



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of Dec. 12, 2022

Report covers from November 26, 2022 to December 9, 2022

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Board Adoption of the 2023-2028 Town Strategic Plan (*)

I attended the Essex Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) meeting of December 1, 2022, along with Chairman Preen and the Town Planner. The Committee has now finished its review of all public and internal comments and has arrived at a final draft for the Board's consideration and adoption. Chairman Preen, SPC Chairman Cameron, the Town Planner, and I met on December 7, 2022 to conduct final document editing.

Recommendation: **Board vote to adopt the 2023-2028 Essex Strategic Plan.**

(2) Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I attended the Essex Economic Development Committee meeting of December 8, 2022, along with the Town Planner. The Committee took stock of the various Fall Town Meeting actions relating to economic development and reviewed the goals associated with two recent State grants (Massachusetts Downtown Initiative – MDI, and Urban Agenda). With respect to the downtown decorative lighting project, the Committee overwhelmingly supported a classic style of lantern, similar to the Town's original gas lanterns but more stylized. With respect to the State grants, certain members of the Committee will participate directly with the Town's consultant and working groups that will be assembled to guide the work.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

B. Computer Systems

(1) Annual Review of Computer Policies and Inventory (*)

Each year, it is necessary for the Board to review and acknowledge the Town's computer policies with respect to asset management and IT security, in addition to the Town's updated hardware and software inventory listings. I have prepared updated documents for the Board's review.

Recommendation: **Board acknowledgement of the policies and inventory listings.**

C. Personnel

(1) Town Administrator's Performance Review and Goal Setting (*)

At this time each year, the Board arranges to review my performance and to set goals for the upcoming year. In the performance area, I will rely on the detailed reports filed with the Board at each Board meeting as a record of my activities and accomplishments. As the Board may recall, my evaluation template was updated with seven specific goals at the outset of this past calendar year for use at this time.

Also, it is necessary to work with the Board to develop goals for the upcoming calendar year. In addition to the general roles and responsibilities in my position description, which I will continue to update the Board on in detail for each new Board meeting, I recommend the following specific scope and welcome discussion with the Board:

- Given that the dispute with respect to the roof defects at the new public safety facility has not been settled, I will continue to coordinate that situation and press on for a resolution that does not cost the Town additional money (unless the Town wishes to upgrade new materials). The Board is presently working with Town Counsel with respect to various options that could be pursued.
- Continue to serve as coordinator and administrator of the MVP grant for the Apple Street roadbed elevation and culvert replacement final design and permitting effort. This work will continue to make progress toward the eventual construction of these improvements, which are intended to preserve Apple Street as the only other viable alternative, north-south transportation route through Essex when the State Highway floods at the Essex causeway. Work will involve reporting, reimbursement requests, attendance at permitting hearings, and first-year project closeout for the MVP project funding (project continues into fiscal year 2024). I will also continue to work with the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to update the Town's "placeholder" Hazard Mitigation Program Grant (HMGP) construction funding application so that it can become more competitive as the MVP project winds down. HMGP funding will eventually be sought at the 90% Federal share level.
- Continue to serve as the Town's chief liaison to the Route 133 Essex River Bridge replacement project. Work will involve my continued attendance at regular construction meetings and coordination of all relevant matters with the Board, other departments, the business community, and the general public. Coordination of the switch back from the temporary bridge to the new bridge will also be required.
- Continue to work collaboratively with the Superintendent of Public Works and the Board of Public Works with respect to the ARPA-funded public water supply modernization project and the State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF)-funded water filtration plant modernization and partial renovation

project. Work will involve overseeing procurement for construction contractors and proper reporting and closeout associated with both projects.

- Manage the use of funds remaining from the Conomo Point Seawall Replacement project to renovate the Town's two stone piers at Conomo Point. Work will involve coordination with our engineering consultant and involvement during the project bidding and construction phases.
- Continue to serve as the Town's primary contact and coordinator of the Essex zoning bylaw evaluation project. Work will involve continued coordination among the Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), and the general public. The Community Planning Grant that the Town was awarded this past year will be aimed at collecting adequate public input and educating the voters about recommendations and benefits of proposed zoning bylaw changes to be considered by the Fall Town Meeting in 2023.
- Work with the Selectmen and the Town Planner to support the initial organization and functioning of the Essex Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) to allow the Trust to begin to formulate a plan to work toward an initial project. Work may involve coordination with Town Meeting in May to determine if Town Meeting desires to provide the Trust with some initial funding.

Recommendation: Preliminary Board discussion relative to this year's evaluation process using the current template and the goal setting process for the upcoming calendar year.

(2) Safety Committee Meeting

The Safety Committee will meet next on December 21, 2022. I have placed a draft agenda in the Board's reading file.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Solid Waste and Recycling Services for Fiscal Year 2024

At the last meeting, the Board suggested that the decision with respect to the type of replacement compactor to be purchased for the Town transfer station be delayed until arrangements for solid waste and recycling services are made for fiscal year 2024 and beyond. It is possible that the Town will contract with a solid waste hauler that would require the use of a breakaway-style compactor, rather than the trailer-mounted container-style compactor now in use. To that end, we have begin contacting all of the major solid waste/recycling contractors in the area and, at present, it appears that both Commonwealth Hauling and Casella are interested in possibly full management of the Town's transfer station (as was the case in the past when Covanta ran the station). The Board of Public Works will be at the present meeting to discuss the matter in more detail.

Recommendation: Board discussion with the Board of Public Works per the posted agenda.

(2) Commencement of Initial Town Transfer Station Improvements (*)

At the last meeting, while the Board resolved that the replacement of the compactor at the Town transfer station should wait until we understand what our future solid waste contractor will need, the Board was in favor of beginning improvement work on the compactor building and on the site fencing. After requesting three written quotations, the Department of Public Works has determined that the lowest fencing quote was from Patriot FenceCrafters, in the amount of \$26,500. With respect to the replacement of the garage door on the compactor building, after three requests for quotations, the Department of Public Works noted that Shumsky Overhead Door was the lowest quote at \$14,345.

Recommendation: **Board approval of the orders for the fencing and garage door replacement work.**

(3) Purchase of 30 Apple Street Progress Update (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that Town Counsel should continue to generate all of the necessary documents and to have the necessary title work done with respect to the Town's purchase of the property known as 30 Apple Street. Presently, Counsel is working on the Purchase & Sale Agreement and has been in contact with the seller's attorney. We expect that all necessary documents will be presented to the Board at its meeting of January 9, 2023 and the parties will move on toward closing after that.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(4) Contract for Design and Oversight of Stone Pier Renovation Work (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that the remaining seawall grant money and associated Town match money should be used to renovate the two stone piers that the Town owns at Conomo Point. The piers are related to the seawall system but the State grant project did not include their renovation in the original scope of work. Our engineering consultant for the seawall project (GZA Geoenvironmental) will by meeting time provide the Town with a scope of services and cost proposal to design and oversee the work. It is expected that the available funding will cover the both the cost of engineering services and construction.

Recommendation: **Board vote to sign the contract with GZA for the stone pier renovation work.**

(5) Process for the Sale of Town-owned Lots on Gregory Island (*)

At the last meeting, the Board asked that I put together an outline for a potential process for the sale of several, Town-owned properties in the Gregory Island

neighborhood. I have developed a draft outline and have had it reviewed by Town Counsel. It will be necessary to trace back the history of each parcel to arrive at a deed that describes the boundaries of each parcel – beyond what is shown on the Assessors’ map. The Board of Assessors’ Clerk is presently conducting that research and the Selectmen can work toward a sale procedure in the meantime.

Recommendation: **Board review of the draft procedure.**

(1) Apple Street Roadbed and Culvert Project MEPA Pre-filing Meeting

Selectman Phippen and I participated in a meeting with the director of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office and personnel from our engineering consultant and the Massachusetts Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant program on December 6, 2022. The purpose of the meeting was to understand the project’s potential path through the MEPA environmental review process. MEPA is triggered since shade trees are proposed for removal, fill is proposed to be added near sensitive resources, a Chapter 91 license is necessary since the project is adjacent to tidelands, and a MA DOT review of the proposed box bridge is required (among possible other triggers). The Director commented that the project is likely only going to need an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) as opposed to being subjected to the full Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process. Once our engineering consultant make the application, we can expect the review process to take about 30 days.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

E. Insurance

(1) Monthly Pothole Log

I received the monthly pothole log from the DPW during the week of November 28, 2022. No potholes were reported during November.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

F. Facilities

(1) Senior Center Annual State Elevator Test

The State Elevator Inspector tested and inspected the elevator at the Essex Senior Center on December 1, 2022. Prior to the test, I had arranged for the Town’s fire alarm contractor and emergency generator contractor to be on site as required. The elevator failed testing since, although the emergency generator was operative and was providing power to the building, the load at the automatic transfer switch was out of balance and the elevator did not operate under emergency power. It is probably that last year’s replacement of the building heating system may have thrown off the load balance between the last State inspection and this most recent inspection. As such, our electrical contractor and our generator company will

need to coordinate a time to review and test the system (likely in late-December). Thereafter, the elevator company and the generator company will need to return with the State inspector to confirm compliance.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

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

I attended the subject meeting along with Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick on November 30, 2022. The meeting featured a discussion regarding the District's budget drivers for fiscal year 2024 and District personnel indicated that the budget currently being planned does not contemplate the use of any District reserve funds that have been used in the past to lower apportionments to the towns. At present, even if the overall increase in costs apportioned to the towns is 3.5%, the District is estimating that an approximately \$1M budget gap exists.

Discussion was also held concerning the timing of the major renovation or replacement of the Essex Elementary School. A recent report from the District's consultant suggests that the renovation or replacement process begin very soon, in order to avoid expensive repairs to the building only to have the building completely replaced shortly thereafter. Even an application to the Massachusetts School Building Authority made in calendar year 2023 would not have a tax impact until around 2030 (since the process is lengthy). Originally, the parties had hoped that the Essex Elementary School could be maintained through around 2029, with a tax impact by around 2036. However, it does not look like that will be financially prudent.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Draft Selectmen's Fiscal Year 2024 Operating Budget Request (*)

The Finance Committee released its call for operating budget requests (due January 10, 2023) during the week of December 5, 2022 and I have developed a preliminary draft for the Board's review.

Recommendation: **Preliminary Board review of the fiscal year 2024 operating budget request.**

(2) Draft Selectmen's Fiscal Year 2024 Capital Budget Request (*)

The Finance Committee released its call for capital budget requests (due January 10, 2023) during the week of December 5, 2022 and I have developed a preliminary draft for the Board's review.

Recommendation: **Preliminary Board review of the fiscal year 2024 capital budget request.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Preliminary List of Potential Annual Town Meeting Topics (*)

I have begun to develop a list of topics for warrant articles at the Annual Town Meeting, which will be held on May 1, 2023.

Recommendation: **Board review and discussion concerning the preliminary list.**

K. Legal Issues

(1) POST Commission Webinar

The Chief of Police, Chairman Pereen, and I participated in a webinar providing an update on the status and workings of the Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Commission on December 7, 2022. The Commission is responsible for implementing and monitoring a variety of police-related training and compliance matters under the new Police Reform Law that was recently developed in the state. During the webinar, a member of the Commission and its Executive Director both discussed how POST operates and what functions it will carry out.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

L. Grants

(1) Downtown Decorative Lighting Project Update and Design Contract (*)

At the last meeting, the Board began to review possible styles for the new, downtown decorative lighting that will be installed via grant, Town, and legislative earmark funding. While one option is to install lighting that closely resembles the original gas lamps that were in Essex in the late 1800s, the Town may also wish to explore more ornate options. To that end, and at the Board's request, the Economic Development Committee considered this question on December 8, 2022 and has recommended that the Town choose lanterns that are similar to the original gas lamps, but that are more stylized. An example given are the lanterns that are in use on Beacon Hill in Boston.

With respect to getting our lighting designer under contract, we have determined that electronic as-built plans of the lighting conduits installed by MA DOT in

2009 are not available. Rather than spending money on re-surveying the area or digitizing the paper plans that MA DOT does have, our engineering consultant has recommended that the light poles be installed immediately at the back of the curb (instead of back of sidewalk). This choice will obviate the need for any of that other work. The Superintendent of Public Works has commented that the Town only plows the right side of the causeway (going toward Gloucester) and that there should be enough room at the back of the sidewalk for the flow to jog around any light poles that are installed on that side.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) Grant Project Kickoff (*)

The Town Planner and I participated in a meeting with personnel from the consulting firm Civic Space Collaborative (CSC) on December 2, 2022 with respect to finalizing the scope of services for the Town's recently-awarded MDI grant. The firm will provide \$25,000 in technical assistance to guide the Town toward a plan for a unified look across all public spaces in the downtown area, through what is known as "placemaking". During the meeting, we covered various possible tasks including public involvement, branding, connection with the downtown lighting project, wayfinding, and more. CSC has developed a scope of services which has been forwarded to the grantmaker (Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development – DHCD) for review and approval. The Board also should review and approve.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Urban Agenda Off-Season Event Grant and Consultant Contract (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that it may be advantageous to utilize the consulting firm Civic Space Collaborative (CSC) that is already working on placemaking for the Town via the \$25,000 Massachusetts Downtown Initiative (MDI) technical assistance grant to also plan and execute an off-season event via the Town's \$51,000 Urban Agenda Grant. In that way, the event that will take place in February or March of 2023 will serve to begin the implementation of the placemaking strategy that is arrived at by CSC. After speaking with the Town Planner and I on December 2, 2022, CSC developed a scope of services and cost proposal for the discharge of the Urban Agenda Grant, which includes the purchase of certain durable goods that may be used in future years. The scope of services relies heavily on input from the Essex business community so that we are sure that we can arrive at the appropriate fit. The Town Planner will be involved with a working group of individuals from the business community and from the Economic Development Committee who will help choose and shape the event.

Recommendation: **Board vote to sign a contract with CSC for planning and executing an off-season event as a follow-on to the overall placemaking work CSC is already doing for the Town under the MDI grant.**

(4) Electric Vehicle Charging Station Design, Installation, & Operation Contract (*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that we should continue to explore with the engineering firm Weston & Sampson the possibility of a contract for the firm to design, install, and operate four electric vehicle charging stations in the municipal parking lot. All costs, risk, and liability would have to be assumed by the firm and the Town would stand to collect a small amount of revenue from the venture. In reviewing the application necessary for the Town to apply to National Grid for rebates and incentives that would pay for the installation of the EV charging equipment, it was obvious that as “Site Host” that the Town would have to commit to a degree of risk and cost and would also be required to “operate and maintain” the equipment. If Weston & Sampson was made the “Site Host”, risk and cost could be shifted to the company but Town would not own the equipment. Given the requirements of the contract versus what the Town is willing to take on, it does not appear that this project is feasible.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

M. Emergency Planning

No items.

N. Other Items

No items.

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