



## Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of Dec. 14, 2020

*Report covers from November 28, 2020 to December 11, 2020*

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

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### A. Town Department Reports/Requests

#### (1) Finance Committee Meeting Summary (\*)

The Selectmen and I participated virtually in a Finance Committee meeting on December 2, 2020. The meeting featured a presentation from Regional School District personnel concerning planning for the upcoming, fiscal year 2022 budget proposal and detailed information relative to major budget drivers and revenue sources. All agreed that the meeting was a good precursor to the District's Tentative Budget Hearing, which was held December 9, 2020.

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

#### (2) Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary (\*)

I participated virtually in the subject meeting on December 7, 2020. The Committee is in the process of finalizing a survey to the business community as part of the initial implementation of the Town's new Economic Development Plan. At the meeting, the Committee agreed with the Selectmen's suggestion to have a mix of statistically-related and open-ended questions and I have worked with the Town Planner to develop a draft final survey and to load that onto the Town's survey platform (a feature offered by our website host). A link to the survey ([www.essexma.org/biz](http://www.essexma.org/biz)) will be inserted into a letter from the Selectmen that the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce and the Essex Merchants' Group plan to send to their respective memberships in the near future. The Committee also agreed that the Town should try and team up with the Town of Manchester for a technical assistance grant that the State has just announced (see item L2, below).

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion relative to the draft final survey.**

### B. Computer Systems

#### (1) File Backup Failsafe Renewal

As the Board is aware, all Essex data is backed up in real time to the Town of Danvers Datacenter, which also has its own offsite backup area. In addition to our arrangement with Danvers, we also back up all user-created data on our file server to Carbonite. Our contract comes up each January and I have renewed the contract for 2021.

*Recommendation:* **No further action is necessary.**

## 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 six specific goals at the outset of this 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:

- Continue to work with the Board, the Fire Chief, the Police Chief, our Project Manager, and our architects to manage the completion of the new public safety facility at 11 John Wise avenue and, eventually, the demolition of the old building at 24 Martin Street. Work will include attendance at regular construction meetings with the project contractor and the consideration and recommendations regarding proposals for project change orders. Work will also involve coordination of the move-in process to the new building and provisioning of the building with new computer systems, furnishings, and the like. I will coordinate the re-use of the old public safety building site, which will begin as open space, possibly with a display building for the Fire Department's antique fire pumper.
- Serve as coordinator and administrator of the CZM Coastal Resilience Grant that will further our understanding of the Apple Street culvert and roadbed elevation proposed future project. Also, re-apply for additional funding to the DER Culvert Grant program and the MAPC Coastal Resilience Program, and apply to the Federal BRIC program. This work will continue to make progress toward final design, permitting, and construction of these improvements which are intended to retain Apple Street as the only other viable alternative, north-south transportation route through Essex when the State Highway floods at the Essex causeway.
- Work with the Board, the Town Planner, MAPC, and the Economic Development Committee (EDC) to implement Town's new Economic Development (EDP); and to include the EDC in the Essex Housing Coalition's effort to support the Planning Board's proposal for a downtown mixed-use zoning District. Work will involve participating in EDC meetings, interfacing with the business community, and possibly applying for additional technical assistance from MAPC or others to assist with plan implementation.

- Continue to work collaboratively with the Superintendent of Public Works and the Board of Public Works to plan next steps recommended in the water system facilities plan. Funding for the first elements recommended by these analyses will be considered in the spring, by the Annual Town Meeting. This goal is dependent upon the ultimate direction that is set by the Board of Public Works and the DEP, but it does seem presently that first steps will occur in the coming year. Work will involve collaboration with the Superintendent of Public Works with respect to procurement and implementation of chosen projects.
- Re-apply for the Conomo Point seawall construction grant and manage the construction project, if funded. Work will involve interfacing with our engineering contractor to revise, improve, and resubmit the grant application and, if funded, working with the chosen construction contractor to complete the work. Work may also involve the production and submission of all necessary grant requests for reimbursement and reporting. I will continue to serve as the Town's primary contact for the project.
- Serve as the Town's primary contact and coordinator of the proposal by a retail marijuana company to locate a dispensary in Essex. Work will involve coordination between the Board and the project proponent, along with Essex public safety departments. Activities include coordinating the process for the proponent to apply for local licenses to the Selectmen and zoning-related approvals by other boards.

***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.

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

##### (1) Procurement of Furniture for New Public Safety Building

I met with the Chief of Police and the Fire Chief at the new public safety building on November 30, 2020. We inspected the various interior spaces requiring furniture and had a furniture expert make suggestions about what could be purchased, taking into account circulation throughout the spaces, and ergonomics. Subsequently, I created detailed specification lists and conceptual drawings of what is desired and packaged those items for bid.

As of December 14, 2020, the procurement of the furniture was advertised in the *Massachusetts Goods and Services Bulletin*, the *Gloucester Daily Times*, the Massachusetts CommBuys website, and via local posting. A site visit for prospective bidders will be held on December 22, 2020. Bids are due on January 4, 2021 and the Board will be asked to consider making an award at its meeting of January 11, 2021. All furniture must be delivered and installed during the week of March 15, 2021.

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

(2) Public Safety Building Construction Project Update (\*)

Chairman Pereen and I participated in weekly construction meetings on December 3 and 10, 2020. Presently, the focus of the project is almost exclusively on the interior, with the exception of some minor siding work and some sidewalk forming and pouring work. Work is proceeding smoothly and we have been able to answer some questions from our contractor relative to the installation of three steam showers in the fire department locker room (as specified in the original design). A variety of detailed questions about smaller items have been raised by the two chiefs and the design team is working through those matters.

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

(3) Public Safety Building Keying Meeting

I participated in the subject meeting with the Chief of Police and the Fire Chief on December 3, 2020. This virtual meeting featured a presentation by the subcontractor responsible for physical key access systems at the new building (key card access is being provided by another subcontractor). Certain doors will be set up for key card access (mostly exterior doors and doors opening into secure areas from within the building) while the majority of doors will have physical, metal keys. The group agreed that certain keys should have multiple functions and that both the Fire Department and the Police Department will maintain locked key boxes in their own spaces for most of the single-function keys. The two chiefs will meet to choose the final design for key functions and will report their final choices to the subcontractor.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

(4) Possible Rear Fence and Dead Tree Clearing at Public Safety Building (\*)

It has come to the attention of the Fire Chief and the Chief of Police that some additional work with respect to the rear of the new public safety facility site may benefit future operations. First, from a security standpoint, a rear fence, possibly with a motorized gate, would help keep the police parking and prisoner intake area more secure and obscured from view. From a safety and property loss perspective, taking down dead trees in the rear of the building may avoid damage or injury in the future. Neither of these possible work items are part of the present construction contract scope.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion relative to potential interest in this additional work.**

## **E. Insurance**

### (1) Monthly Pothole Log

I received the monthly pothole log for the month of November from the DPW during the week of November 30, 2020. No potholes were reported during November.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Insurance Site Visit to New Public Safety Building

I toured the new public safety building with our insurer on December 9, 2020. The tour was offered in conjunction with the Builder's Risk policy that the Town maintains to cover the building during the construction phase. The policy issuer likes to keep abreast of project status and outlook.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

## **F. Facilities**

### (1) Senior Center Annual State Elevator Test

The State Elevator Inspector tested the elevator at the Senior Center on December 11, 2020. I arranged to have our elevator, fire alarm, and generator companies present, as required, for the testing. The elevator passed the test.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Town Hall Roof Repair Work

Our Town Hall renovation contractor returned to Town Hall on December 11, 2020 to address an intermittent roof leak on the third floor that has been an issue since the renovation was completed. The contractor did come back once already to address the issue but more work was necessary. While the contractor was on site, workers were also able to replace several roofing shingles on the Town Hall bell tower had recently been blown off of the roof in high wind conditions. The roof leak work was covered under warranty and we will pay time and materials for the shingle replacement.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (3) Town Hall Bell Striker Repair

I noticed that the Town Hall clock bell was no longer striking on the hour. After investigation, I found that the cable that connects the clockworks on the clock level to the bell striker on the bell level had snapped on the bell level. The clock is still keeping time and the striker mechanism on the clock level is still working fine. I contacted our historic clock contractor and he will repair the problem when he next comes to Town for clock maintenance.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

## **G. Fiscal/Budget**

### (1) School District Budget Collaboration Group Meeting Summary (\*)

Selectman Bradford, Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick, and I participated in the subject, virtual meeting on December 4, 2020, along with officials and personnel from the Town of Manchester and the Regional School District. The meeting featured a similar discussion relative to the budget exchange at a December 2, 2020 Essex Finance Committee meeting and a preview of the presentation that was to be made at the District's Tentative Budget Hearing on December 9, 2020. The District's Tentative Budget anticipates an overall budget increase of 4.25% with the total derived from town apportionments at 3.75%. The group also discussed ongoing COVID management and planning and suggested that both municipal governments begin to offer additional messaging relative to best practices to prevent further COVID spread.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion relative to a framework for COVID messaging.**

### (2) Manchester Essex Regional School District Tentative Budget Hearing (\*)

The Board, the Essex Finance Committee, and I participated virtually in the subject hearing on December 9, 2020. The hearing was intended to lay out the District's initial operating budget proposal for fiscal year 2022 and also included participation by officials and personnel from the Town of Manchester. As noted above, the District is proposing an overall 4.25% spending increase, with total town apportionment-derived portion (both towns combined) of 3.75%. The actual apportionment number for each town will vary based on the regional funding formula. Generally, participants in the hearing had questions concerning the pay structure in the present teachers' union contract and with respect to how the Districts' reserves might be used to soften the expected budget increase this year.

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

### (3) Selectmen's Preliminary Capital Budget Request Update, FY22 (\*)

On behalf of the Finance Committee, the Town Accountant released the request for fiscal year 2022 capital budget plan updates from departments on December 10, 2020. I have developed a preliminary document for the Board's initial review. The final update is due to the Town Accountant by January 8, 2021.

*Recommendation:* **Preliminary Board review of the FY22 capital budget update document.**

### (4) Selectmen's Preliminary Operating Budget, FY22 (\*)

On behalf of the Finance Committee, the Town Accountant released the request for fiscal year 2022 operating budget proposals from departments on December

10, 2020. I have developed a preliminary package for the Board's initial review. The final update is due to the Town Accountant by January 8, 2021.

*Recommendation:* **Preliminary Board review of the FY22 operating budget proposal.**

## **H. Complaints**

No items.

## **I. Meetings Attended**

### (1) Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Grant Focus Group Meeting

I participated in the subject meeting on December 1, 2020. The meeting was intended to receive feedback from communities that have applied for MVP grant funding in the past, with respect to how the application and proposal ranking process could be improved. I indicated that the grant program may want to consider a category for pilot projects that will demonstrate innovative approaches that are not necessarily even allowed yet under existing regulations. Perhaps the program could be useful in working with regulators to allow for these types of piloting exceptions.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Chebacco Lake Environmental Issues Coordination Meeting (\*)

I attended the subject meeting virtually, along with Selectman Phippen on December 3, 2020. As the Board may recall, Senator Tarr is working with a diverse group of stakeholders on the best way to tackle a series of related environmental issues involving the Chebacco Lake, the Alewife Brook, and the watershed generally. At a previous meeting, all had agreed that regular maintenance of the Alewife Brook stream channel, including beaver dam considerations, is foundational to all other issues.

At the recent meeting, Ben Gahagan of the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) agreed that he could put together the necessary Notice of Intent (NOI) to the Essex Conservation Commission by early February of 2021. The NOI would focus on activities necessary to keep the stream channel and its environs clear, as a type of ecological restoration project, likely implemented in phases. Presumably, the Commission will issue an Order of Conditions allowing the work to get underway in late summer and fall of 2021 (when field conditions are most suitable). In later stages, additional permitting may allow for other activities and involvement by the Town of Hamilton. Stream clearing work will be undertaken by volunteers and it would be advantageous to get assistance from the Essex DPW to help haul material away if work could be done on weekdays.

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

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

### (1) Draft Town Meeting Topics List (\*)

I have revised the subject list per the Board's guidance from the last meeting.

*Recommendation:* **Further Board discussion relative to the draft topics list.**

## **K. Legal Issues**

No items.

## **L. Grants**

### (1) Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Grant Monthly Report

I worked with personnel from Boston University to file the subject report for the month of November, during the week of November 30, 2020. Although most of the project work will be completed by year's end, our project extension allows for work to continue through June of 2021. Presently, BU personnel continue to work through laboratory analysis work that was significantly delayed due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Local Rapid Recovery Planning (LRRP) Technical Assistance Grant (\*)

As the Board may recall, the State Legislature recently approved funds that will help communities and associated economies and businesses plan to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, via technical assistance from State-chosen consultants. The money will be provided to communities through the subject grant program and our State Representative had suggested recently that the four Cape Ann communities consider submitting a regional grant application. Our Town Planner has begun to collaborate with economic development and planning personnel in the other communities and I have been working to help coordinate the effort.

During the process, we have communicated with the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce, the Essex Merchants' Group, and the Essex Economic Development Committee as well. All are in agreement that the best path forward is a joint application just with the Town of Manchester, since our town sizes and goals are more similar. As such, the planners from the two communities will collaborate on an application that will help Essex implement its new Economic Development Plan and that will help Manchester with its specific goals.

*Recommendation:* **Board authorization of the Chairman to sign or approve any grant application that may be put together.**



(3) Regional Municipal Benchmarking Grant Update

As the Board may recall, several area communities, including Essex, had begun to participate in a regional municipal benchmarking technical assistance grant offered by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) prior to the COVID-19 crisis. That work had been put on hold until now and I participated in a virtual meeting of the various community leaders on December 9, 2020. The group agreed that the balance of the work should focus on certain key municipal spending areas that will be useful in comparing unit costs among the participating communities (such as cost per FTE). Presently, MAPC is collecting information from each community concerning the largest municipal department cost drivers (public safety and public works) and more information should be available early in the new year.

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

**M. Emergency Planning**

No items.

**N. Other Items**

No items.

*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.*