



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of April 12, 2021

Report covers from March 20, 2021 to April 9, 2021

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Strategic Planning Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I participated in a meeting of the Strategic Planning Committee along with Town Planner Matt Coogan and Chairman Pereen on March 31, 2021. The meeting featured a discussion with respect to how best to update the Town's Strategic Plan for the next five-year period and all Committee members were present. The Committee decided that each member will develop their own list of priorities with respect to new planning goals so that these can be shared at the next meeting, which will be held on April 28, 2021. Committee members expressed the importance of themes like affordable housing and a review of the Town's zoning bylaws, with an eye toward the development of standard zoning districts.

Recommendation: Board discussion as necessary.

(2) Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I participated in a meeting of the Economic Development Committee (EDC) along with Town Planner Matt Coogan on April 6, 2021. The meeting featured a discussion relative to how the Town can best benefit from its participation in the COVID Local Rapid Recovery technical assistance grant that Essex is partnering with the Town of Manchester on. Two members of the EDC in addition to Matt Coogan, Chairman Pereen, and myself are all part of the working group that will move that grant program forward. The grant work includes a [new survey](#) that is available at the Town website and is intended to develop actionable plans to assist businesses with COVID recovery. The Committee also discussed its support for the downtown mixed-use zoning proposal that will go before the Annual Town Meeting on May 15, 2021. The next EDC meeting will be May 4, 2021.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

B. Computer Systems

(1) Deployment of New Computer Systems in New Public Safety Facility

I have spent considerable time configuring individual computer systems for the police and fire departments in the new facility. Police personnel initially moved all of the equipment that we had purchased out of storage at the old facility and into the new facility. Systems range from full PCs with dual monitors to zero-client devices with single monitors. After the boxes for various components were placed at each new workstation (also by police personnel), I verified that everything was in order.

Thereafter, police personnel unboxed and set up the components, without powering up or connecting to the local area network. Subsequently, I started and configured each new system, in turn, and all systems are now ready for use when the departments actually move in. Systems connect to our local area network – which is managed out of Town Hall, and, as authorized, to other networks such as the Regional Dispatch Center in Middleton, and various computerized interfaces for systems within the building (lighting, security, etc.). On April 20, 2021, personnel from the State Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) will physically move the CJIS router from the old building to the new building and I will configure individual systems to access it thereafter. This range of connectivity was dependent on the prior setup of Internet and Town fiber points of presence and the various networks and associated routing that operate over those interfaces.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Preparation for Migration of Town e-mail System to New Platform

As the Board may recall, our goal is to migrate the Town e-mail system to the Microsoft Outlook 365 web-based platform toward late-May. In preparation for this complex task, I have been working with a consultant who will perform the migration to understand the consultant's scope of services versus preliminary steps I will need to take with each user to make the system ready for migration. I will coordinate with and help prepare two groups of users: those who use our on-premises Outlook e-mail client and those who use only the webmail browser that is offered by our current e-mail host. My involvement in this project will still be extensive, due to my need to work with and prepare individual users and to deliver e-mail data files to the consultant for population up on the new platform.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

C. Personnel

No items.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Public Safety Facility Construction Project Update

(*)

Chairman Pereen and I participated in construction meetings on March 25, April 1, and April 8, 2021. Most work on the building itself is completed, excepting punch list items and finalization/training with respect to various building management systems. Our contractor will be focusing exclusively on the grounds of the facility during April and hopes to most exterior work completed, including the top coat of asphalt, by the end of the month. Some landscaping will spill over into the month of May.

One item that may need to be substituted with a different product is the cedar fencing that had been specified for the site. Due to COVID, production on cedar fencing products has fallen behind and that particular material probably won't be available until the end of the coming summer. After we have samples of the proposed substitute, we can show them to the abutter, who may or may not want to wait for the cedar. Further, our contractor has agreed to epoxy paint the main stairway and various rooms with concrete floors that were clear-sealed. The quality of work on the sealing was not acceptable and the paint product will correct that problem.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Revision of Base Plans for Old Fire Station Demolition/Site Restoration (*)

In the past, the Board briefly reviewed a second draft of the restoration plan for the old fire station site, which included final grading. The Board had made certain comments that I passed along to our designer but the revised plans were not ready for the last meeting. Revised plan sheets will likely be available at the present meeting for further review. At the last meeting, the Board also asked if Community Preservation Committee Chairman Kim Drake (also Planning Board Vice-Chair) could review the plans in her capacity as a landscape architect. She has agreed to do so, after the next iteration of plans becomes available.

Recommendation: **Further Board review of the revised plans, if available by meeting time.**

(3) Award of Contract for Sewer Grinder Pump System Preventative Maintenance (*)

As the Board may recall, I had assisted the Sewer Department and Board of Public Works with the development and release of an Invitation for Bids for a contractor to perform preventative maintenance on the Town's aging collection of sewer grinder pump systems. The Board of Public Works hired a consulting engineer to write the bid specifications, which I incorporated into the overall bid package. Bids on this work were due on April 8, 2021 and a total of two bids were received. The bid from F.R. Mahony had the lowest pricing in all work categories (by far) and met all of the necessary specifications. The contract will be for a three-year period and the contractor will be paid for each completed pump replacement, with pricing for both simplex and duplex pump systems. Town Meeting has provided \$200,000 for this work already and an additional \$100,000 appropriation will be sought in May. Funding comes from the sewer betterment interest surplus portion of the Sewer Enterprise Fund.

Recommendation: **Board vote to award the contract to F.R. Mahony. The Board of Public Works plans to also consider this bid on April 13, 2021.**

(4) Quarterly Affirmative Marketing Program Report

I filed the subject report with the State during the week of April 5, 2021, in my capacity as the Town's Affirmative Marketing Construction Officer (AMCO).

The report documents the Town's use of woman or minority-owned businesses on State-funded building construction projects. The Town had no such utilization over the past quarter.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

E. Insurance

(1) Monthly Pothole Log

I received the pothole log for the month of March from the DPW during the week of March 29, 2021. The log is used to document the rapid repair of any reported potholes. No potholes were reported during March.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

F. Facilities

(1) Discussion Regarding Possible Demolition of the Folsom Pavilion (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that the Folsom Pavilion should possibly be boarded up in the interest of public safety until a final plan for the structure is developed. The Building Inspector has deemed the building unsafe for use for the upcoming season, in its present condition. The Historical Commission is working to get Community Preservation Act funding to produce a historical survey of the buildings at the Centennial Grove.

Subsequent to the last meeting, we had an offer from a contractor who serves on the YMCA board to assess whether he could provide volunteer carpentry services to repair the deficiencies which are presently making the structure unsafe. Town Building Committee Chairman and Planning Board member Lisa O'Donnell, who is a practicing structural engineer, visited the site with the contractor to see if the work was something the contractor could take on. Unfortunately, the required repairs are too extensive for him to spare a crew for an extensive and costly engagement. Ms. O'Donnell has commented that the building is really too far gone at this point to be salvageable and recommends that it simply be demolished. We know from our past work with an architect that replacing the structure in kind or completely renovating it to its original condition would cost around \$500,000, either way. I have received a quote from a local demolition contractor in the amount of \$3,760 (plus the cost of dumpsters, to be separately arranged for by the Town) to demolish the structure.

If the Board is inclined to demolish the pavilion, it would be best to take that action very soon, before children arrive for Summer Camp Dory, in June. The YMCA plans to erect a tent this summer to provide shade for summer camp participants if the pavilion is demolished.

***Recommendation:* Board discussion with respect to the best course of action for the pavilion.**

(2) Switchover of Utilities for New Public Safety Building

I worked with our construction contractor during the week of March 29, 2021 to switch the electric, natural gas, and water utilities out of the contractor's name and into the Town's name. The gas switchover was the most complex and required a National Grid technician to come out and retrieve the meter number and perform a meter reading.

Now that the electric utility bill is in the Town's name, I have made arrangements to add this new account to the Town's fixed-rate electricity supply contract with Constellation (after we get the first bill in the Town's name). Our fixed-rate natural gas supply contract with Constellation does not allow for mid-term additions like the electricity supply contract does but natural gas pricing is presently reasonable and we will add the account at its own rate (after we get our first bill).

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Seasonal Opening of Memorial Park Restrooms

The Memorial Park restrooms opened for the season on April 1, 2021. The restrooms will be open seven days per week, from 8:30 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. through the end of September. For the month of October, the restrooms are open from 8:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., Thursday through Sunday.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(4) Placement of Ramp, Float, and Stairs at Conomo Point Park

During the month of April each year, our marine contractor deploys the gangway and float that attach to the deck of the Conomo Point Park and also puts the water access stairs in place. I have arranged for our contractor to undertake this work soon. The Selectmen's Assistant will arrange to have portable toilets placed at the parking lot on Conomo Lane.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(5) Seasonal Setup of the Centennial Grove

The Manchester Essex Little League will be using the Field of Dreams at the Centennial Grove and will follow all required protocols with respect to COVID-19. Volunteers from the league will be replacing the planks on one of the sets of spectator bleachers, since the old planks have rotted out. Our irrigation system contractor will start up the irrigation system at the Field of Dreams in mid-May and the Selectmen's Assistant will arrange to have portable toilets placed at the Field of Dreams and at the Grove itself as the season approaches. I have arranged

for the Water Department to turn on the water to the Centennial Grove Cottage when time allows.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(6) Placement of Rowing Craft Racks at Clammers' Beach, Conomo Point

The new rowing craft racks are set to be delivered soon (perhaps in place by meeting time). The racks are available by permit only and any interested party should contact the Harbormaster about applying for a slot. Depending on the level of interest, slots may be assigned by lottery, in accordance with the Board's recently-promulgated regulations. The old racks at Clammers' Beach will be removed and disposed of by the Department of Public Works.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(7) Water Damage at Centennial Grove Cottage

The cottage at the Centennial Grove recently experienced some water damage in an unoccupied space since roof shingles around the plumbing vent for the bathroom lifted up (probably due to wind). The DPW made temporary repairs and I have arranged for a contractor to make more permanent repairs and to clean out the damaged sheetrock and insulation after visiting the site with him on April 9, 2021. He will attend to this work as soon as possible. It was evident that the entire roof on the building needs to be replaced and I have reached out to the YMCA to determine if that organization can assist. If not, it is a matter that needs to be discussed for possible funding at the Fall Town Meeting.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

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

I attended a meeting of the school budget collaboration group with Chairman Pereen and Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick on March 24, 2021. The meeting featured a discussion regarding whether and how a large public meeting involving the two boards of selectmen, the two finance committees, and the School Committee should be held to discuss the general trajectory of future school budgets. The group agreed that a second collaboration group meeting should be held and I attended that meeting on April 1, 2021, along with Chairman Buttrick and Selectman Bradford. The Essex Finance Committee has reviewed data from other school districts and agrees that a school district cannot be effectively run with only a 2.5% operating budget increase year over year. Rather, the Committee views 3.25-3.5% as a more reasonable range and the group no longer sees a need for an all-boards meeting.

With respect to the status of the operating budget apportionment requests from the District for fiscal year 2022, we have learned after a School Committee meeting

held April 6, 2022 that the School Committee is not inclined to use more District reserves to lower apportionments to the towns at this time. If Federal COVID relief funding allows for apportionment decreases later, the Committee will consider that. Further, it may be possible for the Town to use some of its own Federal COVID funding to effectively reduce its fiscal year 2022 apportionment by offsetting taxation for other expenses with the Federal funding (this would require more knowledge about the upcoming funding and discussion of that possibility by the Finance Committee and the Selectmen).

In future years, given that student enrollment can put either town on the higher side of the apportionment increase equation, it may be possible to develop a system whereby each community and the District would have funds set aside in special stabilization funds. Then, in a year where a town's apportionment increase exceeds some chosen threshold, the affected community and the District could use those funds to reduce the apportionment increase to the desired level. The School District finance manager and representatives from the two town finance committees have agreed to review this and other possibilities going forward.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

(1) Cape Ann Caucus

I attended the subject meeting on March 26, 2021 along with Chairman Pereen and Selectman Phippen. The Cape Ann Caucus is sponsored by the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce several times per year and brings together local and State officials to discuss matters of common interest. This most recent session featured updates from all four communities with respect to local projects and initiatives and updates from Senator Tarr and Representative Hill with respect to the State budget and business support for COVID recovery.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Further Discussion Regarding Regional Vaccination Clinic (*)

Senator Tarr brought regional leaders together to again discuss the prospect of a regional vaccination center on March 25, 2021. Chairman Pereen attended that meeting and reports that the Senator also invited Ipswich, Hamilton, and Wenham to join the regional vaccine initiative discussion. The guest speaker was Alex Doyle, owner of Conley's Pharmacy. Conley's has the staff, availability, and scheduling platform to run clinics as soon as this regional effort is approved to receive vaccines. The group was in favor of proceeding to create a Cape Ann

regional vaccine program proposal and Senator Tarr's office has developed and submitted a proposal to the Massachusetts Secretary of Health and Human Services. All communities have provided letters of support for this regional vaccination program.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Preparation of Finance Committee Report/Town Meeting Booklet

I worked with the Town Accountant during the week of March 29, 2021 to finalize the content of the Finance Committee Report booklet that is distributed at Town Meeting. The booklet was brought to our printing contractor the same week and should be available in print soon. A [digital version](#) of the booklet is already available in the Town Meeting resources section of the Town website.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

K. Legal Issues

(1) Quarterly Review of Executive Session Minutes

Each quarter, the Chairman reviews the Board's unreleased executive session minutes, in the event that any matters have settled that would allow for such release. No new minutes have been recommended for release this quarter.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

L. Grants

(1) Coastal Zone Management Grant Closeout Meeting

Representatives from our engineering contractor (TEC) and I met with personnel from the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) on March 22, 2021 to review the draft final work products for the Apple Street roadbed elevation feasibility study grant. The grant focused on reviewing the alternatives for elevating the second of two dips in the roadway out of the coastal storm surge zone and a feasibility report was generated, along with other, associated work products. CZM personnel had provided me with their feedback in advance of the meeting so that personnel from TEC could be prepared for the discussion. At the meeting, we were able to work through all of the identified issues and we provided CZM personnel with a revised report during the week of March 29, 2021. Presently, we are awaiting CZM's final comments and I will work with TEC to provide CZM with final work products and close out the grant. We expect to build on what we have learned from this study with future grant funding, as we look toward eventual implementation.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Regional IT Coordination Grant Update

A group of area communities has continued to meet under the auspices of a Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) technical assistance grant aimed at utilizing shared IT services provided by the Town of Danvers. Essex has been using space in the Danvers datacenter for year for the backup of our IT infrastructure. Other communities are close to considering similar and other services. At a recent coordination meeting on March 25, 2021, the group focused on getting a Request for Proposals out that will allow participating communities to receive IT services at excellent pricing. Further, the Town of Danvers may soon move to a new VOIP telephone provider and could serve up telephone services from its own server over the regional fiber network. While public safety telephones are tied in with the Regional Dispatch Center in Middleton, this may be something Essex could benefit from with respect to our non-public safety lines.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Sediment Transport Grant Monthly Report

Personnel from Boston University (BU) provided the State with the subject report regarding the Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant, that BU is working on, during the week of March 29, 2021. The study is looking at the southward migration of sediment along Crane Beach and into and throughout Essex Bay. Work is wrapping up and BU personnel are presently coordinating with MVP staff to release a final report and work through any necessary grant closeout steps.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(4) Local Rapid Recovery Planning Grant Kickoff Meeting Summary (*)

As the Board may recall, Essex and Manchester had collaborated on a technical assistance grant application from the State with respect to expert guidance on how to help bring both local economies out of the COVID downturn. The State assigned the firm of Dodson & Flinker to assist the communities with specific planning and the kickoff meeting was held on April 7, 2021. Chairman Pereen, Town Planner Matt Coogan, and I will serve with others in a working group that will assist the consultant with the development of our plan. At the kickoff meeting, the participants broke off into sub-groups to brainstorm how to best assist with COVID recovery across the range of businesses in Essex, particularly in the downtown area. We discussed the history and major attractions in Essex and our consultant had a follow-up discussion with members of the group on April 9, 2021. A public presentation will be offered by the group on the evening of May 11, 2021.

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 portions of the day on March 25 and 26 and all day on April 2, 2021.

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