



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of Sept. 26, 2022

Report covers from September 10, 2022 to September 23, 2022

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Preparation of Draft Strategic Plan Revision for Public Review (*)

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) had finalized all substantive changes in the draft revision of the Essex Strategic Plan back in August. The SPC had authorized its Chairman, Annie Cameron to supervise the final proofreading and formatting of the draft document along with Chairman Pereen, Town Planner Dana Menon, and myself, during September. That process has been largely completed and we have arrived at a [final version of the draft Plan revision](#) (released on September 19, 2022), a [survey](#) for the public to provide additional input (also released on the 19th), and a PowerPoint presentation to be given at an all virtual public forum that will be held on October 6, 2022.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I participated in the subject meeting on September 15, 2022, along with Chairman Pereen and Town Planner Dana Menon. The meeting featured a discussion regarding the various articles that the Committee had requested for the Fall Town Meeting Warrant. Particular attention was given to whether an article for near-term improvements to pocket park areas should go forward now or only after the Town understands whether a grant that the Town Planner has applied for is awarded. If so, that grant would be able to provide guidance for planning services, especially with respect to enhancements that could be made at the site of the former fire/police station at 24 Martin Street.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

B. Computer Systems

(1) Regional IT Collaborative Meeting Summary

I participated in the subject meeting on September 15, 2022. The meeting featured a discussion about the Town of Danvers' (lead community) continued rollout of a regional security fabric that several area communities are participating in. Essex was the first community to connect to the fabric via a new FortiGate firewall device that is remotely managed by Danvers IT personnel. Presently, Danvers is assisting communities that have not already installed fiber optic connections between various municipal buildings (Essex has) to do so. Progress is slow, since supply chain issues have new fiber optic cable on a 40-week backorder. As more communities complete in-town fiber networks and then

connect directly to Danvers (as Essex already is), the network will become more robust and Danvers will be able to offer more regional services. Our next step with Danvers is to migrate our four existing virtual servers and our physical server for the Assessors' software (all of which are at end of life)

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

C. Personnel

No items.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

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

I attended a construction meeting associated with the subject project on September 13, 2022. The project contractor hopes to fully rehabilitate and prepare the bridge abutments and complete associated drainage work by the last week of September. The main beams for the new bridge will be set on the nights of October 3 and 4, 2022 and the concrete deck should be poured during the second or third week of October. After the deck is in place, sidewalks will be poured, which will give the contractor the chance to work on the new utility crossings over the winter.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Solid Waste/Recycling Services Contract Update (*)

As the Board is aware, we have been working with solid waste and recycling contractor Casella to take over the operation of the Essex Transfer Station as of January 1, 2023, when the current contract with Covanta expires. During the week of September 12, 2022, Covanta reached out to me and indicated that the company may wish to collaborate with Commonwealth Hauling to provide transport and disposal services even beyond the current contract expiration date of December 31, 2022.

Our negotiating team met with Covanta and Commonwealth personnel on September 20, 2022. Given that Covanta and Commonwealth both own some of the equipment used at the transfer station, Covanta did not rule out possibly extending the present contract, as-is but with a higher tipping fee, for a short time – to allow an alternative arrangement to be worked out. Our team will meet with Covanta, Commonwealth, and personnel from Maguire Equipment on September 27, 2022 to continue our discussion.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Status Update on Folsom Pavilion Replacement Effort (*)

As the Board is aware, the Folsom Pavilion was demolished a few years back due to its dangerously-deteriorated condition. Town Meeting subsequently appropriated \$150,000 toward the replacement of the pavilion and a private effort was launched to provide raw wood and all necessary milling, along with a team of volunteer professional contractors to erect the new structure.

On September 14, 2022, Chairman Pereen and I visited the Centennial Grove with Dan Mayer of Mayer Tree Service, Jodi Harris and Donna Roy of the Economic Development Committee, and resident/architect Peter Levasseur. Mr. Mayer is donating the raw wood and the milling to the project. It appears that the replacement structure will go in a location similar to the old structure, but shifted slightly in order to best align the floor height for convenient, handicapped accessibility. Mr. Mayer has indicated that footings may be poured this fall but that the post and beam wooden structure itself would not be started until the spring of 2023. A concrete slab floor, for ease of cleaning, is also under consideration.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Route 133 Sidewalk Improvement Proposal Meeting Summary (*)

A resident recently outlined a variety of questions and concerns about sidewalks along a specific section of Route 133 (Water Street to the Gloucester city line). The Chairman and I contacted personnel from MA DOT and Senator Tarr's Office and DOT personnel offered a meeting at Town Hall on September 14, 2022. I attended the meeting along with Chairman Pereen, Senator Tarr, and several Town residents. As it turns out, DOT recently received funding for bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects and, although the funding will be in high demand, it is possible that DOT will move through design and construction during calendar year 2023. Concerns were also raised about the location of existing crosswalks and the resident supplied me with diagrams that DOT is now considering as part of the overall design process. We expect to have preliminary design plans for this sidewalk/crosswalk improvement project in the near future.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Assessment of Memorial Benches at Conomo Point (*)

At the last meeting, the Board decided to schedule a site visit to Conomo Point to assess the existing collection of memorial benches along the Essex River since the area may now be close to its capacity for benches. This decision came after a

recent request for a second bench near the area of the decorative anchor. Subsequent to the meeting, I provided the Board members with a plan from our seawall engineering consultant showing the locations of all of the existing benches along the Essex River. The Board then conducted the site visit on September 21, 2022.

Recommendation: Board decision on whether additional benches are warranted.

(4) Possible Town Elevator Retrofit Requirement (*)

Our elevator maintenance contractor, United Elevator, recently called my attention to a new requirement of the Massachusetts Board of Elevator Regulations. The Board has promulgated in its regulations the requirement for all elevators to be able to meet a standard known as Fire Service Phase II Operation 2013 by the end of the present calendar year.

Under Phase I operation, elevators that are 25 feet or more above the main floor return either to a designated landing area or an alternate area. Phase I operation is activated either manually by a special key, or automatically by a fire alarm initiating device. A sensor could detect smoke in the hoistway, lobby or machine room, for example, and trigger Phase I. The goal is to remove the elevators from service so that building occupants do not use elevators during a fire and become trapped. Phase II operation is an override meant for firefighters after Phase I has been activated. Under Phase II operation, firefighters can use a keyswitch to operate the elevator, provided the hoistway is clear of smoke and the elevator has electricity.

-- *facilitiesnet.com*

I contacted the Board of Elevator Regulations' code expert and he confirmed the recent regulations change. He also indicated that: a) it is possible that the deadline to meet the requirement will be extended, and b) it is possible to apply for a variance to avoid meeting the requirement altogether. In speaking with the Fire Chief, he feels that meeting this standard is important, so he does not recommend applying for a variance. Our elevator contractor has commented that the new elevator in the new Public Safety Facility is already up to code and is presently working to determine if the Senior Center elevator will also need work. The cost for Town Hall alone is over \$7,000. The Reserve Fund would be a suitable way to access the necessary funds.

Recommendation: Board consideration of making a Reserve Fund Transfer request for any necessary elevator code compliance funding.

G. Fiscal/Budget

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

I attended the subject, virtual meeting on September 23, 2022, along with Selectman Bradford and Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick. The meeting featured a discussion regarding various projects and initiatives occurring in all three entities, including a general outlook for the fiscal year 2024 budget year. The District commented that it is beginning the process with the challenge of filling an approximately \$1M gap before major areas of typical increase (such as health insurance and union negotiations) are accounted for. We also discussed the draft of the Town of Essex draft Strategic Plan, given that two of its major goals include significant interaction with the District.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Risk Assessment and Monitoring Plan Annual Meeting

I hosted the subject meeting on September 22, 2022 to go over the Town's Risk Assessment and Monitoring Plan, which is designed to promote a culture of honesty and to detect financial fraud. The annual meeting serves as a good refresher and also allows the team to address any substantial changes in Town operations that should be covered by the plan. This year, we added some language that recognizes the added security and accountability brought to the table by systems in the new public safety facility, among other items.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) MA DOT Review of Southern Avenue Speed Limit Zones (*)

As discussed in the past, a Southern Avenue resident has asserted that the speed limit on Southern Avenue between Main Street and Apple Street should be decreased to a consistent speed of 25 mph in a single speed zone. The Board is in agreement that such a change should be explored but any changes require the assent of the MA DOT, since the DOT is the keeper of "special speed regulations" that all communities enacted and filed in the late 1960's as part of the Chapter 90 road maintenance funding program. In this case, DOT personnel met with Chairman Preen, Chief Francis, Superintendent Galli, the concerned resident, and myself on September 15, 2022 to review the situation in the field.

Generally, the process begins with the police department taking speed measurements with a radar gun at various points along the roadway, in both directions. That data is then analyzed by traffic engineers at DOT to decide if a change in speed limit is justified. It is important to note that, after the Town collects the data, if speeds are higher than expected, the speed limit could actually be increased. For now, DOT will provide us with guidance on where the various speed measurements need to be made and the Chief of Police will commence with data collection.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

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

I have produced a draft version of the Fall Town Meeting warrant in accordance with the Board's guidance from the last meeting. The document has had the advantage of preliminary review by Town Counsel.

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

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Funding for Great Marsh

The recent authorization of Federal funding for the implementation of infrastructure projects included a major appropriation for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) – a Federally-created organization. One area that NFWF might be interested in focusing some of that funding is the Great Marsh, a major portion of which is in Essex. Personnel from the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and the Ipswich River Watershed Association (IRWA) led a discussion on September 13, 2022 in the Essex Town Hall with respect to possibly working with area communities to apply for projects within the Great Marsh. Generally, NFWF personnel appeared pleased with all of the planning efforts that have occurred to date and we are hopeful that additional funding may be made available for implementation. Selectman Phippen and others toured some areas within the Great Marsh with NFWF personnel on both September 12 and 13, 2022.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Shared Streets and Spaces Street Lighting Grant Commencement (*)

The Town Planner and I met with personnel from Stantec, the engineering firm that will prepare final design plans for the downtown street light project, on September 14, 2022. Stantec has prepared a preliminary design and cost estimate

for the portion of Main Street that was highlighted in a recent grant application (what we call zone 1) – a subset of the area that already has underground wire conduit in place and is fully funded by the grant (\$161,000), along with with separate cost estimates: a) for the remainder of the area that already has underground wire conduit in place but is not part of the recent grant funding scope – known as zone 2 (\$97,000) , and b) to extend lighting into areas on either end of the project where no conduit yet exists – known as zones 3a (\$271,000) and 3b (\$212,000).

The goal of the new information was to explore the notion of possibly installing all lighting at once, as opposed to constructing the lighting system in stages. With known cost estimates in hand, private and Town funding may be added to the grant funding and existing Legislative earmark to cover more lighting than the grant scope currently includes. A formal Notice to Proceed with respect to the grant portion of the work is expected soon.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Apple Street Roadbed Elevation Design Project Kickoff Meeting (*)

The Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Stream Crossing Replacement Project for final project design and permitting was formally kicked off on September 16, 2022. Personnel from our engineering consultant (TEC) participated along with the regional coordinator for the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program.

Given the recent expression from members of the public about possible alternatives to roadbed elevation, the public forum that is already part of the project scope will take input concerning any possible alternatives before the design gets too far advanced. That all-virtual forum will be offered on the evening of November 2, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. Earlier that same day, I will be offering an overview of the project at the Essex Senior Center at 10:00 a.m. and we will tour the Essex Causeway and the Apple Street project area at 10:30 a.m. (leaving from the Senior Center). Interested parties can review project resources, keep track of events and meetings, and provide direct project input at a [dedicated web page](#) that I have set up on the Town website.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(4) Chebacco Lake, Alewife Brook, and Groundwater Level Monitoring (*)

At the last meeting, the Board asked me to get more information with respect to the \$30,000 legislative earmark for environmental study of the Chebacco Lake/Alewife Brook system. I was able to arrange with the State a contract end date extension through June 20, 2024. Given that we now have more time to use the funds, it would seem that the best use will be for long-term water level logging in certain, key areas.

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, for a portion of the day on both September 12 and 13, 2022.

This report is available at www.essexma.org on the morning after any regularly scheduled Essex Board of Selectmen's Meeting.