

INTRODUCTION

For 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 first 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 ([a link to the February 10, 2016 Public Forum is available on the SPC webpage](#)). 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 a 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. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 22, 2017 at 7:00 PM at the Senior Center.

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** - Town Building Committee has resumed meeting, concerning public safety building
- **Memorial Park Plan and Public Safety Building** – At the recommendation of the Town Building Committee, the Board of Selectmen will propose to the Fall Town Meeting non-CPA funding to complement existing CPA funding for Memorial Park Plan. This new funding would investigate alternative building foot print and roadway layout options for a future replacement of the police/fire HQ in the area of 24-30 Martin.
- **Memorial Elementary School** – The Town's share of funding for Manchester Elementary School Feasibility Study CY16 was approved at Annual Town Meeting.
- **Essex Elementary School** – Funding opportunity for Essex Elementary facility improvements with Green Communities Grant (March 2017 application deadline for projects completed between June 17 – Feb 18)

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

- **Economic Development Committee** - SPC continues to study the merits of EDC (May-Sep timeframe). Town perhaps applies for Community Compact in this area (Aug – Sept timeframe). If we go forward, EDC starts to meet in 2017.
- **Community Compact** – SPC continues to work with BoS on the Town's Next Community Compact. Both bodies considering "Preparing for Success" which covers housing and economic development.
- **Essex Parking Study Next Steps** – Winter/ Spring 2016-2017. Develop plan to implement action items
- **Zoning** - Planning Board continues work towards Village Center zoning, mixed use zoning. Planner submitted a MDI grant application for technical assistance in December 2016..

PRIORITY 1 – Completed Actions		
Goal	ITEM	DATE
3	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
2	Increase Participation in Town Government	2

- SPC needs to come up with a plan to use \$2,500 allocated from Town Meeting to improve town participation. The committee is exploring an open house event as part of the re-opening of Town Hall.
- SPC will endorse a survey regarding where in local government people might be most interested in serving and, if not interested, what the impediments are. The survey will be widely distributed both in-person and electronically and is designed to be very quick and easy to fill out.

Goal #	Description	Priority
5	Health and Access to River	2

- **Climate Change and Essex River** - Continue to engage various parties in our ongoing climate change work (May-Dec timeframe, at which time we should take stock of where we are). Community Compact in this area is already done.
- Congress is close to approving official changes to the Federal Channel boundaries in the Essex River, which will make the channel free of encroachments and, consequently, eligible for Federal dredging 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. The Town is working 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.

PRIORITY 2 – Completed Actions

Goal	ITEM	DATE
2	Participation in Government SPC was allocated \$2,500 at Town Meeting in May.	May 2016

PRIORITY 3 – Current Actions

Goal #	Description	Priority
4	Protected Land in Essex	3

- **Develop Stronger Relationships with Local Conservation Groups** - MECT collaboration with SPC/ Open Space Committee

Goal #	Description	Priority
6	Recreational Opportunities	3

- **Conomo Point** - Town to make first improvements out at Conomo Point. This gives parking for more convenient use and a small park for recreation with direct dock access to the resource. ATM approved design, permitting, and construction money. Design and permitting occurs from June-December, Bidding in early 2017 for construction in the early spring of 2017.
- **Memorial Park Plan** - (see #1 above)
- **Essex Youth Commission** - Board of Selectmen in discussion to rejuvenate Essex Youth Commission At a recent public forum, the public embraced the concept of creating a master plan for the Centennial Grove that would incorporate existing features such as the cottage and to consider adding amenities that would possibly include docks, boats, and proper restroom facilities. It is possible that staff could be added to manage this area and perhaps offer youth recreational opportunities simultaneously.

Goal #	Description	Priority
7	Education	3

- Working on getting the Manchester Memorial feasibility study done – CY16

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

- **Community Compact** - SPC to consider whether housing should be the Town's other Community Compact focus area.
- **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
4 & 9	CPA – The Town Successfully approved an increase in CPA funding to 1.5% in May 2016	May 2016
4	Open Space Plan – The Open Space Committee updated the Town's Open Space Plan in 2015	2015
4	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	