Collaborative (CSC), held a meeting on January 30, 2023 to review information collected to date, including a reflection on a recent tour through the downtown area. Chairman Pereen, Town Planner Dana Menon, Economic Development Committee Chairman Harris and myself were in attendance, along with members of the Essex business community. The MDI grant program has awarded the Town \$25,000 of CSC's time to develop a plan that will help unify the various public spaces in our downtown area to create a more cohesive "brand" and sense of place. At the meeting, CSC laid out a variety of program areas that need to be considered. The group agreed that an overall theme for cohesive landscaping required immediate attention, since the hope is to install new plantings in the downtown area this coming spring.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

### (5) Urban Agenda Grant Off-Season Event Project Update (\*)

The Town's event planning consultant, Civic Space Collaborative (CSC), has continued to pull together an off-season event that is designed to drive business to downtown Essex. The Urban Agenda Grant is providing the Town with \$51,000 for this event and CSC held a meeting on January 31, 2023 to update progress and to focus on the event in more detail. Chairman Pereen, Town Planner Dana



Menon, Economic Development Committee Chairman Harris and myself were in attendance, along with members of the Essex business community. At the meeting, the group settled upon an event schedule of May 19-21, 2023, with promotion and related events starting earlier in the month. The event will definitely have a spring theme and a final name for the event is in its final stages of development.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

#### **M. Emergency Planning**

No items.

#### **N. Other Items**

##### (1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, on both February 2 and 3, 2023.

*This report is available at [www.essexma.org](http://www.essexma.org) on the morning after any regularly scheduled Essex Board of Selectmen's Meeting.*