



## Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of February 10, 2020

Report covers from January 25, 2020 to February 7, 2020

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

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### A. Town Department Reports/Requests

#### (1) Further Review of Municipal Collaboration Report (\*)

As the Board may recall, I had reached out to all Town departments to ask them on the Board's behalf to review the municipal collaboration report that was completed late last year by the Collins Center. The report highlights ways in which Essex and Manchester may be able to collaborate to improve service, lower costs, or both. The Board has also agreed that the Town should participate in a cost comparison of providing various municipal services among eight or ten peer communities in metro-Boston. It may be useful to first get the results of that work, since it will inform the Board about the areas where collaboration may be most effective from a cost perspective. The peer community work commences with a conference call on February 10, 2020.

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

### B. Computer Systems

#### (1) Regional IT Services Development Grant Follow-up

After many possible IT services that could be provided to area communities by the Town of Danvers were detailed in a recent, grant-funded study, representatives from the eight communities that participated in the study reconvened on January 29, 2020. The group determined that, at this point, it is best to move along on two, parallel tracks and a conference call has been scheduled for February 24, 2020.

First, effort should be made to use future grant funding to interconnect all of the communities with fiber optic cable. Fairly soon, Essex will be able to connect back to Danvers through other communities, all on municipally-owned fiber. However, it would be most advantageous for the communities to be part of a "loop", since failure in one direction would still allow connectivity in the other. The group of communities will continue to work toward this type of infrastructure funding. Second, it is possible that other communities may want to partake in Danvers' disaster recovery offerings, just like Essex does now. That would allow all communities to establish and test the relationship without moving to a formal entity right away.

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

## C. Personnel

No items.

## D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

### (1) Public Safety Facility Construction Project and Schedule Update (\*)

Chairman Spinney participated in a construction project meeting on February 6, 2020. Our construction contractor is presently continuing to focus on footings and foundation work. The contractor has provided the Town and its consultants with a schedule that slightly extends the project deadline (from mid-December, 2020 to the end of January, 2021). As discussed at the Board's last meeting, allowing this extension up front will likely serve to avoid a series of short time extensions (and possibly related costs). I am working to confirm with our architect that the firm will be able to work through the proposed new deadline without extra cost (joining our contractor, our Project Manager, and our Builder's Risk insurer).

***Recommendation:* Board vote to authorize a no-cost time extension through January 31, 2021, if all necessary information is available by meeting time.**

### (2) Finalization of Exterior Colors and Finishes for the Public Safety Building

Our architect provided us with a long list of proposed final exterior colors and finishes for the public safety building that is now under construction. While the building renderings provided during the general design phase are still a good overall representation of the appearance of the building, specific choices must now be made. All items have been reviewed by the Chairman of the Town Building Committee, in consultation with one architect on the Committee and some final suggestions have been made for both our architect and the Board to consider. The Chairman of the Town Building Committee will attend the present meeting to be involved in the discussion.

***Recommendation:* Board review and approval, to the extent possible, of the suggestions that have been made.**

### (3) Change Order: Relocation of HVAC Condensers to Public Safety Bldg. Roof(\*)

In the past, the Board has discussed the need for the relocation of some HVAC condensers to the roof of the new public safety building, along with a roof hatch and ladder/stairs. Our construction contractor will likely have a cost proposal for review by meeting time.

***Recommendation:* Board approval of the change order proposal if available by meeting time and is recommended by our architect and Project Manager.**

(4) No Parking Line Striping Plan Status Update

Our engineering contractor has formally assembled plans that show a variety of downtown areas that are proposed to be marked out as no parking zones. The Board had authorized a change order for this new set of plans and our contractor is now asking for final Town review before the plans are submitted to MA DOT for approval.

*Recommendation:* Final review and approval of the plans by the Board (listed separately on the meeting agenda).

**E. Insurance**

No items.

**F. Facilities**

No items.

**G. Fiscal/Budget**

(1) School District Final Operating Budget Proposal

The Manchester Essex Regional School Committee met on January 28, 2020 to present its final operating budget proposal for fiscal year 2021. The final proposal was essentially the Tentative Budget proposal that the School Committee outlined back in December and Essex's apportionment was calculated as \$8,404,622, which represents a 4.1% increase over last year's figure. The Regional School Committee had attempted to close a \$430,000 budget gap that was over and above the apportionments from the two towns - via internal cuts and efficiencies - and was not able to close the entire gap (\$275,000 in District reserves was added to the budget to close the gap).

At the hearing, Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick commented that, while the Town was working to meet the District's assessment figure, it is becoming more difficult for the Town to absorb such increases given its ability to generally realize only about 2.5% in new tax revenue annually. Subsequent to the hearing, at a budget collaboration meeting held January 31, 2020, the District announced that it was able to project some savings internally for fiscal year 2021 and the District has proposed to use the savings to both reduce the District's reliance on reserves in the operating budget and to reduce the assessments to the towns. As such, the Essex assessment from the District for fiscal year 2021 has been reduced to 3.61%.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

(2) Overview of Fiscal Year 2021 Town Operating Budget Request (\*)

The Town Accountant has entered all of the budget figures requested by individual departments into the master budget for fiscal year 2021 and has arrived at the total request versus the Town's estimated fiscal year 2021 revenue. Presently, if all requests are funded, the Town will be within its tax levy capacity. However, given our long-term budget forecast, requests for non-ordinary increases will need to be scrutinized, with an eye toward long-term affordability.

This year's budget includes a request from the Fire Department to move to a full-time Fire Chief. The Department proposes to use some additional funding from the Ambulance Fund and to reduce other line items (like the need for daily firefighter station coverage) to arrive at a budget with no appreciable, tax-funded wage increase. The budget also includes requests from the Library, the Council on Aging, the Harbormaster, and the Department of Public Works for additional staff or increased staff compensation (with three requested positions triggering health and pension benefits status, if approved).

***Recommendation:* Board discussion with respect to the overall budget picture and with respect to the requests for staffing changes translating to additional wages (beyond cost of living), and associated benefits.**

**H. Complaints**

No items.

**I. Meetings Attended**

No items.

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

(1) Review of Preliminary Draft of Annual Town Meeting Warrant (\*)

I have developed a preliminary draft of the Annual Town Meeting warrant based upon the Board's review of the potential Town Meeting topics list to date.

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

**K. Legal Issues**

No items.

## **L. Grants**

### (1) Apple Street Culvert Replacement Design Grant Update

The Chief of Police, the Superintendent of Public Works, and I met out on site with personnel from our engineering consultant, TEC, on February 4, 2020 to discuss plans for soil test borings in the area of a culvert running under Apple Street near its junction with Southern Avenue. The work is part of a Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) grant that is seeking to make the stream crossing more ecologically sound. At the same time, the design will take into account the need to elevate the roadbed in that area, since coastal storm surges can flood Apple Street in that location. The boring is just the initial step in design data collection and many more activities will occur throughout the winter and spring. We hope to get additional grant funding to complete design and permitting work by next season (applications for the next round of grant funding are due in late March). Thereafter, we will focus on funding for a design to also elevate a second low point on Apple Street and we will go for construction funding for both areas combined as a final action.

*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.*