



## Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of March 13, 2023

Report covers from February 25, 2023 to March 10, 2023

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

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### A. Town Department Reports/Requests

No items.

### B. Computer Systems

#### (1) Removal of Host Server

As the Board may recall, we recently migrated all of our virtual servers from the server room in Essex to the datacenter infrastructure in the Town of Danvers. Danvers also keeps a secondary live instance of our server infrastructure in a separate location and has the ability to stay connected with Essex over the Internet should our direct, fiber-optic link go down. Now that it is evident that the migration has been completely successful, I have removed the host server (which had reached end of life) from the Essex server room and it is being stored for the time-being. Eventually, the hard-drives will be removed and destroyed and the server will be recycled.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### C. Personnel

#### (1) Next Safety Committee Meeting

The Safety Committee will meet on March 23, 2023 at 8 a.m. I have placed a draft agenda in the Board's reading folder.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

#### (1) Gregory Island Lots Sale Process Update

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At the last meeting, the Board heard from Gregory Island residents who were concerned about the Board continuing toward the sale of Town-owned lots on Gregory Island as authorized by the Town Meeting. Additional input was received after the last meeting as well. The Board has been waiting for the Board of Assessors to review the list of lots to ensure that all assessed values are current and accurate and the Assessors are presently collaborating with the Building Inspector to rule out the lots as being buildable. The Economic Development Committee also commented recently that it may be a useful exercise to determine if a number of contiguous lots could be combined to meet zoning for a buildable

lot. Even if that appears to be the case, the Town is not in a position to say with certainty that any particular property is buildable (especially when water and wastewater are considered).

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

(2) Route 133 Essex River Bridge Replacement Project Update

I have learned that the bridge replacement contractor will be working with National Grid to return the electric lines that had been moved off to the side for bridge construction work back to a path along Route 133. The temporary poles for the wire relocation will be removed when the contractor begins dismantling the temporary bridge. This work will occur over night on March 15, 2023, with March 16, 2023 as a rain date and a planned power outage will occur across much of the Town, including several Town buildings. The bridge contractor will be returning from its winter shutdown as of March 13, 2023 and we still expect to see traffic moving over the new bridge by sometime in May.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

(3) Summary of Apple Street Site Visit with an Arborist

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As the Board may recall, the Planning Board had recommended that the Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Culvert Replacement Project plans be reviewed by both an arborist and a landscape architect. On March 7, 2023, our engineering consultant arranged for a local arborist to walk the project site with me, Planning Board Chairman O'Donnell, and Town Planner Dana Menon (who is a landscape architect). It was evident to the arborist that several of the trees that the project is proposing to remove are "hazard trees" anyway and should come down in the interest of public safety along this public street. Our engineering consultant will produce an inventory of hazard trees and the Town Planner will be meeting with another landscape architect (Kim Drake) in the near future to begin to go over the project from a landscape design perspective. The arborist will certify the list of trees and the Superintendent of Public Works (who is also our Tree Warden) will attest to it. Eventually, our engineering consultant will receive recommendations from the two landscape architects and the arborist for tree replanting and stone wall reassembly after temporary removal.

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

(4) Summary of Conservation Commission Apple Street Site Visit

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Members of the Board attended a visit to the Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Culvert Replacement project held by members of the Conservation Commission, the and the Town's engineering consultant on March 9, 2023. Commissioners had a chance to walk the entire project and ask detailed questions of our engineer.

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

## **E. Insurance**

No items.

## **F. Facilities**

### (1) Senior Center Elevator Retest and Public Safety Facility Annual Test

I worked with the Council on Aging Director to line up the necessary contractors for a March 7, 2023 retest of the Senior Center elevator after the elevator failed an annual State inspection late last year. At that time, the elevator failed to run when the building was only on generator power. The issue was thought to be a fuse in the Senior Center's automatic transfer switch. That fuse got replaced and the retest was successful. However, additional work on the building's electrical wiring is probably necessary in order to balance the load more evenly in the future. Assistant Electrical Inspector Ramie Reader discussed what may be necessary with the State inspector. Prior to the retest, on March 2, 2023, our elevator contractor arrived with a replacement circuit board for the Senior Center elevator since that required separate upgrading in accordance with new fire code requirements. That work was ordered many months ago but supply chain translated to a long lead time.

On the same day, the State Inspector visited the Essex Public Safety Facility and conducted the annual inspection and test on the elevator there. The Fire Chief and the Chief of Police had already arranged for the necessary support contractors. Unfortunately, the elevator, despite its recent installation, failed inspection - with issues including an indicator light that was no longer working and a question as to whether the control system meets the new fire code.

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

### (2) Centennial Grove Cottage Phone Line Repair

Our alarm company reported on March 3, 2023 that the company had lost connectivity with the alarm system for the Centennial Grove Cottage. I checked the line at the system demarcation and determined that the problem was with Verizon's network. I contacted Verizon repair and service was restored the following day. I then went and re-armed the alarm system.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

## **G. Fiscal/Budget**

### (1) Manchester Essex Regional School District Budget Discussion Summary (\*)

The Selectmen met jointly with the Finance Committee on March 8, 2023 and School District personnel and officials to discuss the fiscal year 2024 School District operating budget proposal and upcoming capital needs (including the replacement of two turf fields by the District). During the discussion, members of

the public were permitted to provide input. At present, the District's budget has been certified at a level that translates to an 8.96% increase to the Town of Essex over the last fiscal year.

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

## **H. Complaints**

No items.

## **I. Meetings Attended**

### (1) Chebacco Lake Coalition Meeting Summary (\*)

I attended the subject meeting organized by Senator Bruce Tarr on March 6, 2023, along with Selectman Phippen. As the Board may recall, Essex hired consulting engineering firm Interfluve during 2022 to begin to better understand the Alewife Brook and its environs. Additional funding from a legislative earmark allowed the Town to again contract with Interfluve to install surface water and groundwater monitoring devices to obtain a better picture of the area's hydrology over the longer term. At the meeting, the group recapped progress to date and anticipates permitting for additional Alewife Brook routine cleanout operations this coming summer. The group is working on the possibility of kicking off a lake monitoring and management plan and is considering formalizing the Coalition further in hopes of more active advocacy and management.

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

### (2) Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce Caucus

I attended the subject meeting to represent the Town on March 10, 2023. The meeting was held in the Essex Town Hall auditorium and officials from each of the five communities represented in the Chamber provided local updates. The group had a chance to discuss questions of common interest and both Senator Tarr and Representative Ferrante were on hand to provide the Commonwealth's perspective.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (3) MA Police Chiefs Association Legislative Breakfast

I attended the subject meeting along with Chief Francis on March 1, 2023. The meeting featured a panel of over a dozen State legislators, including Senator Bruce Tarr, and town administrators/managers had been invited specially to attend. During the question and answer period, I raised again the need for small towns to obtain some level of relief under Police Reform since the part-time personnel that made our police force more affordable have vanished under the new rules. Other administrators of small towns in attendance agreed and Senator

Tarr indicated that he would be willing to set up a committee to study the matter further.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

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

### (1) Draft Language for Remote Working in Personnel Rules/Regs (\*)

At the last meeting, the Board agreed in its capacity as Personnel Board that the Personnel Rules & Regulations should be revised to include guidelines on working from home. This practice become much more common during the COVID-19 emergency and should be codified. To that end, I have developed a draft new section using input from other communities via the Massachusetts Municipal Human Resources Association's listserve for the Board's review and discussion.

*Recommendation:* **Board discussion as necessary, including the possible scheduling of a public hearing on the proposed changes to the Personnel Rules & Regulations.**

## **K. Legal Issues**

No items.

## **L. Grants**

### (1) Apple Street Project Monthly Report

I worked with our consulting engineer to file the subject report with the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability (MVP) program during the week of February 27, 2023. The report featured discussion concerning the recent public hearing before the Essex Conservation Commission, which has been continued until March 14, 2023.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### (2) Rural and Small Town Development Fund Grant Application (\*)

I met with personnel from the YMCA and the Town Planner on February 28, 2023 to discuss the Town's development of the subject grant application. The Board voted to support an application under the subject grant program for physical improvements to the Centennial Grove, an approach also supported by the Economic Development Committee. At the meeting, we established a plan to develop a competitive grant application. That process will continue over the next couple of months, since applications are not due until June 2, 2023.

*Recommendation:* **Board authorization of the Chairman to sign the grant application and any other necessary paperwork, when available.**

(3) Apple Street Project Federal Funding Update

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that seeking 75% Federal funding for the Apple Street project could be preferable to waiting for the chance of 90% Federal funding if moving to the 75% program might get the project reviewed faster and more favorably at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). I have received an update from the program contact at the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) and I have learned that both potential funding pathways will likely begin in July of 2023 (one will not begin before the other). As such, at the appropriate time, MEMA will advise the Town on which pathway is expected to be the most advantageous.

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

(4) Placemaking Grant Meeting Summary

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Our placemaking grant technical assistance consultant (Civic Space Collaborative - CSC) met with Town Planner Dana Menon, Chairman Preen, and Economic Development Chair Harris, along with others, on March 9, 2023. The group discussed the status of the plan and the schedule for its completion. Much attention was given to the planting plan for our public spaces, since the Economic Development Committee (EDC) will be facilitating a major refurbishment of public space plantings very soon. CSC agreed that, once the public input portion of the placemaking project has been completed, the firm will produce and present two or three possible overall themes that could be adopted by the Town moving forward.

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

**M. Emergency Planning**

No items.

**N. Other Items**

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, on March 3, 2023 and for part of the day on March 7, 2023.

*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.*