



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of June 7, 2021

Report covers from May 15, 2021 to June 4, 2021

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

No items.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Migration of Town e-mail Users to Outlook 365

As the Board is aware, I had been working to prepare over the past two months for a migration from our long-time, third party e-mail host to the Microsoft web-hosted platform (Outlook 365). After I had prepared each e-mail account, users were informed about procedures that needed to be completed by April 21, 2021 and the consultant assisting with the migration repointed the Town's e-mail (name@essexma.org) from our third-party host to the Microsoft servers after business hours that day. Users began logging into their new platform for new e-mail after that cutoff and I worked with our consultant to steadily migrate old e-mails to the new platform thereafter (one user at a time). My work also included preparing .pst files from users who had only used the old webmail system in the past. The migration required substantial attention from me throughout the process, including process and network management many nights and on weekends.

By the end of the week of May 24, 2021, all users had both old and new e-mail at their fingertips, all on the new platform. The work required much preparation and planning but it will allow the Town to benefit from the highly-reliable Microsoft platform, from which the Town may run other Microsoft Office applications in the future. The new platform is completely portable and all users will now be able to see and manage all of their e-mail from any device, at any time. Previously, users had to VPN into their work computer for that type of functionality. A webmail application was offered by our previous host but that could not be fully synchronized across devices, due to mailbox size limitations.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Reconfiguration of Fiber Switch Network Associated with Public Safety

While both the old and new public safety facilities were on line simultaneously with respect to in-house computer systems, we had a separate fiber optic switch in Town Hall feeding the old building. Now that neither the police department nor the fire department have in-house computing needs at the old building anymore, I have decommissioned the fiber switch in the old building and moved it to the new building, as a second switch. The new building was running on a single fiber

switch, with a temporary, unmanaged switch connected to it, to provide the necessary number of connection ports from devices and workstations in the new building. Moving the second fiber switch over provides those devices with a much better connection.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Decommissioning of Old Fire Station Fiber Optic Spur

The old fire and police facility is served by a fiber optic spur that connects that building with other Town buildings. Now that all building occupants have moved into the new facility, we no longer have need for communications there. As such, I have requested a quote from our fiber optic contractor to properly decommission that spur, especially in light of the fact that the building will be demolished. I am presently awaiting that quote.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(4) Installation of Wi-Fi System at New Public Safety Facility

We had not yet installed Wi-Fi transmitters in the new public safety facility since additional manageable switch ports were necessary to run those devices. As noted in item B2, above, we now have a second fiber switch in the new facility and we are able to feed and manage the Wi-Fi devices moving forward. I have worked with our network consultant to configure the management system for the Wi-Fi devices and to make the necessary, custom connection back to the Internet. We are now in the process of choosing the proper location for transmitters.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Annual Distribution and Sign-off Regarding Town Policies

Each year, in late-May, I notify all employees and board/committee members of their responsibility to review all Town personnel and related policies and to provide sign-off sheets indicating they have done so. This year, the notice went out in employee paychecks during the week of May 17, 2021 and board and committee chairs were asked to collect sign-off sheets from their members. All parties are expected to return sign-off sheets by the end of July, 2021.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Public Safety Facility Construction Project and Roof Problem Update (*)

Most work on the interior of the new public safety facility has been completed. Landscaping work on the grounds of the building is not completed and additional work should occur soon. Our general contractor is still working on punch list

items and completing necessary tasks to receive the permanent certificate of occupancy for the building.

Chairman Pereen and I visited the facility on May 27, 2021 and met with representatives of the contractor, our designer, our Project Manager, and roofing industry representatives to further evaluate the status of the roofing shingle problem. Our architect still maintains that the roof will flatten out and shingles will all lay down nicely as the roof goes through its first summer season (if no other factors are preventing that, see below), and that the use of non-vented nail boards is not the issue. Our general contractor and its roofing subcontractor still maintain that all work was completed in accordance with the design documents and that the use of vented nail boards and/or architectural shingles would have avoided the roofing issues we are now seeing. A limited inspection of the roof by the architect after the meeting suggests that some of the shingle problems are being caused by roofing nails not being installed flush with the shingle surface, causing shingles above to not lie flat.

At this point, Town Counsel recommends putting our contractor, our architect, and our Project Manager on formal notice about the problem, with the contractor's surety company and insurers for our architect and our Project Manager being looped in to all correspondence. Our contractor will want to reduce the amount of retainage that has accumulated over the course of the project and Town Counsel will advise the Town on an appropriate response to any such request. It may still be necessary to consider bringing in a third party to fully evaluate the problem – the cost of which could possibly be shared by others if the evaluation does turn up any specific design or construction problems.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(2) Updating of Plans for Demolition/Restoration of Old Fire Station Site (*)

In May, the Board answered some questions that our designer had with respect to the further revision of the plans for the demolition of the old public safety building at 24 Martin Street and the subsequent restoration of the site. At the last meeting, the Board learned that our designer had just completed revisions to the plans in accordance with the answers to those questions and with comments that had been made by landscape architect Kim Drake. Board members have had a chance to review the revised plans in between meetings and Ms. Drake has commented that not many of her suggestions were incorporated. Our designer feels that the plans are in good shape for bidding and would like to move forward. I have reviewed the plans myself and had several observations and questions for our designer, which he plans to address.

Recommendation: **Board review and approval of the revised plans.**

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Outfitting of Town Hall Auditorium for Live/Interactive Broadcasts (*)

In my last report, I indicated that an audio/visual expert had visited the Town Hall auditorium to determine the cost of a system that would: a) support the live broadcast of meetings or events at Town Hall to local cable channels, b) support the capability for hybrid remote meetings, where some participants could join via an application like Zoom, c) replace the existing microphones and soundboard with newer equipment for broadcasting and for in-house public address, and d) be able to capture a computerized video presentation and send it out for broadcast.

I have since learned that the cost of such a system is in the neighborhood of \$40,000. Unfortunately, the system is not eligible for funding through CARES. Other possible funding sources include the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – but eligibility is not yet known, or the Town Technology Fund (which is supported by user surcharges on local cable TV bills). In any event, 1623 Studios, our local access provider, can only commit to staffing within its existing budget that would run the system for us twice per month. Any more frequent use of the system would incur staff charges.

***Recommendation:* Board discussion relative to whether these new capabilities are desired, given the limited operational support offered.**

(2) Delivery of Replacement Harbormaster Shed

As the Board may recall, I had arranged for the replacement of the old Harbormaster shed at Town Landing after it had been knocked down by a runaway vehicle. The vehicle owner's insurer has paid for the new shed. On May 19, 2021, I met at the Town Landing with the Superintendent of Public Works and the shed supplier to ensure that the site would be prepared adequately for a May 25, 2021 delivery. We agreed that the DPW would bring in some crushed stone so that the building will have a level base and the new shed arrived and was set in place successfully on the 24th.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Replacement of Field of Dreams Bleachers and Repair of Dugout Roofs

Some aspects of the Field of Dreams baseball complex at the Centennial Grove are original to the facility. Both sets of wooden bleachers were seriously rotted and needed to be disposed of. Also, the roof on each of the two dugouts and the roof on the irrigation system shed required replacement. Fortunately, a local donor is considering donating funds for one new set of aluminum bleachers and volunteers from the Manchester Essex Little League have donated the labor to

replace the two roofs. The Town will pay for materials and debris disposal with respect to the roofing work.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(4) Annual Town Hall State Elevator Inspection

Both the Town Hall elevator and the handicapped accessible lift used to reach the Selectmen's conference room were inspected by the State Elevator Inspector on June 3, 2021. I had arranged for our elevator contractor, our fire alarm contractor, and our emergency generator contractor to be present, as required, for the testing. Both units passed inspection.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Allowable Uses of and Town Plans for American Rescue Plan Act Funding(*)

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) sets out four broad categories for the use of Federal funding aimed at helping the nation recover from the COVID-19 crisis. Essex is set to receive just over \$1.1M, total, over the next two fiscal years.

Generally, the Act provides funding:

(1) to respond to the public health emergency and its negative economic impacts, (2) to provide premium pay to essential workers, (3) to provide government services to the extent of eligible governments' revenue losses, and (4) to make necessary water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure investments. These four eligible uses reflect Congress's judgment that the Fiscal Recovery Funds should be expended in particular ways that support recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Given that Essex has been for some time evaluating the needs of its aging water system, it may be appropriate to focus there. In fact, recently, the Water Department has been faced with a failure of one of the sludge conveyance systems in the water filtration plant. The cost of current water system needs far outpaces the total amount available to Essex through ARPA. If ARPA funds are used, it will be important to factor in the cost of outsourced, specialized, administrative services to properly manage and document the Town's use of this Federal funding and to pay for and successfully pass the required Federal audit.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Preliminary Look at Possible Fall Town Meeting Topics (*)

Now that the Annual Town Meeting is behind us, it is useful to begin to consider topics that may be addressed in the fall. This exercise is particularly important to items that may have been put off due to fiscal concerns stemming from the pandemic. I have developed a preliminary list of topics for the Board's consideration.

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

(2) Next Steps for Consideration of Town Zoning Changes (*)

I met with Chairman Preen, Planning Board Chairman Burnham, Planning Board Vice-Chairman Drake, Planning Board Member O'Donnell, and Town Planner Matt Coogan on June 3, 2021 to begin to discuss possible avenues to review and amend the Town's zoning bylaws. The Essex Town Meeting recently approved a two-year moratorium on conversion of residentially-used and vacant property to commercial or industrial uses and the Planning Board needs to recommend and implement changes.

The Planning Board is generally open to working toward some of the simpler changes on its own, such as adding abutter notification to the Site Plan Review process. However, the group agreed that assistance from a third party would be beneficial for the more complex possibilities. To that end, the Town Planner is going to look into what the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) might be able to offer in the way of technical assistance. Separately, I have learned that the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) does offer a Community Planning Grant Program. However, it is already too late to apply for funding from that program this year.

Recommendation: **Board discussion relative to a process for arriving at a scope of work for a professional planning firm to undertake, possibly with the desired proposal being funded at the Fall Town Meeting.**

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Closeout of Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Sediment Transport Study
Researchers at Boston University (BU) have completed work on a study that looked at how sediment is transported in a southerly direction along Castle Neck Island and into and throughout Essex Bay. The project provides insight both on normal sediment transport routes and what can be expected in the future, with respect to climate change and sea level rise. The final report is being put together now and I will work with BU to close out the project with the State Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant program staff.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Regional Pilot Grant (Cape Ann Comeback) Update (*)
I participated in a steering committee meeting with respect to the Regional Pilot Grant for Cape Ann on May 19, 2021. The grant is working to provide direct support to businesses for COVID recovery and the campaign is known as Cape Ann Comeback. Marketing, a digital marketplace, and direct business training and support tools are being offered through a project manager the Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce. The group had been planning a webinar for businesses aimed at covering the main areas of focus for the grant. However, the group has decided to wait until the professional marketing firm that is going to be hired with a portion of the grant funds can help develop the webinar's content. The firm will also help with a more refined business survey and will be chosen very soon.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Local Regional Recovery Program Grant Update (*)
The consultant for the subject grant program aimed at helping Essex and Manchester businesses recover from the COVID crisis (Dodson & Flinker) hosted a public forum about the program on May 25, 2021. The forum was aimed at providing information about the two communities and collecting input from business owners and the public concerning how best to support recovery. Chairman Pereen and Town Planner Matt Coogan were in attendance.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(4) Signature of State Seawall Replacement Grant Contract (*)
The Town has been awarded a Seawall Replacement grant in the amount of \$1,739,915, which represents 75% of the funding necessary to completely replace the Conomo Point seawall system (the Town has put aside the other 25% in cash). Our plan is to schedule the work during the off-season and all design and permitting work has already been completed. Over the summer, I will work with our engineering firm to package the project for bidding. Work should begin this fall and be wrapped up by April of 2022.

Recommendation: **Board signature of the contract paperwork.**

M. Emergency Planning

(1) Update Concerning Regional COVID Vaccination Program (*)

The Board discussed at its last meeting plans for a regional COVID vaccination program (involving vaccination sites in Rockport, Ipswich, and Topsfield). A steering committee with representation from ten different communities has been set up and has continued to meet to iron out details. Board of Health Administrator Erin Kirchner attended a planning call on May 25, 2021 and I participated with her on another call on June 2, 2021. The group has determined that each community will pay for its own costs if it decides to host its own, pop-up venue. Generally, the major sites in the three communities above will not require Essex to provide funding. Any funding that does need to be provided (such as Essex's share of clinic promotional costs) will come from CARES Act funding that Essex still has available.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

N. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, on May 20, May 21, and May 28, 2021.

(2) Memorial Day Holiday

The office was closed on May 31, 2021, 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.