

Below is the Strategic Planning Committee June 2018 quarterly report for the Town's Strategic Plan. This report tracks the progress in the implementation of the plan. This is a quarterly report covering the first half of 2018..

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 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 (2nd 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.

PRIORITY 1 – Current Actions

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

- **Public Safety Building** - A proposal to purchase the the Village Restaurant property for a new fire station was brought to Town Meeting but did not receive the necessary $\frac{2}{3}$ vote needed to authorize the purchase of the property. The Town and Building Committee will continue to work on options at the current Fire Station site and to solicit offers for other private property that could be purchased (subject to meeting minimum criteria).
- **Water System Infrastructure** – The Annual Town Meeting in May of 2018 appropriated \$50,000 for a comprehensive study of the Town’s entire water system, in order to prioritize which elements will need to be addressed first, what the overall timeline will be, and what the cost of upgrades and line replacements is expected to be over the long term.
- **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.
- **Green Communities** - The Town Planner submitted a Green Communities grant application to fully fund two projects at Essex Elementary School. One is a second phase of LED interior lighting upgrades. The other is an expansion of capabilities for the building’s energy management system. The total funding requested is \$155,000 and the Town should hear whether they’ve received the grant in the next month.
- **Memorial Elementary School** – The Manchester Memorial Elementary School Feasibility Study has advanced rapidly over the last quarter and a recommendation for a final campus and building configuration has emerged. The Memorial School project now has a Project Manager and a Construction Manager. Both Towns will vote in mid-October relative to the costs of final design, construction, and construction oversight.
- **Essex Elementary School** – The Town Planner submitted a Green Communities grant application for additional LED lighting and upgrades to the building’s energy management system.
- **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 115 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 and the recent Annual Town Meeting has set up and began to fund a future maintenance account. There are a few available funding options, including a grant program managed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Rapid LED Program, which covers 30%. The Selectmen favor seeking 100% of the funding through a Green Communities Grant. Before the Town can convert the streetlights, the lights will need to be purchased from National Grid. The Town is in the process of purchasing the lights presently.

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

- **Economic Development Committee** - The EDC had their official first meeting in March 2018 as a joint meeting with the Strategic Planning Committee. They have also met in April and May and will continue to meet on a monthly basis. Current projects include the implementation of the Village Center Parking Strategy and a potential Economic Development Plan for the Town.
- **Essex Parking Study Next Steps** – With a recommendation from the Economic Development Committee, the Board of Selectmen voted to begin implementing some of the recommendation from the parking study, including pavement markings and signage. The Town Administrator is presently working with MassDOT about recommendations that involve the State Highway.
- **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 was taken into account as they finalized their zoning recommendations. The Village Center Zoning Study has been completed and is now on the [Town website](#).

PRIORITY 1 – Completed Actions

Goal	ITEM	DATE
1	Water System Infrastructure - The May 2018 Annual Town Meeting appropriated \$50,000 for a comprehensive study of the Town's entire water system, in order to prioritize which elements will need to be addressed first, what the overall timeline will be, and what the cost of upgrades and line replacements is expected to be over the long term.	May 2018
2	Essex Parking Study - The BoS voted to begin implementation of the Parking Strategy for downtown, specifically pavement markings and signage.	May 2018
1	Public Safety Building - The article at Spring Town Meeting to authorize the Town to purchase the Village Restaurant property at 55 Main Street did not receive the necessary $\frac{2}{3}$ vote. The Town will continue to pursue options for a new facility at the current Fire Station site and to consider the purchase of other private parcels that meet certain minimum criteria.	May 2018
2	Zoning - The Village Center Zoning Study has been completed by the consultant Harriman. The study includes recommendations for a new Main	May 2018

	Street zoning district with new dimensional requirements and an allowance for mixed use development. The study is available on the Town website.	
1	Green Communities Application - The Town applied for \$155,000 of Green Communities grant funding for additional LED lighting and upgrades to the building energy management system. DOER should be notifying grant awardees in the next month.	Mar 2018
2	Economic Development Committee - The EDC held its first official meeting in March 2018. They will meet on a monthly basis.	Mar 2018
1	Green Communities Application – The Town was awarded a 2017 Green Communities Competitive Grant in July from MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER). The Town received 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 submitted a final report to the Green Communities Division. The Town was able to apply for additional grant funds for new projects in March 2018.	Jan 2018
1	Public Safety Building - 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 renderings are available on the Building Committee webpage . An Article for the design, construction, and oversight of the chosen scenario was to come before the Annual Town Meeting in May of 2018.	Jan 2018
1	Town Hall – 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	Zoning – 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	Public Safety Building - 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 issue will be brought to public forums and in May, 2018, for a vote at the Annual Town Meeting.	May 2017
1	Green Communities competitive grant application submission – 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	Essex Elementary Green Communities grant application – 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	Town Hall Green Communities Grant – 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	Community Compact – 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	Essex Parking Study – Funded through a MDI grant, the Town received technical assistance from Nelson Nygaard to produce a parking management plan for the Essex Village Center. The plan is available on the Town website.	Oct 2016
1	Memorial Elementary School Study – Town’s share of funding for Manchester Elementary School Study CY16 was approved at Spring Town Meeting	May 2016
1	Water Main Replacement – 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

- 798 resident voted in the May 14, 2018 Town Election. This is 32% of eligible voters (2,514 total) and 2% less than 2017 Town Election.
- 570 residents participated in the Annual Town Meeting on May 7. This is 23% of eligible voters (2,514 total).

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).
- **Municipal Vulnerability and Climate Change:** The Town was awarded a grant from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs to be applied towards a process in order for the Town to achieve Municipality Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) designation from the state. The Town also was awarded and has completed the scope of a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) to get the public more familiar with coastal resiliency via showing how this field goes hand in hand with emergency planning. Presently, the Town is working to kick off two new MVP Action Grants: one grant will begin to study the feasibility of using mussel reefs to stabilize the salt marsh horizontally and the other grant will work in Essex, Ipswich, and Newbury to study how the salt marsh recovers from a significant natural sediment deposition event that occurred in January of 2018
- **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.
- **Hazard Mitigation Plan Update** – The Town is working on updating its Hazard Mitigation Plan from 2012 using a grant secured through the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. The Plan needs to be updated every five years in order to remain eligible for Federal hazard mitigation grants.
- **ACEC Hazard Mitigation Project** – Brendan 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.

PRIORITY 2 – Completed Actions

Goal	ITEM	DATE
4	ACEC Hazard Mitigation Project - The Town wrapped up its involvement in two coastal planning projects, one funded by the Federal Superstorm Sandy grant to characterize the predicted effects of climate change and sea level rise in our area; the other funded by CZM to raise public awareness about these predicted future circumstances.	
4&6	Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project - The project has been completed.	June 2017
4	ACEC Hazard Mitigation Project – Essex hosted an ACEC summit with stakeholders of the partnering communities.	Sep 2017
3	Participation in Government – the SPC helped host the re-Grand Opening of Town Hall in June.	June 2017
4.	Climate Change and the Essex River – Essex became a Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Community and was awarded grant funding to continue coastal vulnerability work.	June 2017
4 & 6	Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project – 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

4	ACEC Hazard Mitigation Project – Essex has engaged with Gloucester, Ipswich, Rowley and Newbury on a Resource Management Plan for the Great Marsh ACEC	April 2017
4 & 6	Conomo Public Waterfront Access Project – BoS awarded the contract for the Northern Conomo Point Waterfont Access Improvement project	Feb 2017
4 & 6	Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project – design, permitting, and allocation of funding for the public improvements completed in 2016.	Dec 2016
3	Participation in Government SPC was allocated \$2,500 at Town Meeting in May.	May 2016
3	Participation in Government – 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** - The Board of Selectmen has rejuvenated the Essex Youth Commission with five new members. The Commission created a revised position description for a Youth Director and the new Director was hired in April of 2018. The Commission is working with the Director to develop new programs for the youth of Essex.
- **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. The Selectmen are working with the Pingree School (interested in the Grove for its rowing program) and the Youth Commission to determine whether, together with the YMCA, a comprehensive package can be offered to Town residents at low or no cost (pingree may be able to maintain and improve facilities for the Town in exchange for their shared use of the facility).

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 capital budget workshops on December 19, 2017 and March 21, 2018.

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

- **Affordable Housing** - The SPC and EDC will hold a joint meeting on June 20 to discuss affordable housing. They will review possible strategies and initiatives to increase affordable housing inventory in Essex with those attending representing Haborlight Community Partners.
- **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
9	Housing - Joint SPC/ EDC meeting on affordable housing 6.20.2018	Jun 2018
6	Essex Youth Commission - The new Director was hired in April of 2018. The Commission is working with the Director to develop new programs for the youth of Essex.	April 2018
6	Centennial Grove Master Plan - Unfortunately the Town did not receive any proposals from the RFP in October 2017. The Selectmen are working with the Pingree School (interested in the Grove for its rowing program) and the Youth Commission to determine whether, together with the YMCA, a comprehensive package can be offered to Town residents at low or no cost (pingree may be able to maintain and improve facilities for the Town in exchange for their shared use of the facility).	Mar 2018
7	MERSD Budget - 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 Regional School District and two Towns held an operating budget workshop on November 29, 2017 and capital budget workshops on December 19, 2017 and March 21, 2018.	Mar 2018
6	Centennial Grove Master Plan – 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	Essex Youth Commission – The Board of Selectmen has rejuvenated the Commission with 5 members.	July 2017
6	Centennial Grove Master Plan – Funding approved at Annual Town Meeting for a Master Plan for the future management and amenities at Centennial Grove	May 2017
6	Essex Youth Commission - 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	Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project – The waterfront observation deck has been completed and opened to the public for Memorial Day weekend.	May 2017

4 & 6	Conomo Public Waterfront Access Project – BoS awarded the contract for the Northern Conomo Point Waterfont Access Improvement project	Feb 2017
4 & 6	Conomo Point Public Waterfront Access Project – design, permitting, and allocation of funding for the public improvements completed in 2016.	Dec 2016
2	Community Compact – 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	CPA and Protected Land - Preservation of Sagamore Hill	May 2017
5 & 9	CPA – The Town Successfully approved an increase in CPA funding to 1.5% in May 2016	May 2016
5	Open Space Plan – The Open Space Committee updated the Town’s Open Space Plan in 2015	2015
5	Sagamore Hill – CPA funding for Sagamore Hill Project was approved at Town Meeting	Nov. 2016
7	School Operations - The Town already meets the operation and budgetary goals and has repeated annually	