



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of April 8, 2024

Report covers from March 23, 2024 to April 5, 2024

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

No items.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Town Hall Auditorium Remote Meeting Equipment Repair

At the last meeting, although remote meeting participants were able to hear the Board and each other, the Board could not hear remote meeting participants. I reviewed the matter and was not able to find any particular problem with cabling or with specific pieces of hardware. The vendor that installed the broadcast system reviewed the matter further with me via remote connection and was unable to determine the cause of the problem (it was not programming or software-based). As such, a technician was dispatched to our location to diagnose and correct the matter, and I am hopeful that the system will work properly at the present meeting (information not available at the time of printing). Unfortunately, since the issue was not with the new speaker system for remote audio itself, and had to do with the original broadcast board, the service visit was not covered under warranty.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Hiring of New Town Clerk

Ms. Ann Dunne has accepted the Board's offer to become the next Essex Town Clerk. Ms. Dunne comes to us from an assistant town clerk position in Sudbury and is available to start work sometime in May. Retired Town Clerk Pamela Thorne will cover the office between April 16 and when Ms. Dunne begins and is communicating directly with Ms. Dunne about some cross-training.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Hiring of New Town Accountant

The Board has authorized me to engage with a Town Accountant candidate to explore her requirements prior to potentially extending her an offer of employment.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Centennial Grove Restroom Project Update

(*)

As the Board may recall, the Board recently decided to accept an offer from volunteers to design and construct the Centennial Grove restroom facility, in a fashion very similar to the pavilion project. Local architect Peter Levassuer has donated his time to develop a set of plans for a post and beam restroom building with associated changing rooms and volunteer project coordinator Dan Mayer of Mayer Tree would like to advance the project along by getting lumber cut to build that particular design.

Also, I am working with Septic System Installer Dave Clark of D.F. Clark. Mr. Clark has agreed to coordinate the tight tank installation and to obtain the necessary permit. I have already designed the system and it has been approved by the Board of Health. The actual labor and machine time for the earthwork will be supplied in-kind by Mr. Mayer. Mr. Clark will assist with the selection of all necessary materials and I will order and pay for all materials directly, using Town funds.

***Recommendation:* Board approval of the restroom facility design and commencement of the tight tank work.**

(2) Public Safety Facility Repair Project Procurement Commencement

(*)

Chairman Pereen and I met virtually with personnel from our public safety facility repair project engineering firm on March 28, 2024. We finalized the plans, specifications, and bid documents for the project and the bid package will be released to prospective bidders on April 10, 2024. The bid process will unfold from April 10 through mid-May and the Board will be asked to consider a contract with the successful bidder at its meeting of May 20, 2024. The Town will hold a pre-bid site visit on April 24, 2024 at 10:00 a.m., filed sub-bids will be due on May 8, 2024 at 1:00 p.m., and general bids will be due on May 15, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Downtown Decorative Lighting Project Update

(*)

Subsequent to the Board's last meeting, I have received additional information concerning the subject project. The grant coordinator for the DOT Shared Streets and Spaces Grant has indicated that it may be possible to defray a portion of the custom lighting element materials using grant funding but no final word is available as of the printing of this report. Our lighting installation contractor has billed the Town for services rendered to date and I am in the process of reconciling that invoice against certified payroll documents and other backup. Other materials such as electrical wire and fuse holders that the Town obtained in the past are returnable for credit and I am working with the DPW to transport those back to the supplier in Gloucester.

On March 29, 2024, I sent a letter to our engineering contractor (Stantec) informing them that it may be necessary for the Town to make a claim against Stantec's insurance policy. I have also begun to discuss this matter with Town Counsel and it is likely that additional communication will be forwarded to Stantec in the near future, as advised by Counsel.

With respect to the custom lighting components that were ordered, the lanterns are set to arrive on April 8, 2024 and the light poles will be following shortly. If there had not been utility conflicts, the light pole bases would have been in the ground by now and our lighting contractor would soon be installing the light poles, fixtures, and attachments. The light pole bases had been delivered some time ago to an area adjacent to Memorial Park and they have now been moved to another location since boating and baseball season is upon us. Dan Mayer of Mayer Tree generously donated his equipment and personnel to perform that relocation work for the Town.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

E. Insurance

(1) Monthly Pothole Log

I obtained the pothole log for the month of March from the DPW during the week of April 1, 2024. The log is intended to document reports of potholes and swift action on the Town's part to repair. No potholes were reported during April.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Freeze-up Prevention Logs

I obtained from the Chief of Police and the Superintendent of Public Works a series of heat log sheets for various public buildings. Completing the sheets each weekend when buildings are not occupied is part of our insurer's freeze-up prevention program and inspections are intended to detect heat problems early, avoiding frozen pipes. Fortunately, we had no heating outages or freeze-up problems this past winter.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

F. Facilities

(1) Memorial Park Restrooms

The Memorial Park Restrooms have opened for the season – 8:30 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. every day (as of April 1, 2024). Our new Senior Center Custodian is responsible for daily cleaning and he will expand his weekly hours to accommodate this seasonal task.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Centennial Grove Seasonal Startup

The Centennial Grove is starting to open up for the season. The Selectmen's Assistant will arrange for portable toilets both at the Field of Dreams and at the picnic grove. We are working with the DPW and the Manchester Essex Little League to have a fields contractor perform spring maintenance work at the Field of Dreams and our irrigation contractor will start up the irrigation system there in May. Also, the Water Department will soon turn the seasonal water back on and our plumbing contractor will restore water service to the Cottage.

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) Preliminary Annual Town Meeting Motions (*)

At the last meeting, the Board approved the Annual Town Meeting warrant. I have begun to develop possible Annual Town Meeting motions based upon the warrant.

Recommendation: **Board review of the preliminary Annual Town Meeting motions.**

(2) Annual Town Meeting Booklet

The booklet for the Annual Town Meeting, which contains the Finance Committee's Report, the Wage & Salary Scale, the Town Meeting Warrant, and other items is available on the Town's website. The booklet was dropped off for printing at the end of the week of April 1, 2024 and paper copies will be available in the next couple of weeks.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Town of Essex Draft Hazard Mitigation Plan

At the last meeting, personnel from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) presented a final draft of the subject plan, with the intent of seeking public comment prior to the plan's review by State and Federal authorities. As noted at the meeting, a [dedicated website](#) has been set up to allow the public to review the draft plan and provide direct input, which will be accepted through late April. Thereafter, MAPC will make any necessary adjustments and will prepare for the State review process. I also submitted the required Quarterly Report to the Massachusetts Office of Emergency Management (MEMA) during the week of March 25, 2024.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Zoning Review Project Grant Quarterly Report and Project Closeout

I submitted the subject report to the State Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) during the week of April 1, 2024. The work of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has concluded with MAPC producing a summary of all work products and milestones. MAPC provided the Town with a final invoice which closes out the \$75,000 grant (over \$16,000 of work was also completed for the Town by MAPC without charge to the Town, a grant match – for a total cost of over \$90,000). I have provided a final report and request for reimbursement to EOHLC.

The Planning Board will move forward with some additional zoning proposals for a third, consecutive Town Meeting (Annual Meeting in 2023, Fall Meeting in 2023, and Annual Meeting in 2024). Beyond the proposals and zoning amendments made to date, the Planning Board hopes to bring proposals for actual zoning districts at the Fall Meeting of 2024. The moratorium on conversion of a residential or vacant use to commercial or industrial use is set to expire at the end of this calendar year.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) Funding Request (*)

As the Board is aware, the Town recently went out to bid for some improvements to the Town's three public water supply wells. Unfortunately, the bids came in much higher than the available level of ARPA funding that the Town was allocated by the Federal Government. As such, our engineering consultant is presently working to repackage the project minus a particular aspect that had to do with improving access to Well #2. The masonry work required by that project

element, especially where a high water table is involved, is what put the original bid beyond the available funding.

The project element that has been cut out of the scope has already been designed and is therefore “shovel-ready”. Shovel-ready projects are favored by a type of Federal funding known as Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS), which essentially translates to Congressional earmarks. In fact, past attempts by the Town for this type of funding have been unsuccessful since they were not truly shovel-ready. The deadline for CDS applications for Federal Fiscal Year 2025 (which begins this coming October) was recently announced as April 5, 2024 and our engineering consultant assisted me with information necessary to apply for CDS funding (a project total of \$628,000). Chairman Pereen authorized the application and provided a required certification. CDS funding is very competitive and results won’t even be known until the spring of 2025. However, having the design already in place makes the project much more competitive and the Town had nothing to lose by applying.

Recommendation: Board vote to ratify the Chairman’s signature of a required certification document and application for CDS funding.

(4) Green Crab Trapping Commencement

The State Green Crab Trapping Grant in the amount of \$13,000 was awarded by the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) late last fall, after most green crab activity had waned for the season. Normally, trapping is allowed to resume as of May 15 but that does not leave much time between commencement and the end of the fiscal year. An Essex trapper was recently successful in convincing DMF to issue a permit to start trapping earlier this year (April 1) and he has obtained a new contract from the Town to begin that work. The Shellfish Constable has been informed about this development and he will spread the word to other potential trappers (who would also need to obtain an April permit). If enough trapping is undertaken, it is possible that a Town appropriation for this purpose will also be tapped, but only after the State grant has been fully expended.

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 vacation leave, on April 1 and 2, 2024.

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