

Below is the Strategic Planning Committee's final 2017 quarterly report for the Town's Strategic Plan. This report tracks the progress in the implementation of the plan. This is the fourth quarterly report for 2017.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2016 the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) worked to finalize the Town's strategic plan by prioritizing goals and developing a system to track the Town's progress in implementing the plan. Going forward, the SPC will work with Town departments and boards and committees to ensure that Town initiatives adhere to the goals of the Town's Strategic Plan. This is the most recent quarterly report on the progress in implementing the plan.

The Strategic Planning Committee was created by the Board of Selectmen in the spring of 2015 to develop a Strategic Plan for the Town. Its membership consists of representatives from other existing boards and commissions, including the Planning Board, School Committee, Finance Committee, Conservation Commission, Public Works Committee, Council on Aging, Community Preservation Commission, and the Conomo Point Planning Committee. The SPC drew on previous town planning efforts, including the *Planning to Preserve the Best of Essex* report produced by the Long Term Planning Committee in June of 2015. Through a series of seven, two hour workshops, the SPC created a draft strategic plan that included nine goals for the Town to pursue ([link to draft plan](#)). The plan was made available for public comment in December of 2015. In addition, the SPC hosted a Public Forum on February 10, 2016 to present the plan and take comment. [A video recording of the forum is available on the SPC webpage.](#)

The Strategic Planning Committee is grateful for all the public feedback received from the first draft of the plan. The SPC relied heavily on public feedback in setting priority goals for the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The two main themes from the feedback were:

- There are not enough Town funds to pursue all of the goals outlined by the SPC, and thus the SPC should prioritize the goals of the plan based on what is most important and essential to the Town in the future (e.g. needs before wants).
- The public needs to have ample opportunities throughout the strategic planning process to vote, approve and fund any action and initiative that is generated from the strategic planning process, and the SPC should work on ways to better inform the public.

Based on this feedback the Committee set priority goals for the Town. The two highest priority goals (Priority 1) are

- Renew and Finance Critical Town Infrastructure
- Maintain and Develop a Strong Business Community.

The next set of goals (2<sup>nd</sup> priority) would be

- Increase participation in Town government
- Improve the health of and access to the Essex River and Chebacco Lake.

The remaining goals (Priority 3) would be the lowest priority.

Identifying highest priority goals ensures that these are the focus for the Town. The SPC recognizes that the Town may work towards goals of different priorities simultaneously but advises the Town to consider how pursuing other goals will affect achieving the priority goals in terms of the dedication of resources.

Working towards the nine goals of the Strategic Plan will be incremental. This document will serve as a quarterly report and will be maintained by the Staff Planner for the SPC to track the progress of each project or initiative. Within each priority is a gray box: When an item is completed it would be recorded in the gray box in each priority section, and another project or initiative from the Strategic Plan list of actions would be added to this list for the Town to work on.

Essex Strategic Plan Goals		
Goal #	Description	Priority
1	Renew and finance critical town infrastructure	1
2	Maintain and develop a strong business community	1
3	Increase Participation in Town Government	2
4	Improve the health of and access to the Essex River and Chebacco Lake.	2
5	Increase the amount of protected land in Essex	3
6	Expand the range of recreational opportunities and assets	3
7	Develop and deliver a fiscally responsible school budget	3
8	Maintain the Town's public safety services	3
9	Meet the housing needs of all Essex residents	3

This quarterly report will be updated and reviewed by the SPC at their quarterly meetings. It will be available to the public through the SPC webpage ([link to Strategic Planning Committee webpage](#)). The SPC meetings are public meetings and attendance and participation is encouraged.

Questions about the plan and its progress can be directed to Matt Coogan, Town Planner, at [mcoogan@essexma.org](mailto:mcoogan@essexma.org).

**PRIORITY 1 – Current Actions**

Goal #	Description	Priority
1	Renew and Finance Critical Town Infrastructure	1

- Public Safety Building** - [Town Building Committee](#) has resumed meeting, concerning public safety building. The Committee has narrowed down the question of where to site the new facility to three possible options. One option could cost upwards of \$14M and would require fire and police to relocate while the existing building is torn down and a new, larger building is put in its place. Another option would be appreciably less costly and would renovate the existing building for police use only, with a new, fire-only building being constructed between the existing building and the Town Hall. A third, more recent option is to acquire property downtown for a new fire station and rehabilitate the current station for the police department. The Committee is in the process of vetting the options and working toward consensus for one plan or the other with the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Public Works, the Finance Committee, the Historical Commission, the Fire Department, and the Police Department. The Annual Town Meeting approved \$10,000 in funding for the production of visual renderings to compare what the options at the two main sites will look like. The Committee worked with an architect to formulate the necessary photo renderings and a public forum was held on January 24th. The rendering are available on the [Building Committee webpage](#). An Article for the design, construction, and oversight of the chosen scenario will come before the Annual Town Meeting in May of 2018. The cost of a new facility is estimated between \$14 million and \$17 million.
- Memorial Park Plan and Public Safety Building** – At the recommendation of the Town Building Committee, the Board of Selectmen proposed to the Fall Town Meeting non-CPA funding to complement existing CPA funding for Memorial Park Plan. This new funding was used to investigate alternative building footprint and roadway layout options for a future replacement of the police/fire HQ in the area of 24-30 Martin. The results of that investigation assisted the Committee with the choice of the two final options discussed above.
- Green Communities Application** – The Town was awarded a 2017 Green Communities Competitive Grant in July from MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER). The Town receives \$176,145 to fund 3 projects at Essex Elementary School: the first phase of a LED lighting upgrade, stream trap replacements, and an Energy Management System (EMS). As of this month, these projects have been completed, and the Town will be able to apply for additional funds through the 2018 Green Communities Competitive Grant. This grant round deadline is early March. Potential projects include a LED streetlight conversion, a new high efficiency boiler at the Water Treatment Plant, and additional measures at Essex Elementary School.
- Memorial Elementary School** – The Town’s share of funding for Manchester Elementary School Feasibility Study CY16 was approved at Annual Town Meeting. The Memorial School project now has a project manager and the preferred scenario and costs will soon be arrived at. Both Towns will vote in fall.

- **Essex Elementary School** – Town Planner submitted a successful Green Communities competitive grant application to fund three projects at Essex Elementary: Phase 1 LED lighting upgrade, steam trap upgrades, and a EMS system. The projects were recently completed, and new projects are being considered for Green Communities funding, including the next phase of LED lighting upgrades.
- **LED Streetlight Conversion** - The Town Administrator and Town Planner have been working with the Board of Selectmen on different options for converting the Town’s 105 streetlights to LED fixtures. The conversion would reduce electricity consumption and lower utility bills, as well as improve lighting quality. Future maintenance is something the Town will need to consider. There are a few available funding options, including a grant program managed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Rapid LED Program, which covers 25%. The project could also be partially funded through a Green Communities Grant. Before the Town can convert the streetlights, they will need to purchase them from National Grid.

Goal #	Description	Priority
2	Maintain and Develop a Strong Business Community	1

- **Economic Development Committee** - SPC continues to support the development of an EDC. The membership of the EDC will be recommended by the SPC 1/31 and the BOS will appoint for an initial meeting in February.
- **Essex Parking Study Next Steps** – Develop plan to implement action items, possibly to be tackled by the new Economic Development Committee (EDC).
- **Zoning** – The Town was awarded a 15,000 FY 2017 Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Technical Assistance (MDI) Program award for consulting services to assist the Town and the Planning Board with a Village Center mixed use zoning ordinance. The Planner and Chair of the Planning Board coordinated a series of stakeholder meetings with the consultant, Harriman, on August 31. Harriman held a public meeting on December 14, 2017 to present their analysis and recommendations, and took public comment. The feedback from the meeting will be taken into account as they finalize their zoning recommendations. [The presentation is available on the Town website.](#)

**PRIORITY 1 – Completed Actions**

Goal	ITEM	DATE
1	<b>Green Communities Application</b> – The Town was awarded a 2017 Green Communities Competitive Grant in July from MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER). The Town receives a \$176,145 Green Communities grant in 2017 to fund 3 projects at Essex Elementary School: the first phase of a LED lighting upgrade, stream trap replacements, and an Energy Management System (EMS). These projects are now completed. The Town Planner will submit a final report to the Green Communities Division. The Town will be able to apply for additional grant funds for new projects in March 2018.	Jan 2018
1	<b>Public Safety Building</b> - The Committee worked with an architect to formulate the necessary photo renderings for three options and a public forum was held on January 24th. The rendering are available on the <a href="#">Building Committee webpage</a> . An Article for the design, construction, and oversight of the chosen scenario will come before the Annual Town Meeting in May of 2018.	Jan 2018
1	<b>Town Hall</b> – Renovation is complete and Town departments moved in the week of May 22, 2017. The Town Planner completed the final report for the Green Communities grant funding used to fund some of the energy efficiencies in the renovation, including the new HVAC system, windows, and insulation. The Town’s grand re-opening event was held on Saturday, June 24, 2017.	June 2017
2	<b>Zoning</b> – The Town was awarded a FY 2017 Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Technical Assistance (MDI) Program award. The award provides up to \$15,000 of consulting services to assist the Town and the Planning Board with a Village Center mixed use zoning ordinance.	May 2017
1	<b>Public Safety Building</b> - The Annual Town Meeting approved \$10,000 in funding for the production of visual renderings to compare what the options at the two main sites will look like. It is possible that the whole issue will be brought to public forums between now and May, 2018, for a potential vote at the Annual Town Meeting.	May 2017
1	<b>Green Communities competitive grant application submission</b> – Town Planner submitted for a grant to fund the replacement of the Water Treatment Plant boiler with a new, ultra-energy efficient boiler system.	Mar 2017
1	<b>Essex Elementary Green Communities grant application</b> – Town Planner submitted for a grant to fund 3 projects at the school: Phase 1 LED lighting upgrade, steam trap upgrades, and a EMS system	Mar 2017
1	<b>Town Hall Green Communities Grant</b> – The Town Planner submitted a final report to DOER for the Green Communities grant that helped fund the new HVAC system, insulation, and new windows.	Feb 2017

2	<b>Community Compact</b> – The State approved the Town’s request to add the best practice area “Preparing for Success” as an additional Community Compact, under the Housing and Economic Development category. The SPC recommended this action in order to move along economic development action items in the Plan.	Dec 2016
2	<b>Essex Parking Study</b> – Funded through a MDI grant, the Town received technical assistance from Nelson Nygaard to produce a parking management plan for the Essex Village Center. <a href="#">The plan is available on the Town website.</a>	Oct 2016
1	<b>Memorial Elementary School Study</b> – Town’s share of funding for Manchester Elementary School Study CY16 was approved at Spring Town Meeting	May 2016
1	<b>Water Main Replacement</b> – With SPC recommendation, the Finance Committee worked with the Public Works Committee to add Water Main Replacement to the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan.	May 2016

**PRIORITY 2 – Current Actions**

Goal #	Description	Priority
3	Increase Participation in Town Government	2

- SPC utilized the \$2,500 allocated from Town Meeting to help with the planning and coordination of the grand re-opening of Town Hall held on June 24, 2017.
- 868 residents voted in the May 8, 2017 Town Election. This is 34% of eligible voters (2,575 total), the highest turnout in at least 10 years, according to the Town Clerk.

Goal #	Description	Priority
4	Health and Access to River	2

- **Climate Change and Essex River** - Continue to engage various parties in our ongoing climate change work. Community Compact in this area is already done. The Army Corps of Engineers committed to a full feasibility study that will compare the cost and benefit of traditional dredge spoil disposal to possibly using spoils within the Essex River System to restore environmental quality and perhaps make the marsh the Town's best "green" infrastructure for future coastal resiliency. The study may take up to two years to complete but we are hopeful that our state of readiness will translate to climate change and sea level rise mitigation funding that may be offered by the Federal government in the future. The Town successfully applied to become Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Community. The designation will afford the Town extra credit on future grant applications and it is likely that the Town will be able to obtain the designation based upon the extensive coastal resiliency planning work completed to date. The MVP program is administered by the state department of Coastal Zone Management (CZM).
- **MVP Grant and Climate Change:** The Town was awarded a second grant from Coastal Zone Management (CZM) to be applied towards a process in order for the Town to achieve Municipality Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) designation from the state. The goal in this process is to get the public more familiar with coastal resiliency via showing how this field goes hand in hand with emergency planning.
- Congress has approved official changes to the Federal Channel boundaries in the Essex River, which will have made the channel free of encroachments and, consequently, eligible for Federal dredging or other funds. Simultaneously, efforts to understand the implications of climate change and sea level rise are turning to the initial implementation of strategies to mitigate those future effects. As noted above, the Town has worked closely with the Army Corps of Engineers, Mass CZM, and Mass DEP to request a feasibility study that would consider the re-use of dredged materials within the Essex Bay system, thereby solving the navigation problem and making progress toward a more resilient coastal environment.
- **ACEC Hazard Mitigation Project** – Brendhan is working with Gloucester, Ipswich, Rowley, and Newbury on a Resource Management Plan for the Great Marsh Area of Critical Environmental

Concern (ACEC). A summit involving many stakeholders was held on September 20, 2017 in the newly-renovated Town Hall. [For more information on the ACEC use this link.](#) The group agreed to use a new CZM Coastal Resiliency grant and the soon-to-be-released Great March Adaptation Plan as the nucleus for a possible Regional Management Plan in the future.

<b>PRIORITY 2 – Completed Actions</b>		
<b>Goal</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>DATE</b>
<b>4&amp;6</b>	<b>Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project</b> - The project has been completed.	June 2017
<b>4</b>	<b>ACEC Hazard Mitigation Project</b> – Essex hosted an ACEC summit with stakeholders of the partnering communities.	Sep 2017
<b>3</b>	<b>Participation in Government</b> – the SPC helped host the re-Grand Opening of Town Hall in June.	June 2017
<b>4.</b>	<b>Climate Change and the Essex River</b> – Essex became a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community and was awarded grant funding to continue coastal vulnerability work.	June 2017
<b>4 &amp; 6</b>	<b>Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project</b> – The waterfront observation deck has been completed and opened to the public for Memorial Day weekend. The parking lot has also been completed.	May 2017
<b>4</b>	<b>ACEC Hazard Mitigation Project</b> – Essex has engaged with Gloucester, Ipswich, Rowley and Newbury on a Resource Management Plan for the Great Marsh ACEC	April 2017
<b>4 &amp; 6</b>	<b>Conomo Public Waterfront Access Project</b> – BoS awarded the contract for the Northern Conomo Point Waterfront Access Improvement project	Feb 2017
<b>4 &amp; 6</b>	<b>Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project</b> – design, permitting, and allocation of funding for the public improvements completed in 2016.	Dec 2016
<b>3</b>	<b>Participation in Government</b> SPC was allocated \$2,500 at Town Meeting in May.	May 2016
<b>3</b>	<b>Participation in Government</b> – BoS government participation survey was distributed at Fall 2016 Town Meeting and electronically through the Town website. The effort was very successful, translating to four new Finance Committee members, one new Housing Authority member, and several other volunteers who may be willing to work in other areas in the near future.	Nov 2016

**PRIORITY 3 – Current Actions**

Goal #	Description	Priority
5	Protected Land in Essex	3

- **Develop Stronger Relationships with Local Conservation Groups** - MECT collaboration with SPC/ Open Space Committee
- **Increase Protected Land in Essex** - The Town coordinated with Essex Greenbelt and neighboring Towns on the acquisition and creation of the Sagamore Hill reservation. The Town approved CPA funds to help with the acquisition.
- **Increase Protected Land in Essex** - The Board of Selectmen, Board of Assessors, Open Space Committee, and Conservation Committee are presently working to a) better manage Town property that is already in conservation status (perhaps with help from a local management organization), and b) possibly put other tax-tile parcels into a conservation status under the Selectmen, again, with management assistance from a local land management organization. Work cannot begin in earnest until the Board of Assessors completes adjustments to parcel ownership, locations, and boundaries.

Goal #	Description	Priority
6	Recreational Opportunities	3

- **Memorial Park Plan** - (see #1 above)
- **Essex Youth Commission** - Board of Selectmen has rejuvenated the Essex Youth Commission with five new members. The Commission is presently working on a job description for a new Director or Youth Coordinator and will undertake a hiring process once that work has been completed.
- **Centennial Grove Master Plan** - The Annual Town Meeting approved funding for a Master Plan for the future management of and amenities at the Centennial Grove. The Selectmen have worked with the Finance Committee to release a Request for Proposals for a cost-driven Master Plan. Proposals were due on October 19, 2017. Unfortunately the Town did not receive any proposals and the Town Administrator is working on issuing a new RFP with changes from a different perspective.

Goal #	Description	Priority
7	Education	3

- The Regional School District and the two towns have embarked upon a process that will study both the operating and capital budget forecasts of each entity, in an effort to keep year-to-year operating assessments to an affordable level and to properly time and finance

School District and municipal capital projects. The three entities held an operating budget workshop on November 29, 2017 and a capital budget workshop on December 19, 2017. The next meeting will also be a capital budget meeting and will include new school project numbers on March 21, 2017.

Goal #	Description	Priority
8	Public Safety	3

- **Fire Department** SPC correspondence with the Fire Chief on identifying what the EFD’s top ongoing initiative is right now.

Goal #	Description	Priority
9	Housing	3

- **Technical Assistance** SPC to work with Planner and Town Administrator to identify an expert who could analyze what a Community Compact for housing means in Essex and how this could get us out of first gear.
- **Learning from and partnering with Manchester** - Town Planner recommends that the SPC invite the Town Planner from Manchester or a member of their affordable housing organization to present on their process and successes in creating an affordable housing policy. CPC could be invited to this presentation as well since CPA funding could be used towards affordable housing. The Essex Housing Authority could also be involved. Manchester has expressed interest in partnering with Essex on a regional housing strategy.

**PRIORITY 3 – Completed Actions**

Goal	ITEM	DATE
6	<b>Centennial Grove Master Plan</b> – Board of Selectmen, with the support of the finance committee, has released a Request for Proposals for a cost-driven master plan. Proposals are due October 19, 2017	Sep 2017
6	<b>Essex Youth Commission</b> – The Board of Selectmen has rejuvenated the Commission with 5 members.	July 2017
6	<b>Centennial Grove Master Plan</b> – Funding approved at Annual Town Meeting for a Master Plan for the future management and amenities at Centennial Grove	May 2017

6	<b>Essex Youth Commission</b> - Annual Town Meeting approved funding for a new Youth Coordinator or a Youth Program Director in the fiscal year 2018 operating budget.	May 2017
4 & 6	<b>Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project</b> – The waterfront observation deck has been completed and opened to the public for Memorial Day weekend.	May 2017
4 & 6	<b>Conomo Public Waterfront Access Project – BoS awarded the contract for the Northern Conomo Point Waterfont Access Improvement project</b>	Feb 2017
4 & 6	<b>Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project</b> – design, permitting, and allocation of funding for the public improvements completed in 2016.	Dec 2016
2	<b>Community Compact</b> – The State approved the Town’s request to add the best practice area “Preparing for Success” as an additional Community Compact, under the Housing and Economic Development category. Both housing and economic development fall within this Community Compact.	Dec 2016
5 & 9	<b>CPA and Protected Land</b> - Preservation of Sagamore Hill	May 2017
5 & 9	<b>CPA</b> – The Town Successfully approved an increase in CPA funding to 1.5% in May 2016	May 2016
5	<b>Open Space Plan</b> – The Open Space Committee updated the Town’s Open Space Plan in 2015	2015
5	<b>Sagamore Hill</b> – CPA funding for Sagamore Hill Project was approved at Town Meeting	Nov. 2016
7	<b>School Operations</b> - The Town already meets the operation and budgetary goals and has repeated annually	