



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of August 9, 2021

Report covers from July 24, 2021 to August 6, 2021

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Zoning Board of Appeals Cell Tower Variance Hearing Summary (*)

I attended the subject hearing on August 4, 2021, which was the second continuation of an original hearing begun back in April. I have been assisting the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) to navigate the process of considering variances sought by a cell tower applicant at 65 and 73 Eastern Avenue, including coordination with Town Counsel and the Town's third-party peer reviewer (funded by the applicant). Chairman Pereen was also in attendance. The ZBA allowed the applicant to answer questions asked at the previous meeting and the applicant was questioned by the Town's expert. Testimony was taken from individuals and an opposing group represented by counsel. During the hearing, it became evident that the applicant could not at the time of the hearing prove that a particular alternative site is not available for possible use. As such, the applicant requested a further continuance until September 1, 2021 and intends to provide evidence that the owner of that parcel was duly contacted and had no interest in hosting a cell tower.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

B. Computer Systems

(1) Centralized Antivirus Application Update

Broadcom/Symantec issued an update to its antivirus/anti-intrusion management program recently. The program sits on a central server and manages all of the various client instances of Symantec Endpoint Protection. The update process went well at first but stalled after initial processing. I worked directly with Symantec engineers to identify the problem and to get the update fully functional. The system is now working well again.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Deployment of Network Video Recorder in New Public Safety Building

I assisted a contractor for the North Shore Regional 911 Emergency Dispatch Center with the moving and re-deployment of a network video recorder (NVR) from the old public safety facility to the new facility during the week of August 2, 2021. This device, which is essentially a server, will record audio/video specific to the two public entry points in the new building where visitors have remote interactions with public safety dispatchers. The new facility's general security camera system also captures and records these areas but the NVR recordings will

provide more detail via more focused camera and audio coverage. The contractor will connect the server with all necessary devices to make the system fully operational.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Town Planner Vacancy Update (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that candidates for the vacant part-time Town Planner position should be sought. Presently, the opportunity has been advertised on a specific e-mail list-serve within the municipal planning community and we have had two applicants. The minimum position posting duration goes through August 10, 2021 and the Board may wish to interview a candidate or candidates at the next meeting.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Mobilization of Old Fire/Police Station Demolition Contractor (*)

At the last meeting, the Board voted to award the contract for the demolition of the old fire/police station at 24 Martin Street to Encore Contracting Services of Lawrence, MA. Our Project Manager worked to pull together the necessary contract documents and we are awaiting the signed contract at the time of printing of this report. I expect that the contract will be available for the Board to countersign soon and we will work on scheduling a date for a kickoff meeting that will provide the Town with more information about the project footprint and its schedule. In the meantime, I walked the old building for a final time and showed our contractor via video all of the items that remain in the building. Our contractor did not notice anything that was not expected.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Public Safety Facility Construction Project Update (*)

Chairman Preen and I participated in a construction meeting on July 29, 2021. Our contractor, our project manager, and our architect are working together to wrap up any outstanding punch list items and to coordinate other project closeout activities (such as operation and monitoring manuals and assurance that all landscaping has been properly installed/watered). Minor details such as sorting out final door keying revisions are also being addressed. The only remaining uncompleted work is the wooden site fencing, which is expected by the middle of August. Our contractor arranged for a final inspection by the Building Inspector and the permanent Certificate of Occupancy was issued as of July 30, 2021.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Addition of Sand to the Centennial Grove Beach

At the last meeting, the Board asked me to research if it is possible to add sand to the beach at Centennial Grove, along with perhaps a strategy to control runoff from the hillside above the beach that typically causes scour. In reviewing this matter with the Conservation Agent, I learned that such activities are considered maintenance and that no formal permission from the Conservation Commission will be required. The Superintendent of Public Works has already placed the sand on the beach.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Resident-Only Parking at Sumac Drive Parcel

In the past, the Board asked that I work with the abutter and with the DPW to prepare the Town-owned lot at Sumac Drive for resident-only parking. After reviewing the matter in the field, it was apparent that the main access to the parcel crosses through an extremely wet area that would have to be improved for parking to be viable. As such, the Board asked at the last meeting for me to work with the DPW to set off just a small area of the parcel with dry access for parking. The DPW has placed rocks to delineate that small area and to prevent vehicles from entering through the wet area or using the main field. A sign will be posted indicating that parking is for residents only.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Further Inspection of New Public Safety Facility Roof by Consultant (*)

Our roofing consultant visited the new public safety facility on July 29, 2021, in the company of our general contractor and the roofing subcontractor. Our consultant was assisted in performing “test cuts” on the roof so that he could inspect conditions underneath areas that are clearly showing defects on the surface. Generally, he has postulated that the roofing problems may be due to the orientation and methods chosen to attach the nail boards to the roof deck. However, he has not yet made any final conclusions or recommendations. His report is expected out soon.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Manchester Memorial Elementary School Borrowing Technical Call Summary
School District personnel arranged a call with the District's financial advisers on July 28, 2021 to discuss the District's plan to borrow additional funding for the ongoing Manchester Memorial Elementary School replacement project. I participated in the call along with Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick and Manchester officials.

The District originally borrowed \$35M and that funding will be expended soon. This next round of borrowing will be for \$3.5M and is designed to keep the project running without overborrowing. The Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) has not yet indicated what its final contribution to the project will be. As such, any additional borrowing beyond this \$3.5M that will be needed to meet cashflow needs through project closeout will be accomplished with Borrowing Anticipation Notes (BANs), which are interest-only loans. All BANs will be rolled into permanent borrowing after the project has been completed. The group was in agreement that this new borrowing should be financed over 20 years with a level principal payment. We expect the School Committee will be approving the borrowing on August 17, 2021.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) School Budget Collaboration Group Meeting Summary (*)
Selectman Bradford and I participated in the subject meeting, along with personnel and officials from Manchester and the Manchester Essex Regional School District on August 4, 2021. The group discussed how the District will likely continue to require annual overall budget increases of 3.2 – 3.5% and how spikes in individual apportionments may be dampened by dedicated stabilization funds set up by the two towns. The District would perhaps set up its own stabilization fund to keep the overall increase within the acceptable range. District personnel and officials will be visiting the Essex Finance Committee on September 28, 2021 to review how the District's budget process works, along with the main budget drivers. The Selectmen may wish to attend that meeting.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

(1) Essex Housing Coalition Meeting Summary (*)
I attended a virtual meeting of the Essex Housing Coalition on July 28, 2021. The Coalition is supported by the Citizens' Housing and Planning Association

(CHAPA) and has in the past conducted public outreach and produced some basic reports. With the short-term goal of the mixed-use downtown zoning district having been realized back in June, the Coalition is now focusing on how to pull together its first affordable housing project in Essex.

The group discussed the need of every community to assess compliance with the new Housing Choice Act which mandates multi-family use by right in at least a certain portion of Town. With respect to ideas for developing more affordable housing in Essex, the group discussed possibly forming an Affordable Housing Trust, expansion of the allowance of accessory dwelling units, working with the Planning Board on its upcoming zoning study, and possible use of Community Preservation Act funding for a small project involving partners to purchase and rent-restrict existing housing. The Coalition will meet again on August 25, 2021 and CHAPA personnel are working on a written summary of the recent meeting.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Zoning Review Discussion with Metropolitan Area Planning Council (*)

As reported previously, I had arranged for a call with personnel from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to discuss possible assistance with setting the scope for a review of the Essex Zoning Bylaws. The call occurred on July 29, 2021 and I participated along with Planning Board Chairman Kim Drake and Chairman Preen. While MAPC does not have any technical assistance funding available at this time (funding typically is applied for in the spring), the MAPC Planning Director recommended that we check in with the State, under the Community Compact Cabinet Best Practice Program (which the Town has benefited from in other program areas in the past).

The idea would be to embark upon a phased planning approach that would begin this fall with MAPC conducting a zoning audit, a public input session, GIS mapping of the various Town land uses, and an analysis of existing lot sizes. If this scope of work could be funded by the Community Compact program, MAPC would get started and would recommend a figure that the Fall Town Meeting could consider for future work. Future work could entail assistance from MAPC to apply for additional grant funding that would provide much more detailed analysis and potential zoning bylaw work products. In speaking with the program coordinator for the Community Compact program, I have learned that Essex is indeed eligible for funding in fiscal year 2022 and that program application materials will soon be released by the State.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Continued Discussion of Draft Fall Town Meeting Topics (*)

I have updated the draft list of possible Fall Town Meeting topics in accordance with the Board's guidance from the last meeting.

Recommendation: Further Board discussion as necessary.

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Green Communities Grant Kickoff Meeting

I met virtually with personnel from the State Green Communities Grant Program, the Manchester Essex Regional School District Facilities Director, and a representative of the National Grid incentive/rebate program on July 28, 2021. The Town's most recent Green Communities Grant award (based on a spring application from former Town Planner Matt Coogan) is for the completion of building automation system work in the Essex Elementary School. The procurement and installation of the remaining work will be handled by the District and I will serve as the liaison to the Town since it is a Town grant (normally handled by the Town Planner). At the meeting, we determined that we probably will not see a notice to proceed from the State until late-August and that the District will be able to provide the required periodic reporting. Hopefully, the Town will have a new Town Planner toward the fall so that the Green Communities Program Annual Report can be handled by the Planner.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Seawall Replacement Grant Award Ceremony

Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, and Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Theoharides presented awards to various communities for dam and seawall repair/replacement projects on July 28, 2021. The presentation was held in Gloucester at the Haskell Pond Dam and Essex received its award for over \$1.7M in State funding for the Conomo Point Seawall replacement project. I attended the ceremony along with Selectman Phippen and the project will begin after the State issues the Town an official notice to proceed.

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, for portions of July 30 and August 2 and 3, 2021 and all day on August 6, 2021.

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