



## Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of April 22, 2024

Report covers from April 6, 2024 to April 19, 2024

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

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### A. Town Department Reports/Requests

#### (1) Planning Board Public Hearing for Zoning Amendment Proposals

I attended the subject hearing along with Chairman Pereen on April 17, 2024. The Planning Board provided summaries of each of the proposed Annual Town Meeting articles seeking various zoning bylaw amendments. Members of the public were in attendance and asked relatively few questions. No major concerns were raised by the public.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### B. Computer Systems

#### (1) Camera System for Centennial Grove and Upgrade of Video Servers (\*)

As the Board has discussed in the past, the new fiber optic spur system from the Water Filtration Plant to two locations at the Centennial Grove is complete and is capable of supporting video monitoring of the area. Installing cameras both at the picnic grove area and the cottage area is estimated to cost approximately \$22,000. However, the existing video servers at the police station are in need of updating or upgrading to be able to properly accept the additional video feeds. The existing servers accept feeds from cameras within and around the public safety facility and the software system provided when the building was constructed requires frequent updates that sometimes take the system off line.

If the existing servers are re-provisioned with new software, the cost of updating will be around \$15,000. However, if the existing servers are to be outright replaced with new servers, the cost will be considerably higher – around \$48,000. An article has been placed on the Annual Town Meeting warrant that will allow for appropriation of funds based on the chosen scenario. One advantage to the high-cost scenario is that it will replace the servers before they hit “end of life” which is about a year away.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

#### (2) Fiber Optic Line Disruption

Essex's servers are all located in the Town of Danvers datacenter as part of the North Short IT Collaborative. On April 19, 2024, the fiber optic path between Essex and Danvers was disrupted and Essex users temporarily could not access our servers. The system was set up with a failover to Internet in the event of a fiber disruption but the failover did not initially work. I contacted Danvers IT

personnel and they determined the cause of the problem and noted how it will be avoided if another failover is needed in the future. Town users computed using the Internet path until the problem with the fiber could be identified and repaired.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### **C. Personnel**

No items.

### **D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects**

#### (1) Downtown Decorative Lighting Project Update (\*)

Since the Board's last meeting, I have confirmed that our engineering contractor, Stantec, has officially informed its insurer that the Town may be making a claim against the firm's professional liability policy. The Town did not receive adequate guidance from Stantec with respect to the possible risk of pre-purchasing custom lighting components based on what turned out to be unsuitable site conditions. In Stantec's contract with the Town, Stantec clearly suggested that utility conflicts would not be a problem and did not recommend any further field investigation prior to assisting the Town prepare the order for the non-returnable components. Further, Stantec actually completed a feasibility study concerning this project via a technical assistance grant prior to the Town hiring the firm for the actual design. Nowhere within the Town's involvement with Stantec did the Town ever receive cautionary statements or suggestions for additional field investigatory work.

Fortunately, we have learned from Mass DOT that the \$160,000 Shared Streets and Spaces Grant that was awarded to defray a portion of the project will be allowed by DOT to be fully expended on the purchase of the custom lighting components, even though the Town will be storing those components for the time being. The custom lanterns were delivered several weeks ago and portions of the custom light poles and attachments have also been delivered (all are now in storage and we are waiting for the actual poles to ship). Further, I am presently working with our lighting installation contractor to review the company's assessment of costs that occurred between project commencement and when work ceased due to utility conflicts.

Another issue for the Board to consider is whether the Board would like to move forward with the demolition of 23 sidewalk sections with the embedment of decorative ship plaques in the re-poured sections. Another possibility would be to have a local mason patch the cuts that were made when our contractor began to prepare for light pole base installation.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Replacement or Repair of Shellfish Department Pickup Truck (\*)

At the last meeting, I noted that the Shellfish Constable had just received an expensive repair estimate for the Shellfish Department pickup truck involving the replacement of both catalytic converters. Rather than pursue those repairs immediately, the Board asked me to check in with the State surplus vehicle program through Senator Tarr's office, since the Town acquired the current truck through that program in 2018. I have learned from the State surplus coordinator that a truck may become available but that the State program no longer provides vehicles to municipalities at no cost. As such, if a truck does become available matching our needs, it would come to the Town at a market rate.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Public Water Supply Well Improvement Project Re-Bid

As the Board may recall, the Town's first attempt at securing a contractor to conduct certain improvement work on the Town's three public water supply wells resulted in bids that were all over the available budget. Our engineering contract has now developed a modified bid package with a smaller scope and is ready to put the project out to bid again. The new bid packages will be available on April 24, 2024, with a pre-bid conference on May 8, 2024. Sub-bids for certain trades will be due on May 20, 2024 and general bids will be due on May 28, 2024. We are also working on an application for Congressionally-Directed Spending (CDS) that, about a year from now, could fund the portion of the work that had to be cut out of the scope (along with perhaps the replacement of some aging water mains in the street).

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

(4) Centennial Grove Improvement Project Update (\*)

I met at the Grove with volunteer Centennial Grove Improvement Project coordinator Dan Mayer on April 17, 2024. Work has resumed on the new pavilion and siding and roofing elements will be completed in the coming weeks and months. We reviewed the best location for the new restroom facility and a foundation plan is being developed based on the dimensions of the building that the Board approved at the last meeting. I will work with the Building Inspector to understand the ADA rules around maximum slope between the pavilion and the restroom facility.

While walking the property, Mr. Mayer suggested that a number of mature trees adjacent to the lower parking lot and along the area where the restroom facility will be sited should be taken down. He is willing to conduct this work at no charge to the Town and plans to use the timber for milling into boards for the project. All work will be outside of the wetlands buffer zone. Also, Mr. Mayer suggested that the trees that Scott Energy is planning to plant on Town property in a wooded area after accidental cutting be planted instead at the Grove. He noted that the trees in the wooded area will come back naturally and that the

commitment made by Scott Energy would be far more beneficial to residents if exercised at the Grove. Further, Mr. Mayer suggested that the upper Grove parking lot be reduced in size to still allow a full row of head-in parking but much closer to the road, making the remainder of the parking lot green space.

*Recommendation:* **Board consideration of Mr. Mayer's suggestions involving tree cutting, tree planting, and upper parking lot area reduction.**

## **E. Insurance**

### (1) Quarterly Facility Self-Inspection Checklist

I completed the subject checklist for Town Hall and I have asked the Council on Aging Director to take over the completion of the checklist for the Senior Center moving forward. Other departments also fill out checklists for other buildings. The inspections are intended to flag safety problems and make rapid corrections to avoid any injuries. The Safety Committee discusses the inspection forms each quarter.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

## **F. Facilities**

### (1) Town Hall Bell Tower Roof

Another episode of high winds again tore shingles off of the Town Hall bell tower roof. The original contractor for the Town Hall renovation project twice replaced shingles in that location and, after the building warranty expired, another contractor has twice replaced shingles there. I am making arrangements to have the shingles replaced again but it seems that the exposure of that roof, on one particular side, may make it difficult to keep the roof in good repair.

*Recommendation:* I will update the Board as necessary.

### (2) Installation of Conomo Point Ramp, Float, and Water Access Stairs

Our marine contractor will soon install the subject equipment at the small, waterfront park at Conomo Point, for the season.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (3) Drain Clog and Backup in Public Safety Facility

A drain in the public safety facility experienced a serious blockage on April 16, 2024 and backed up sewage-contaminated water into the building. The clog was on the street level and backed up water drained down through the ceiling to the police offices on the lower level. The Chief of Police brought in a remediation specialist immediately after having a drain company visit the building to clear the blockage. I have connected the Chief with our insurer since cleanup and repair costs may be substantial and are likely covered by our insurance policy.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

#### **G. Fiscal/Budget**

No items.

#### **H. Complaints**

No items.

#### **I. Meetings Attended**

No items.

#### **J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations**

##### (1) Finalization of Annual Town Meeting Motions (\*)

The Board reviewed preliminary Annual Town Meeting motions at the last meeting and I have updated the motions in accordance with the Board's guidance.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary and finalization of the motions.**

#### **K. Legal Issues**

##### (1) Quarterly Review of Executive Session Minutes

Chairman Pereen has reviewed unreleased executive session minutes as she does on a quarterly basis and has discussed with me her recommendations for potential release. I have reviewed the recommendations with Town Counsel and several matters can be considered concluded, warranting the release of the minutes.

*Recommendation:* Release of various executive session minutes in accordance with the posted agenda.

##### (2) Site Visit to Owner Unknown Parcel Adjacent to Route 128 (\*)

Chairman Pereen and I and Economic Development Committee Chair Jodi Harris accessed the subject parcel from abutting private property (with permission from that abutter) just to understand the topography and possible depth to bedrock. This preliminary viewing of the area confirms steep slopes and shallow depth to bedrock. While the site conditions on this parcel are generally not ideal for future development, some portions of the property may be useful. Our title examiner is continuing to review area property deeds in an effort to understand past ownership and possibly to approach this parcel from a tax-title taking perspective in the future.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary.**

## **L. Grants**

### (1) Closeout Meeting for Community Planning Grant

I participated in the subject meeting on April 10, 2024 along with Chairman Pereen, Planning Board members, Metropolitan Area Planning Council personnel, and others. MAPC was interested in collecting feedback from the Town with respect to how the project played out. Comments were registered concerning how public engagement could be improved in the future and how exercises could have been better tailored to the average citizen in a more understandable way. All agreed that the project final summary report would benefit from additional detail and cross-referencing of work products and MAPC is preparing a revision to that report.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

## **M. Emergency Planning**

No items.

## **N. Other Items**

### (1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, on April 12, 2024, and for a portion of the day on April 17, 2024.

### (2) Patriots' Day Holiday

The office was closed on April 15, 2024 in observance of the subject holiday.

*This report is available at **[www.essexma.org](http://www.essexma.org)** on the morning after any regularly scheduled Essex Board of Selectmen's Meeting.*