



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of March 27, 2023

Report covers from March 11, 2023 to March 24, 2023

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Community Preservation Committee Meeting Summary

The Community Preservation Committee (CPC) met on March 21, 2023 and Chairman Preen (who is also chairman of the Affordable Housing Trust - AHT) was in attendance. The AHT had proposed that the CPC recommend to the Town Meeting the transfer of \$100,000 from the Community Preservation Fund to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The CPC voted in favor of that transfer and Town Meeting will consider it in May. The CPC also reviewed one other project request but decided to table that item.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Joint Planning Board/Board of Selectmen Meeting Summary

The Selectmen met jointing with the Planning Board on March 22, 2023 to review progress to date by our consultant (the Metropolitan Area Planning Council – MAPC) with respect to the ongoing, grant-funded zoning bylaw review project. I was also in attendance, along with the Town Planner. The meeting reviewed a detailed framework for public input and technical assistance from MAPC personnel and includes future joint meetings, Planning Board meetings, and several public forums. One early step will be evident at Town Meeting on May 1, 2023 when the Planning Board will be asking the Town to consider a complete reorganization and recodification of the existing content of the zoning bylaw. Ultimately, MAPC will recommend substantive changes to the zoning bylaw for the Fall Town Meeting in November.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

B. Computer Systems

(1) Assistance with Police Department Body Camera Deployment

The new body camera system for the police department was deployed by the system vendor between March 13 and March 15, 2023. I had already assisted with the assignment of the necessary IP address scheme and I assisted the vendor with the physical connection between the new server and the Town network. We are presently working out on our own a solution for backing up body camera video from the primary server to a backup device in a separate location (the process involves custom scripting in Linux since the software does not include any type of automated backup module).

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Assistance with Migration of Assessors Software to New Server

The Town's Assessors' database was migrated from an end-of-life, on-premises server to a remote server located in the Danvers datacenter between March 15 and March 17, 2023. Danvers IT personnel and I assisted our software vendor with access to both servers. A standard caution is that, due to slight differences between the old and new versions, valuations can change. Fortunately, in our case, no value changes in excess of \$100, which meant that our migrated database could be used right away (as opposed to needing review and adjustment). After the migration, I assisted the vendor re-point the workstations in the Assessors' office to the new instance of the database in Danvers. While the Town had a backup solution in place for the on-premises server, the migration to Danvers will make the backup solution more robust and will provide a secondary live instance of the device.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(3) Deployment of New Spam Filtering Capability

As the Danvers IT department continues to engage features of the Regional Security Fabric that the Town participates in (using the FortiNet platform), Essex is the first community in the collaborative to have the advanced spam filtering capability engaged. The system was tested using just my e-mail account for a number of weeks, without incident. The feature was engaged for all users starting on March 16, 2023.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

C. Personnel

(1) Safety Committee Meeting Summary

I attended the subject meeting as a member of the Committee on March 23, 2023. Chairman Preen was also in attendance, along with our loss control representative from our insurer. The meeting featured a discussion regarding the recent losses in Fire Department equipment at a major fire during an arctic cold period. The Committee also reviewed progress toward annual goals and discussed past and future grant opportunities.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Stone Pier Rehabilitation Project Contract Award

(*)

Our engineering consultant held a pre-bid site visit for the subject project out at Conomo Point on March 13, 2023. A total of 3 prospective contractors attended the site visit out of about 16 contractors that had pulled bid documents. Actual bids were opened on March 23, 2023, after we received a total of 6 bids. The apparent low bidder, inclusive of both add alternates (two sets of stairs) was ERA

Equipment of Ipswich, with a base work bid price of \$127,800 and \$17,330 and \$16,500 for add alternates 1 and 2, respectively (\$161,600 total). Our engineering consultant will vet the apparent low bidder by meeting time.

***Recommendation:* Board vote to award the stone pier rehabilitation work to ERA Equipment of Ipswich, MA in the amount of \$161,600, conditional on favorable vetting by our engineering consultant.**

(2) Conclusion of Conservation Commission Apple Street Public Hearing

The Essex Conservation Commission concluded its continued public hearing regarding the Apple Street Roadbed Elevation and Culvert Replacement Project on March 14, 2023. I was in attendance, along with the Selectmen and our project consultants. After the hearing, the Commission voted to issue a five-year Order of Conditions for the project which will generally include the following requirements (language still under review and final drafting by the Commission):

1. The applicant shall provide the Conservation Commission with a planting schedule and plan prepared by a qualified professional which includes monitoring for three (3) growing seasons.
2. The Conservation Agent and the applicant and/or their representatives in consultation with a certified arborist will confer on the removal, relocation and preservation of trees and shrubs.
3. The applicant shall provide the Conservation Commission with a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (“SWPPP”) which meets the Stormwater requirements under the WPA as soon as available. The SWPPP shall be reviewed and approved by the Conservation Commission and/or its Conservation Agent prior to the commencement of work.
4. Only the staging areas depicted on the final approved plan shall be utilized for equipment and materials.
5. The applicant will use reasonable best efforts to obtain approval from property owners adjacent to replication areas for removal/suppression of phragmites. Written authorization signed by the property owners shall be submitted to the Conservation Commission office.
6. The applicant will monitor and remove phragmites in the replication areas in perpetuity and this condition will survive the issuance of a Certificate of Compliance.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Gregory Island Lots Sale Process Update

(*)

The Selectmen have been waiting for the Board of Assessors to review the list of Gregory Island lots that will potentially be sold to ensure that all assessed values are current and accurate. The Assessors collaborated with the Building Inspector to rule out the lots as being buildable. Since none of the lots were deemed by the Building Inspector as being buildable (at least a general level of assessment), the Assessors are working to simply update the values to reflect non-buildable vacant

lots in the current market. I expect that the Assessors will be able to finalize values at a meeting planned for early April. The Economic Development Committee had 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 single, 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 truly buildable (especially when water and wastewater are considered). It may be advisable at this point to visit the area to see whether an on-site wastewater treatment system even appears feasible. My understanding of the area is that it is very shallow to bedrock, with many exposed outcrops.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(4) Route 133 Essex River Bridge Replacement Project Update

The bridge contractor has returned from its winter shutdown as of March 13, 2023 and the following events and timetable are anticipated at this time:

Telephone Conduit Installed on Bridge	Completed
Verizon Installation of Telephone Cables	Completed
Miscellaneous Concrete Work	Week of March 27
National Grid Power Line Relocation	March 29
Guardrail Work	Week of April 3
Single-Lane Traffic Closures	Month of April
Traffic Begins to Travel Over new Bridge	Late-April
Temporary Bridge Removal	Month of May
Final Paving and Demobilization	Week of June 5
Paving to Extend Road Adjacent to Tennis Courts	Week of June 5

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(5) Municipal Energy Aggregation Program Update

(*)

The Board recently asked me to investigate how Essex might enter into a municipal energy aggregation agreement with a major electricity supplier so that Essex residents could consider using the aggregation in addition to National Grid or any other alternative energy supply contract. I have learned that the process actually begins with the Massachusetts Green Communities Division and eventually runs through the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER). Unless a resident is already with an alternate energy supplier (i.e. the resident does not currently receive energy supply from National Grid), the resident is given a chance to opt out of the aggregation. If a resident is with National Grid and does not opt out, they will automatically be moved from National Grid into the aggregation program. Those who are already with alternative suppliers can stay with those suppliers and will not be notified initially about the aggregation program option.

Steps involved in setting up a municipal aggregation program include: Town Meeting votes to authorize proceeding to set up a municipal aggregation program;

hire a consultant to prepare a municipal aggregation plan in consultation with DOER; allow an opportunity for citizen review of the plan; submit plan to the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) for review and approval. Importantly, the operation of a municipal aggregation rests with the municipality, which includes outreach to potential customers and coordination with a hired consultant, state agencies, and any other involved parties. The DOER Municipal Aggregation Manual & Best Practices Guide states: “Aggregation requires administrative effort for the municipality, especially to launch, but also on an ongoing basis. Even if a using a consultant to assist with the aggregation process, municipal staff will need to allocate resources to launch and maintain an aggregation”. Further, given the currently-high price of electricity as a commodity, even if the Town desires to move forward, it would not be advantageous to anyone to do so until the market settles in the future. The process to approval is very long and the market might settle in the meantime. However, our issue remains one of staff capacity.

***Recommendation:* Based on market condition and the effort required, I am not recommending that Essex approach an aggregation project at this time. Individual customers may still opt out of National Grid’s standard service by signing up with one of many alternative energy supply companies.**

(6) Procurement of Transfer Station Compactor(s) (*)

The Department of Public Works is ready for the procurement of a new solid waste compactor to replace the existing, old unit and for the procurement of up to two, smaller compactors to assist with recycling operations. I developed an Invitation for Bids (IFB) for this equipment since there does not appear to be a good source on the State Contract. After review of the draft IFB by the Superintendent of Public Works, I commenced the advertising process and the project was included in the Massachusetts Goods and Services Bulletin on March 27, 2023. I am also advertising via local posting, in the newspaper, and at CommBuys online. Bids are due by 10:00 a.m. on April 20, 2023 and the Board will consider awarding a contract on April 24, 2023. The base bid will be for the large, solid waste compactor and bid alternates one and two will be for identical, smaller, recycling compactors.

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

E. Insurance

No items.

F. Facilities

(1) Town Hall Split System HVAC Repair

After extensive repairs, including the replacement of one of three compressors in 2022, the Town Hall split system HVAC again experienced a malfunction during the week of March 13, 2023. A technician investigated the situation and found

that a rodent had nested in one of the units over the winter and had damaged some internal components. The technician ordered the necessary parts and we expect to have the system up and running again soon.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Fiscal Year 2024 Finance Committee Booklet

Now that the Finance Committee has finalized its recommendations for the fiscal year 2024 operational and capital budgets for the Town, I will be working with the Town Accountant to assemble the usual Town Meeting booklet. We expect that the booklet will be at the printing shop by April 7, 2023 (with an on-line copy posted even before the printed booklet is completed).

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(2) Draft Figures for FY24 Transfer Station Stickers and Bags

Based on the Board's discussion with the Board of Public Works at the last meeting, I have been working with the Superintendent of Public Works and the Town Accountant to arrive at preliminary figures for both transfer station stickers and pay-as-you-throw trash bags as of July 1, 2023. Both boards had agreed that 35% of the total transfer station budget (approximately the portion needed to run the station itself) should be defrayed by stickers and the remaining 65% (the portion needed to pay for hauling and disposal) should be defrayed by pay-as-you-throw bags. After estimating the total required expenses for the transfer station for fiscal year 2024 (about \$370,000) and factoring in the per-bag cost that our bag vendor will keep, it appears that the sticker will be in the neighborhood of \$125, each large bag will cost around \$4.75, and each small bag will cost approximately \$2.50. The Board of Public Works will soon review the data and will announced final recommendations for Town Meeting, including whether or not to allow a senior citizen discount for the sticker.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Final Annual Town Meeting Warrant

I have developed the final version of the Annual Town Meeting warrant in accordance with the Board's guidance. The warrant includes two citizens' petition articles (one to repeal the Stretch Energy Code and another to abolish the Board of Public Works).

Recommendation: Board approval and signature of the warrant in accordance with the posted agenda.

(2) Revised Language for Remote Working in Personnel Rules/Regs (*)

At the last meeting, the Board reviewed in its capacity as Personnel Board a suggested policy addition to the Personnel Rules & Regulations on remote work authorization. I have revised the draft policy in accordance with the Board's guidance.

***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) Rural and Small Town Development Fund Grant Application Status (*)

I visited the Centennial Grove along with the Executive Director of the Ipswich YMCA and David Clark of D.F. Clark contracting on March 15, 2023. David is an experienced sewer and septic system installer and he has since provided a ballpark installation cost of \$35,000 for two tight tanks to serve the Town's facilities (one at the cottage and one for a new restroom facility at the picnic grove). Prior to this site visit, Rollins Well Drilling visited the Grove and provided a cost estimate for the installation of a drilled, bedrock well to serve the cottage (approximately \$15,000).

On March 16, 2023, the Executive Director returned with his whole team to review the project from a much wider perspective. We walked the entire site and reached agreement about the scope of the grant application in addition to discussing how the volunteer effort to replace the Folsom Pavilion is taking shape. Further, discussion turned to the siting and construction of public restroom facilities and changing rooms. We are exploring both on-site construction and prefabricated construction. Presently, the estimated cost of a prefabricated unit (not including plumbing and wiring connections) is around \$275,000. Since the restrooms are the most critical infrastructure in the grant application, we may

have to scale down what else we desire to achieve with the grant. I have completed my second iteration of the draft, on-line grant application and it is presently being reviewed by the Town Planner and YMCA personnel.

Recommendation: **Board discussion with respect to the overall scope for the project.**

(2) Community Planning Grant Quarterly Report

I developed and submitted the quarterly report for the subject grant for the quarter ending March 31, 2023 during the week of March 20, 2023. The grant has allowed the Town to retain the services of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to recommend changes to the Town's zoning bylaws for the Fall Town Meeting this coming November, based on public and Planning Board input. MAPC has been conducting much background work to date and is providing the Town with \$15,000 of in-kind services, which, together with the \$75,000 grant, brings the project total to \$90,000. The first community forum regarding the project was held on March 22, 2023 (see item J3, above) and two others are planned (in May and in July, 2023).

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(3) Urban Agenda Grant (Off-Season Event) Quarterly Report

I developed and submitted the quarterly report for the subject grant for the quarter ending March 31, 2023 during the week of March 20, 2023. The grant is funding an off-season event on the weekend of May 19-21, 2023 to stimulate patronage of local businesses. The event is known as "Spring into Essex: Essex in Bloom" and the Town has retained the consultant Civic Space Collaborative (CSC) to assist with the planning and implementation of the event. The Event Working Group includes representatives from the Economic Development Committee, the Greater Cape Ann Chamber of Commerce, and the Essex Merchants' Group.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

M. Emergency Planning

No items.

N. Other Items

(1) Town Administrator Leave

I was out of the office, on leave, for portions of the day on March 13, 14, and 20 2023.

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