



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of January 8, 2024

Report covers from December 16, 2023 to January 5, 2024

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

No items.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Replacement of Fire Department Printer/Fax/Scanner

The all-in-one device at the Fire Department's fire prevention desk was no longer working well with the operating system on the server that the fire prevention computer terminal connects to. As such, I ordered, installed, and configured a printer with all of the necessary functions that is completely compatible with the server operating system and the new device is working well.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Provisioning of New Town Hall Network Users

A new administrative assistant for the Planning Board and a new Assistant Town Clerk started work during the week of January 1, 2024. I assisted those two departments with computer network, website, meeting posting, and e-mail provisioning for the new employees, including copying resources from previous users to the new users.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Safety Committee Meeting Summary

I attended the subject meeting on December 20, 2023 as a member of the Committee, along with Chairman Pereen. The meeting featured a discussion regarding ongoing challenge of building systems maintenance in Town Hall and the new public safety facility. The group also discussed progress made with respect to ongoing goals.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Revision of Town Administrator Goals for Calendar Year 2024 (*)

At the last meeting, the Board reviewed my calendar year 2024 draft goals in more detail and asked that one new goal be added and that one existing goal be modified.

With respect to the new goal, the Board was interested in more clearly defining my coordination role with respect to the quarterly department head sessions that are held at Selectmen's meetings. I recommend the following wording:

For each quarterly department heads meeting that is held at a Selectmen's meeting during the year, work with all departments to report specific information to the Selectmen including: a) recent achievements, b) obstacles to current goals and objectives, c) expectations for the coming quarter, d) long-term goals on the horizon, e) concerns, f) recent grants and an explanation of whether any particular grant will require the Town to pick up any ongoing costs in the Town's own operating budget when the grant is concluded. Specific participation from the Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School District will also be sought.

The amended goal has to do with the Town-owned parcel at 30 Apple Street. The goal, as originally presented was:

Explore the possibility of grant funding for a road across the Town-owned parcel at 30 Apple Street between Apple Street and the Town Transfer Station and DPW facility. A portion of the funding for the road may be possible via coastal resilience grants and moving forward may be dependent on whatever other uses are being considered for the parcel, both from a timing and from a physical perspective.

Given that the full scope of that goal might be premature, the Board asked me to amend the goal in the following fashion:

Explore the Town-owned parcel at 30 Apple Street as a possible site for a new Essex Elementary School as part of the Manchester Essex Regional School District's ongoing Massachusetts School Building Assistance Authority assessment and funding process. If the site is determined to be a valid option, explore the possible incorporation of a road and waterline connection across the parcel between Apple Street and the Town Transfer Station and DPW facility. This work will be dependent on whatever other uses are being considered for the parcel, both from a timing and from a physical perspective.

Recommendation: Board review and approval of my final goals for calendar year 2024.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Clarification of Public Safety Building Repair Engineering Proposal (*)

At the last meeting, the Board reviewed an engineering services proposal from Copeland Building Envelope Consulting, which includes Northeast Roof Consultants as an engineering subcontractor, for repairs to the roof and building

envelope of the public safety facility. The majority of the proposed cost is related to on-site construction administration since it is essential that the repairs address the issues once and for all. I asked Copeland to further break down these costs so that the Board could get a better sense of what is being proposed, both from Copeland and from Northeast. That breakdown has been provided and, generally, while a relatively small amount of money could be saved, it does not appear to me that the savings are worth the risk of poor field control over the contractor. Further, a follow-up call with Copeland and Northeast on December 22, 2023 included additional discussion on the potential scope that the Board should discuss.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Downtown Decorative Light Project Update

Our contractor for the downtown decorative lighting project was planning to begin work in the spring of 2024. However, given the window of mild weather/lack of snow recently, our contractor decided to begin the project by installing the underground bases for the light poles. Work occurred for two days so far (January 2 and 3, 2024) and may be completed by January 12, 2024, weather permitting. Prior to the work commencing, on December 22, 2023, I walked the site with the contractor to go over logistics. We are presently awaiting the actual light poles, fixtures, accessories, and control cabinets, which should arrive in Town sometime during February or March and work will resume at that time.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Process for Hiring a New Town Planner

(*)

The Board advertised for a new Town Planner shortly after Thanksgiving and several applications from qualified applicants have been submitted. The Board may now determine how the applicants might be interviewed (at a Board meeting or perhaps via one Board member and myself with a recommendation made to the Board).

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary and the setting of a schedule and method for conducting interviews.**

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Route 133 Sidewalk Reconstruction Project Update

As the Board may recall, MA DOT has been in the process of developing plans for a complete reconstruction of the sidewalk system between Water Street and

Harlow Street in Essex. The project also continues on into Gloucester. One particular matter of interest was an original proposal to eliminate a crosswalk over Route 133 linking the Goodwin Court and Lufkin Street neighborhoods. After discussion among Town officials, DOT, and Goodwin Court residents, DOT agreed to relocate the sidewalk slightly, with the inclusion of flashing, pre-warning signs. That relocation is included in the final plans and DOT does not presently have a date for bid advertisement. However, it looks like the project will be bid and constructed during calendar year 2024. I have reached out to the Goodwin Court residents to provide them with a copy of the final plans.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Quarterly Facility Self-Inspection Checklists

I completed the subject checklists for the quarter ending December 31, 2023 for the Town Hall and the Senior Center. Other buildings are inspected by other personnel. The goal of the inspections is to detect and remedy any conditions in Town buildings that are cause for a safety concern. Checklists are reviewed by the Safety Committee on a quarterly basis. This quarter, I commented on the continuing issues that we have experienced with the Town Hall HVAC system and how the system appeared to be back in proper operation after additional repair work was completed. However, further diagnosis is required since the system runs for a few days and requires a reset. A manufacturer's representative has collected system data via a computer connection and is working on the root cause. I also commented on addressing the issue of the Senior Center elevator not properly working while on generator power. That situation is being corrected, with the installation of a "soft starter" which starts the elevator hydraulic pump motor less abruptly than the original starter, translating to a momentary amperage increase that the generator can actually handle.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Manchester Essex Regional School District Operations Review Update (*)

At the last meeting, I explained how various consultants who offer school district operations review services generally like to have a certain degree of cooperation from district personnel and officials in order to provide a worthwhile product. At that time, the Board was hopeful that the School Committee would assent to some level of cooperation at their meeting of December 19, 2023. However, the School Committee did not take the topic up. Also, at two prior School Committee meetings, the Committee decided to not take a position (first meeting) and to table the matter (second meeting).

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Massachusetts Fair Share Amendment Funding

At the last meeting, I mentioned that the Town had received word that a voter-passed initiative known as the Fair Share Amendment would be adding about \$71,000 to the Town's Chapter 90 funding for roadway maintenance. The money comes from a portion of the 4% surtax on taxable incomes that exceed \$1M in Massachusetts. Since the letter from the Governor also mentioned that a portion of the Fair Share funding is also going toward education, I reached out to the Manchester Essex Regional School District Superintendent to see if the District also got funding. The Superintendent explained that this year's education funding mostly went to stabilize the statewide free lunch program. As such, no additional funding that could subsidize general operations is available.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Final Review of Selectmen's FY25 Operating & Capital Budget Requests (*)

At the last meeting, the Board briefly discussed my recommendations for the Board's fiscal year 2025 operating and capital budget requests. The final version of the request package is due to the Finance Committee by January 12, 2024.

Recommendation: **Board final review and approval of the requests.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

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

I have developed a preliminary list of topics for possible Annual Town Meeting articles.

Recommendation: **Board review of the preliminary list.**

K. Legal Issues

(1) Release of Executive Session Minutes Concerning Roof Defects

The Chairman has reviewed the unreleased executive session minutes through December 31, 2023 and minutes concerning the defects in the public safety building roof are suitable for release, since that matter has been officially settled.

Recommendation: Board vote to release the executive session minutes concerning the public safety building roof defects in accordance with the posted agenda.

L. Grants

No items.

M. Emergency Planning

No items.

N. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, on December 21, for a portion of the day on December 28, and all day on December 29, 2023.

(2) Christmas Holiday

The Office was closed on December 25, 2023 in observance of the subject holiday

(3) New Year's Day Holiday

The office was closed on January 1, 2024, in observance of the subject holiday.

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