



Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of May 3, 2021

Report covers from April 24, 2021 to April 30, 2021

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

A. Town Department Reports/Requests

(1) Strategic Planning Committee Meeting Summary (*)

Chairman Preen and I attended the subject meeting along with Town Planner Matt Coogan on April 28, 2021. As the Board may recall, at the last SPC meeting, members were preparing to send their priorities for planning goals to one of the SPC members to assemble prior to this new meeting. The SPC is in the process of revising the Town's Strategic Plan for the next five-year period. At the meeting, Committee members were able to see the various priorities that each other had submitted and which categories those generally fell in. Each member will give thought as to how any new categories might dovetail with the categories used in the original plan. The Committee will meet again on May 25, 2021.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

B. Computer Systems

No items.

C. Personnel

(1) COBRA Benefits Webinar

The Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) has for many years provided employees who have separated from employment with continuing health insurance coverage (at the employee's own cost) for up to 18 months. Provisions in the recently-enacted American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) have mandated that anyone who involuntarily left service and elected COBRA coverage up to 18 months prior to April 1, 2021 is eligible for 100% of the cost to be covered by the employer (which will be reimbursed by the Federal Government). Fortunately, we do not now nor do we expect to have anyone in that situation. Nonetheless, I did attend a webinar offered by our insurer on April 26, 2021 explaining how the program will work if we do have someone who qualifies during the applicable window, which ends September 30, 2021.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

(1) Public Safety Facility Construction Project Update

(*)

Chairman Pereen and I attended a construction meeting on April 29, 2021. At this point, final paving of all driveways and parking areas is scheduled for May 5, 2021 and following (weather permitting) and landscaping of the grounds will continue into the spring. The police department is fully operating out of the new building now and the fire department is expected to transition over by the middle of May.

On April 26, 2021, representatives of our general contractor and I met on site with one abutter concerning a fence that is planned between the new facility and the abutter's property. The project had originally specified cedar fencing but COVID issues have left that product in short supply. Our contractor showed the abutter an alternative, premium vinyl fencing product but the abutter prefers to wait until our contractor can obtain the cedar product.

An issue has arisen with respect to the electronic access key car readers in several locations in the police department area of the building. The issue involves both items that were not originally specified but also timing that the contractor should have been aware of that would have made the work easier to accomplish earlier in the job. The work is necessary and I will have an update by meeting time with respect to the potential cost.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

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

At the last meeting, the Board agreed that comments that had been made by landscape architect Kim Drake with respect to the plans to demolish the old police and fire station at 24 Martin Street and to restore the site should be forwarded to our project designer for plan revision. Our designer (Johnson Roberts Associates) is presently working with its subcontractor to consider all of the comments and to have revised plans available for the Board's review at the Board's meeting of May 17, 2021. Our designer had some questions for the Board at this stage as well.

Recommendation: **Board review of and response to our designer's questions.**

E. Insurance

(1) Replacement of Harbormaster Shed at Town Landing

As the Board may recall, an unattended vehicle accidentally rolled out of control into the Harbormaster's shed at Town Landing in early April. I have been working with the vehicle owner's insurance company to obtain approval on costs associated with clearing the debris from the old shed (which had been ordered knocked down by the Building Inspector, for safety reasons) and with the delivery

of a new shed. The Harbormaster located a suitable shed and the DPW provided me with a dumpster quote for debris haul away. The owner's insurance carrier is presently considering the Town's quotes for both and will be back in touch with a decision. Debris will be removed from the site by early in the week of May 3, 2021 and we will place the order for the replacement shed, which has a 4-6 week lead time, when the project cost is cleared by the insurance company.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

F. Facilities

(1) Cutover of Cable TV to New Public Safety Building

As part of the cable franchise agreement between the Town and Comcast, Comcast provides free cable TV to three devices at the public safety building at 24 Martin Street (two full service and one with just limited service). In preparation for the transition to the new public safety facility at 11 John Wise Avenue, I made arrangements for Comcast to move this service to the new facility. A technician visited the new building on April 26, 2021 and I was able to let him into the old building to retrieve the devices and get three connections working in the new building (the fire department day room, the police department conference room, and the Chief of Police's office – limited service). The police and fire departments are likely going to desire cable TV connections in other rooms in the new building and they will work to set up paid service for those other locations.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

(2) Future Outfitting of Public Meeting Spaces for Cable TV Broadcast (*)

In the past, Cape Ann TV (now known as 1623 Studios), which is the local cable public access provider for our area, has occasionally recorded and later broadcasted select Town Meetings. Later, some Town Meetings have been broadcast live using a camera streaming to the Internet. However, this has been the extent of local meeting coverage in Essex. Now that Comcast has constructed a video return line from Essex Town Hall to 1623 Studios (with a transmitter being installed on May 5, 2021), the provider would like to get into more live coverage using this direct, fiber-optic link. In order to facilitate meeting coverage in various locations on a regular basis, however, Town buildings would need to be outfitted with permanent cameras, microphones, etc. Further, 1623 Studios would like to be able to offer management of some remote meetings for the Town.

I discussed all of these matters with 1623 Studio's Executive Director, Erich Archer, on April 29, 2021 and he has indicated that it would probably cost around \$50,000 to set up the necessary audio-visual equipment and connections to both directly broadcast meetings from the third floor of Town Hall on cable TV and to allow for remote participation in meetings as necessary. Funding may be able to come from the American Rescue Plan Act funding that is coming our way.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

(3) Demolition of Folsom Pavilion

At the last meeting, the Board held to its previous decision to have the Folsom Pavilion demolished. I have been in touch with the demolition contractor and he will begin work on May 5, 2021.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

(4) National Grid Efficiency Incentive for New Public Safety Facility

Given that the new public safety facility incorporates a variety of energy efficient systems, fixtures, and appliances, the project was able to qualify for about \$30,000 in incentives from National Grid back to the Town. I had been working with our Project Manager and a National Grid account manager to identify and apply for possible incentives as the project unfolded. The incentive check will be deposited against the construction project budget and will serve as an offset.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

G. Fiscal/Budget

(1) Regional School District Budget Collaboration Group Summary (*)

Selectman Bradford, Finance Committee Chairman Buttrick, and I participated in the subject meeting, along with personnel and officials from Manchester and the Manchester Essex Regional School District on April 30, 2021. The meeting featured discussions relative to the District's recent transfer of funds from its Excess and Deficiency Fund into its Stabilization Fund (to be used for future capital projects); the planned installation of a fiber optic line between school facilities in Manchester and the Essex Elementary school; the ongoing replacement of the Eagle's Next Playground at the Essex Elementary School; and other matters.

Recommendation: **Board discussion as necessary.**

H. Complaints

No items.

I. Meetings Attended

No items.

J. Town Meeting, By-Laws, and Regulations

(1) Finalization of Annual Town Meeting Motions

(*)

At the last meeting, the Board reviewed preliminary motions for the Annual Town Meeting, which will be held May 15, 2021 at 1:00 p.m., at the Essex Elementary School (weather permitting). I have revised the motions in accordance with the Board's guidance.

Recommendation: **Board review of the final motions.**

(2) Assistance to Zoning Board of Appeals: Regulations/Handbook/Peer Review

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) recently revamped its rules and regulations, along with the handbook that the clerk for the Board uses as a procedural guide. At the last ZBA meeting, the ZBA members agreed that certain elements of the rules and regulations were not in synch with the Town bylaws governing the ZBA. As such, I identified the specific changes necessary and provided that draft to the ZBA chair for review. After she agreed, I worked with the clerk of the ZBA to publish the updated rules and regulations and also assisted with editing the clerk's internal procedural guide (handbook). Further, since the ZBA had voted to have the application for a cell tower on Eastern Avenue and a local citizens' group rebuttal of that application peer reviewed by an expert, I assisted the ZBA Chair with correspondence to the applicant's attorney outlining the scope of services and the amount of the deposit due to start the review work.

Recommendation: No further action is necessary.

K. Legal Issues

No items.

L. Grants

(1) Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Sediment Transport Grant

As the Board is aware, personnel at Boston University (BU) have been working over the last couple of years to better understand sediment transport along Crane Beach and into and throughout Essex Bay. The project was delayed due to COVID and its principals at BU are now in the final stages of the project. We expect that the project will develop a final report in the near future, on the project's path to final closeout by the end of June, 2021.

Recommendation: I will update the Board as necessary.

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.*