



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of February 8, 2021

Report covers from January 23, 2021 to February 5, 2021

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Community Preservation Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I attended the subject meeting on January 28, 2021, along with the selectmen and the Fire Chief. We presented to the Committee a proposal to utilize \$60,000 in Community Preservation Act funding to set a new, modular building on the site of the present fire and police headquarters building, after that building has been torn down. The building will feature large windows for the viewing of the Town's antique fire pumper, known as the "hand tub". The funding will also cover site preparation, electrical connection, lighting, etc. At the meeting, the Committee voted to support the selectmen's proposal at Town Meeting. Further, one tomb at the ancient graveyard on John Wise Avenue is in need of repair. A stone mason has volunteered his time and the materials cost will be \$2,500. The Committee also recommended that project and it will be under the care of the Selectmen.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I attended the subject meeting along with Town Planner Matt Coogan and Chairman Pereen on February 2, 2021. The meeting featured a discussion with respect to the continued implementation of the Town's new Economic Development Plan. The Committee hopes to use pending grant funding for technical assistance that will assist in this regard and encouraged the Planner to team up with local business groups and the Town of Manchester to apply for an additional grant, that will help with Plan implementation.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Strategic Planning Committee Meeting Summary (*)

I attended the subject meeting along with Chairman Pereen (the Board's representative to the Committee) and Town Planner Matt Coogan on February 2, 2021. The meeting featured a discussion with respect to updating the Town's Strategic Plan. The original Plan covered 2015-2020 and requires updating for the next five years (2021-2025). Generally, the Committee would like to determine if some members who do not usually participate will consent to being replaced and will reconvene after the Committee is brought back to a full complement of members. The Committee had discussion on some of the existing Plan's pillars and tasks and hopes to delved into the Plan update more completely at the next meeting.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

B. Computer Systems

(1) Site Visit for VOIP Phone System Installation, Public Safety Building

The Town's vendor for voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) telephones in the new public safety building visited the site on January 27, 2021. I was in attendance, as were the Chief of Police and the Fire Chief. The vendor's goal was to better understand the layout and wiring for the new phone system, which will incorporate all equipment that exists in the present fire and police building, plus additional equipment (since the new building is larger and has more workstation seats). See item D2, below, for more details.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

C. Personnel

No items.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Public Safety Building Construction Project Update (*)

Chairman Pereen and I attended weekly construction meetings on January 28 and February 4, 2021. Our contractor is rapidly moving toward interior finishes, including casework, final painting, final ceiling tiles, and flooring. All overhead doors are now installed (including in the fire bays) and hanging of interior doors, with hardware, is progressing well. The elevator has been installed and only final adjustment and inspection remain on that task. Our contractor is actually starting to demobilize some aspects of the operation. The building is now served by Comcast for Internet, with static IP addresses, and I have begun to work with various communications vendors and agencies reliant on that information for next steps.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Public Safety Building Site Visit for Communications

The Chief of Police, the Fire Chief, and I visited the new building on January 27, 2021. The contractor's site supervisor and electrician and personnel from our VOIP telephone vendor were also present.

Both an emergency call box and a system to conduct routine business will be located in each lobby. The emergency box locks the outdoor door behind a person who may be being pursued and calls Regional Dispatch directly. The other system allows someone to contact Regional Dispatch to help alert fire or police personnel that someone is in the lobby for a business visit (especially if all personnel are out on the road) and it includes a separate camera. All six of the

abovementioned devices are connected to Regional Dispatch using the building's VOIP phone system or network connection and our phone vendor was able to get a good understanding of what is needed.

Separately, each workstation position in the new building will have a VOIP telephone. We are using the same vendor for the new building that is in place in the old building and that vendor will provide a seamless transition. The network in the new building will be set up in tandem to the one in the old building so that the new system works instantly, when it is time to begin working from the new building.

Further, at the present meeting (see item D3, below), the Board will be asked to consider signing a contract with a separate vendor to wire and outfit the Station Alerting System (the general contract just provided box and conduit infrastructure). This system allows personnel at the Regional Dispatch to operate some aspects of the building remotely and to make audio announcements throughout the building. Personnel from Regional Dispatch will move the central processor for this system from the old building to the new building once the new building is ready to open.

I will continue to coordinate with various parties as systems become more complete.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Approval of Contract for Station Alerting System Installation (*)

As noted in item D2, above, a specialized communications vendor, L.W. Bills, a vendor on the State Contract, has provided the Town with a proposal in the amount of \$18,435 to install the Station Alerting System in the new public safety facility. Our general contractor has already installed all necessary conduits and junction boxes and L.W. Bills will wire the system and install all peripherals. Personnel from the Regional Dispatch Center will move the existing central processor from the old building to the new building at the appropriate time.

Recommendation: **Board signature of the contract with L.W. Bills.**

(4) Finalization of Plans for Demolition of Old Fire Station/Site Restoration (*)

Chairman Pereen and I met virtually with the Chief of Police, the Fire Chief, our architect, and our Project Manager on February 1, 2021 to turn our attention to the upcoming demolition of the old fire and police station at 24 Martin Street. The Board voted in 2020 to demolish the entire building and restore the site. The Board has also proposed to the Community Preservation Committee that Community Preservation Act funding be used to purchase a modular viewing shed for the antique fire pumper and to prepare the site for that building and matters related to it. During the call, the group established some working parameters necessary for our architect to develop a base site restoration plan that

would be part of the overall demolition project. I have provided our architect with various plans depicting underground utilities in the area of the building, including water, sewer, gas, and buried electric. We expect to have a copy of the base plan for the Board's review, possibly as early as the next Board meeting.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(5) Invitation for Bids for Sewer Grinder Pump Preventative Maintenance

As the Board may recall, the Town Meeting approved \$200,000 in June for replacement (as preventative maintenance) of sewer grinder pumps. The Department of Public Works will replace older pumps with new pumps in an effort to avoid future failures. Pump operation to date has begun to show that pumps are beginning to reach the end of their useful service life. The DPW is in need of some assistance with the necessary procurement and I will be working with their consulting engineer and DPW personnel to put the work out to bid in the coming weeks.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Structural Review of Folsom Pavilion for Summer Camp Preparation

Each year, the YMCA, which runs the summer camp for children at the Centennial Grove, known as Camp Dory, reviews the facility for safety. The Folsom Pavilion is used on most camp days to get out of the rain or sun and the Town had structural work performed on the pavilion about six years ago (after the heavy snow loads of the winter of 2015). The Building Inspector is asked to sign off on the facility each year and, this year, he asked that the Town review the structural integrity of the pavilion. Former Selectman Lisa O'Donnell is a structural engineer and she has volunteered to inspect the structure and provide an opinion. Unless the past work is found to be failing, the structure should be found to be sound.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Repair of Alarm System at Centennial Grove Cottage

Regional Dispatch was informed by our alarm company of a communication issue with the alarm system at the Centennial Grove Cottage during the week of February 1, 2021. I contacted the alarm company's service department and accompanied a technician to the site later in the week. The system had error codes that needed to be cleared and a new backup battery was installed. The system is again working properly.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Town Hall Basement Unit Heater Maintenance

The Town Hall Custodian and I noticed during the week of February 1, 2021 that the unit heaters in the Town Hall basement were not working. After checking basic items such as the thermostats, circuit breakers, and kill switches, I placed a call for service. The technician came and was able to adjust the water temperature sensors on the units to make them operate more reliably (the boiler water temperature is generally not hot enough to activate the units at the sensor levels they were at).

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Manchester Essex Regional School District FY22 Budget Proposal Hearing(*)

I attended the subject, virtual hearing, along with the selectmen and Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick. Much discussion ensued concerning which path the District may be pursuing over the long-term: a) restructuring the educational program to keep school operational increases to no more than 2.5% each year, versus b) acknowledging that the present program offering will require larger annual increases that will require planned, regular Proposition 2 ½ overrides. Essex officials and the Manchester Finance Committee Chairman asked the District to consider reducing the apportionments to the two towns this year using reserves, especially in light of the ongoing COVID crisis. The goal would be to explore both paths and choose one as fiscal year 2023 approaches.

The School Committee met again on February 2, 2021 and decided to vote an overall budget figure that represents a 3.5% increase over last year's total budget. District personnel are presently working on what that translates to into the two apportionment increase percentages and figures for the two towns. The School Committee is open to perhaps utilizing additional reserves this year, to bring down the apportionments while still holding the same, overall budget figure. Discussion was held about the possibility of planning for school-related overrides in each town for fiscal year 2024.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Draft Annual Town Meeting Warrant

(*)

I have revised the draft Annual Town Meeting warrant in accordance with the Board's guidance from the last meeting.

***Recommendation:* Further Board discussion relative to the draft Annual Town Meeting warrant.**

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Municipal Benchmarking Grant Update

Several communities that are working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to compare unit costs for various municipal services met virtually on February 8, 2021 to update the status of the work. During December and January, each community began to populate standardized spreadsheets concerning various police, fire, and DPW-related labor and expense costs. Most communities are not yet done with the basic data input work but MAPC personnel used data from communities that were done (including Essex) to illustrate how the project will move along after all data has been submitted. We plan to convene again in the future, after all communities have completed data input work.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Sediment Transport Study Grant Monthly Report

Boston University (BU) personnel produced and submitted the subject report during the week of January 25, 2021 with respect to our ongoing Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant. BU is studying how sand along Castle Neck Island (Crane Beach) drifts to the south, some of which enters and is distributed around Essex Bay. Laboratory work is wrapping up and attention will soon be turned to summarizing project results and moving toward a public presentation of the work.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Apple Street Roadway Elevation Study Grant Monthly Report

I completed the monthly report to the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) with respect to our ongoing Coastal Resiliency grant. The grant is being used to study the feasibility of various alternatives to increase the roadbed along a low point in Apple Street, at the Southern Avenue end. This low point is adjacent to a second low point (which includes a culvert). Both areas need to be elevated due to roadway flooding which can occur during severe

coastal storm surges. The other low point has already been studied somewhat using a Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) grant and we hope to received additional DER funding for that area this spring. The CZM monthly report indicates that the feasibility report has now been completed. The recommended course of action (along the entire low area) is to elevate the roadbed to elevation 15.3, which will get above the flood elevation and provide some freeboard to account for future sea level rise.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(4) Division of Ecological Restoration Culvert Replacement Grant Application(*)

As noted above, the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration (DER) previously funded a project under its Culvert Replacement grant program. That grant began to study both the replacement of a culvert under the Southern Avenue end of Apple Street to meet State ecological standards and to elevate the roadbed to raise that portion of the road out of a flood area. Both this low point near the culvert and an adjacent low area (being studied using a CZM grant, see above) can flood during major coastal surge events when Route 133 is already submerged. As such, the only other north-south connector in the Town is also rendered impassible.

DER has announced a new funding round and I have reviewed with DER personnel our last attempt at funding, which was not successful. Together with our engineering firm, we may be able to acquire this second round of DER funding on this next attempt. We are told that, in the last round, out of 70 applications, sufficient funding was available to address only 12 projects.

***Recommendation:* Board authorization of the Chairman to sign the grant application when it has been completed.**

(5) Massachusetts Seawall Construction Grant Application (*)

As the Board may recall, the Town had received funding to design and permit the replacement of the Conomo Point seawall system using grant funds from the Massachusetts Seawall Design grant program. Thereafter, I worked with our engineering firm to apply in the summer of 2019 for construction funding. That effort was unsuccessful and the State put the construction grant program on hiatus for about a year and a half, due to the ongoing COVID crisis.

In January of 2020, we visited the site with personnel from the State who had helped to rate and rank our grant application, to understand how we could improve a future application. Several items were pointed out during that visit and we actually tasked our engineering firm with generating a report that addressed those items and actually made changes to the construction design to accommodate them. The State has now announced the next round of seawall construction funding and we intend to use what we have learned to seek the funding again.

The Town has put aside and has maintained with inflation the 25% local match for this grant program.

***Recommendation:* Board authorization of the Chairman to sign the grant application after it becomes available and has been completed.**

(6) Green Community Grant Application (*)

Between now and April, the Town Planner will be working with the Facilities Director for the Regional School District to assemble an application to the Green Community grant program for the completion of a heating system efficiency upgrade at the Essex Elementary School (EES). Some work has already been done to convert old, pneumatic heating valves to direct digital controls (DDC). About \$150,000 of work remains and the Town has partnered with the District in the past to use Green Community funding. The net result of this ongoing work is to keep improving building systems in the EES so that they are more efficient and, just as importantly, they are prepared for a longer service life (to help stave off the need for school replacement until after other school district debt has been retired).

***Recommendation:* Board discussion as necessary and authorization of the Chairman to sign the application when it has been completed.**

(7) Regional Pilot Project Grant Program (to assist with COVID recovery) (*)

The Massachusetts Office of Business Development (MOBD) has announced a new grant program that will assist municipalities and organizations to work together to create solutions for COVID recovery in their specific, local economies. This funding could be instrumental in helping to continue to implement the Town's Economic Development Plan and any recommendations that come out of the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative's (MDI) Local Rapid Recovery Planning grant program that the Town has already applied for with Manchester as a partner. MOBD's new offering will require close coordination with non-profit business groups and the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce and Essex Merchants' Group should be involved. The Essex Town Planner is presently working with those groups and the planner in the Town of Manchester to possibly pull together an application.

***Recommendation:* Board authorization of the Chairman to sign the grant application when it has been completed.**

(8) MAPC Accelerating Climate Resiliency Grant Application (*)

As the Board may recall, we had applied to the subject grant program last fall. Our application was aimed at moving the design along for the elevation of the second low area on Apple Street after preliminary study under a Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) grant studied basic feasibility (see item L3, above). However, our first attempt at the MAPC grant was not successful. The CZM grant is wrapping up and information obtained may feed

well into a second attempt at the MAPC grant (its next round was announced during the week of February 1, 2021). While it is worth applying for a second time, in light of the CZM grant completion, I had been told after our unsuccessful attempt that it will be difficult for Essex to meet the environmental/social justice aspects of the MAPC grant and that we will most likely not be successful in a second attempt.

Recommendation: Board authorization of the Chairman to sign the grant application when it has been completed.

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.