

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

BACKGROUND

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. 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. The Committee has narrowed down the question of where to site the new facility to two possible options. One option could cost upwards of \$13M 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. 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. It is possible that the whole issue will be brought to public forums between now and November, 2017, for a potential vote at the Fall Town Meeting.
- **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 foot print 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.
- **Town Hall** – Town Hall renovation will be completed in May and departments will move in starting on May 22, 2017. Also, 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 is anticipating a grand re-opening the end of June.
- **Green Communities Application** – The Town Planner submitted a Green Communities competitive grant application for 4 projects, including a new ultra-efficient boiler at the Water Treatment Plant. Grants will be awarded in June 2017. See below for 3 projects at Essex Elementary.
- **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** – Town Planner submitted a 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 grant will be awarded in June 2017.

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

- **Economic Development Committee** - SPC continues to study the merits of EDC (May-Sep timeframe). Town applied for Community Compact in this area and the Compact has been approved. EDC now needs to be constituted so that meetings can begin during 2017.
- **Community Compact** – The Baker Administration has entered into an Economic Development Community Compact with the Town, focusing on the “Preparing for Success” theme, which covers housing and economic development.
- **Essex Parking Study Next Steps** – Spring/Summer 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
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 2017
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	May 2016

Replacement to the Town's Capital Improvement Plan.

PRIORITY 2 – Current Actions

Goal #	Description	Priority
3	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. The likely timeframe for this event is June of 2017.
- SPC endorsed a survey regarding where in local government people might be most interested in serving and, if not interested, what the impediments are. The survey was widely distributed both in-person and electronically and was designed to be very quick and easy to fill out. The effort was very successful, translating to three, 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.

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
- **Conomo Point public improvements** - The Board of Selectmen awarded the contract for the Northern Conomo Point Public Water Front Access Improvement project to Campbell Construction Group, LLC at the February 27th meeting. The project will be completed before Memorial Day Weekend, 2017.
- 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 ACEC.

PRIORITY 2 – Completed Actions

Goal	ITEM	DATE
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. Survey helped spark interest in participation, including new members for the Finance Committee	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

Goal #	Description	Priority
6	Recreational Opportunities	3

- **Conomo Point public improvements** - The Board of Selectmen awarded the contract for the Northern Conomo Point Public Water Front Access Improvement project to Campbell Construction Group, LLC at the February 27th meeting. The project will be completed before Memorial Day Weekend, 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. At present, the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen are determining whether funding for this position will be included in the Town's fiscal year 2018 operating budget.

Goal #	Description	Priority
7	Education	3

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

Goal	Description	Priority
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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 & 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
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	