



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of August 7, 2023

Report covers from July 22, 2023 to August 4, 2023

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

No items.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Exploration of Fiber Optic Spur to Centennial Grove

At this point, the Board desires to improve security at the Centennial Grove with lighting and that will be planned into the work that will hopefully begin this coming fall. Eventually, the Town may wish to install camera systems at the Grove and this will require an Internet or Town network connection to be affordable and effective. The Board agreed that I should investigate the potential cost of adding a Town network fiber optic spur between the Water Filtration Plant and the Grove Cottage/Concession Stand (we have poles to both buildings). This would allow security data to flow easily through the Town's existing fiber optic network and back to Town Hall or the public safety facility. I met on site with personnel from CommTract on July 28, 2023 and a proposal for the necessary fiber work and an associated camera network are forthcoming.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

C. Personnel

No items.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Continued Development of Summer Camp/Enrichment Programs RFP (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that a certain list of enrichment program ideas for youth and adults should be added to the Request for Proposals that I am developing for future summer camp and enrichment program services. I have incorporated that content and I now recommend discussion with respect to the summer camp attendance options and pricing. Generally, our current vendor has seen a trend that includes a move to most summer camp participants staying for the full-day program (9 a.m. until 4 p.m.). It has also been more difficult in recent seasons to staff the program, making the half-day option difficult to manage.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Water Filtration Plant Renovation Work Update and Authorization (*)

I attended the subject conference on July 26, 2023 along with the Superintendent of Public Works, the Chief Operator, our engineering team, and representatives of the contractor. The meeting laid out the schedule and expectations for inspections and payment requisitions, along with a discussion concerning keeping the plant fully operational during the renovation process. The project will run into September of 2024 and I will be the principal Town contact for payment requisitions after review by our engineering team. It would be advantageous to the reimbursement process if the Board could authorize me to sign all necessary documents involving routine payments to the contractor and reimbursements from the State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF).

Recommendation: **Board signature of a letter of authorization for me to sign off on routine payments and reimbursement requests.**

(3) Fixed-Rate Natural Gas Contract Procurement Update

At the last meeting, the Board agreed to explore the procurement of a successor, fixed-rate natural gas contract through a broker, Tradition Energy. After I sent Tradition the most recent natural gas bills for each of our gas accounts, it was discovered that Essex does not use enough natural gas annually for Tradition to work with us. As such, Direct Energy appears to be the only option for a successor, fixed-rate natural gas contract (the only other player, Sprague Energy, usually quotes higher pricing and has not to date even gotten back to me – likely due to our small size and usage). I will continue to get periodic quotes from Direct Energy and I will keep the Board advised about any decisions that need to be made.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Repair of AC Unit Drain System

The coil component of the AC unit in the Board of Health Administrator's office began to leak condensate water during the week of July 24, 2023. After investigating the matter, I was able to determine that an internal drain hose that directs condensate to the unit's pump chamber had become dislodged. After reconnecting the drain hose to the pump chamber, the unit again functioned properly.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Replacement of Basement Dehumidifiers

When phase 1 of the Town Hall renovation work was done in 2015, an interior basement perimeter drain was installed below the new slab. The drain had risers to grade to allow dehumidifiers to continuously remove water without manual emptying. A total of five dehumidifiers were in use and three of them were either non-functional or obviously ready to fail. Three new units were purchased and I deployed them all during the week of July 31, 2023.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Investigation of Public Safety Facility Maintenance/Repair Needs

At the last meeting, the Board agreed to hire Copeland Building Envelope Consultants to investigate issues that have been noticed with respect to the new public safety facility involving the PVC trim, the color-match caulk, the stain for the wood shingles, and the hardy plank siding system. The work will not exceed \$15,000, inclusive of contractor/lift support, and the Town will receive a full report with specifications for repairs and a cost estimate. Presently, we are awaiting scheduling of the investigation by Copeland.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(4) Improvements to Town Hall Broadcast System

At the last meeting, it was apparent that it can sometimes be difficult to understand remote meeting participants over the house sound system during meetings. Guests have varying equipment and audio input levels and their audio is projected out toward the audience. The vendor that installed the equipment in the Town Hall auditorium is able to provide the Board with a “monitor” speaker that projects toward the Board’s meeting table and to provide the audio technician with a gain control for the in-house speakers to allow for sound adjustment depending on the quality of the incoming guest signal. These improvements will be made as soon as our vendor has all of the necessary equipment (on order).

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Continued Discussion Concerning School District Budget

Chairman Pereen and I met for a third time with Manchester Select Board Chairman Ann Harrison and Manchester Town Administrator Greg Federspiel on July 25, 2023. The group continued to discuss how a structural change to the regional agreement may be necessary in order for Essex to be able to afford participation in the School District over the long term. Generally, this could be approached by increasing the apportionment formula’s reliance on the equalized valuations for both communities and decreasing reliance on the other factors. The group plans to meet again in early August to discuss more details.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

(1) Regional Public Health Coalition Update

The Eastern Essex Regional Public Health Coalition was instrumental with respect to COVID vaccinations and case management during the pandemic. While grant funding to keep the Coalition director in place is still available, the director has moved on to another opportunity and the need for COVID-related coordination has significantly waned. The Town of Hamilton is the anchor community for the Coalition and the Hamilton Town Administrator discussed the future focus of the Coalition with all participating municipalities on August 1, 2023. It was agreed that the director's position will be advertised for immediately and that other meetings will occur in the future to review focus and service delivery when a new director is hired.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Continued Review of Draft Mobile Vendor Policy

At the last meeting, the Board briefly discussed the draft Mobile Vendor Policy and determined that further discussion should come after full comments are received from the Economic Development Committee and the Essex Merchants' Group. Both of those entities are presently reviewing the draft document.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Continued Review of Fall Town Meeting Article Topics (*)

At the last meeting, the Board reviewed the draft list of Fall Town Meeting article topics with various department heads and board/committee chairs who were in attendance. I have continued to collect backup information concerning some of the items for the Board's further review.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

K. Legal Issues

(1) Legal Research on Owner-Unknown Parcel off of Southern Avenue

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that a title researcher with a reasonable hourly rate should begin to investigate the title to a large "owner-unknown" parcel off of Southern Avenue. The parcel also may have access off of Route 128 and it

could be a location for future light commercial development, which is the hope of the Economic Development Committee. I contacted the title researcher and he visited Town Hall to pick up documents obtained by a prior, volunteer researcher. He is presently digesting the prior work and will be soon commencing his own work, up to a maximum of \$1,000. Once he reaches his maximum, he will report back on how much work he sees ahead and what other resources he may need.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Renewal of Licenses Pertaining to Village Restaurant Property (*)

The Town has had a license to allow pedestrians to pass over the Village Restaurant property from the municipal parking lot for many years now. Also, the Village had a license with the Town to allow the use of a small area of Town property for dumpster storage and parking. The present licenses expire September 13, 2023 and the property is being sold to a new owner. I reached out to the attorney for the new owner during the week of July 31, 2023 and learned that her clients do wish to continue with both licenses but need time for review and discussion.

Recommendation: **Board vote to sign successor pedestrian passage and dumpster/parking licenses outside of a meeting, with the new property owner, as soon as new documents are available.**

L. Grants

No items.

M. Emergency Planning

(1) New Emergency Notification System Available Through Regional Dispatch

Essex's ability to provide the public with emergency alerts by e-mail, phone, or text has been supported via a system maintained and paid for by the North Shore Regional 911 Center. That system was previously known as SwiftReach and the Center has now migrated to a new system, known as RAVE. Personnel from the Center provided users in the various communities with training on the new system on July 26, 2023 and Chief Francis, Sergeant Bruce, and I were all in attendance. We have now revised our website link to the system allowing residents to [sign up for alerts](#). We have migrated all previous enrollees from the old system (no new enrollment is necessary for previously-enrolled residents) and we have retained the ability to send message to a "whitelist" of publicly-available phone numbers. Chief Francis and I had a more in-depth training session with Center personnel on August 1, 2023 to set protocols specific to Essex. The 911 Center is presently working to configure a variety of settings on the new platform and full functionality will gradually be phased in.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

N. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, for a portion of the day on July 31, 2023 and all day on August 3, 2023.

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