



## Town Administrator's Report Board of Selectmen's Meeting of Nov. 27, 2023

Report covers from November 11, 2023 to November 24, 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

No items.

### C. Personnel

#### (1) Arrival of New Town Accountant

New Town Accountant Charles Benevento arrived to start work on November 16, 2023. Outgoing Town Accountant Jeff Soulard (who has accepted a position in another community) will continue on a part-time basis for a period of weeks or months as Assistant Town Accountant to help support office operations and to transfer institutional knowledge. The two employees will work to hire a new clerk for the department who can learn from both of them and eventually allow Mr. Soulard to completely cease his own operations in Essex. It is possible that the new clerk could eventually become the Assistant Town Accountant and perhaps, later on, the Town Accountant, all depending on performance and mastery of the subject matter.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

### D. Procurement/Ongoing Projects

#### (1) Possible Manchester Essex Regional School District Operations Review (\*)

Even though the Manchester Town Meeting was not in favor of appropriating funds for a review of the Manchester Essex Regional School District's operations, the Essex Town Meeting did appropriate the sum of \$40,000. While this sum may not be sufficient to procure the entire scope of consultant services that had been envisioned, it may be sufficient for some preliminary work. As such, if the Board desires to explore hiring a consultant for this operations review, a scope of services could be arrived at and presented to the School Committee for discussion.

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

(2) Approval of Fiber Optic Spur Contract for Centennial Grove (\*)

The recent Fall Town Meeting appropriated \$20,000 for a fiber optic spur from the Water Filtration Plant to two different areas within the Centennial Grove (the picnic grove adjacent to the new pavilion and the cottage area). This build-out will connect the Grove back through the Town's network to a building such as the fire and police station where video monitoring and recording can take place. The new spur will also be able to offer Wi-Fi service to people using the Grove. The lead time for the spur work is about thirteen to fifteen weeks after placing the order and the video and Wi-Fi systems can be added after the spur is constructed, likely using funds that have been set aside for general Grove improvements. The total cost for the fiber spur work will be \$19,942.20 and the cost of the camera and Wi-Fi components will likely be available by meeting time. The work carries a 13 to 15 week lead time.

*Recommendation:* **Board approval of the order.**

(3) Approval of Light Pole, Fixture, Control, and Accessory Order (\*)

The recent Fall Town Meeting appropriated approximately \$263,000, which, combined with other, existing funds, will cover the purchase and installation of the decorative street lighting system for the downtown area. The subsurface preparation work is already under contract to Pine Ridge Technologies, Inc. (PRT) and that contract has been extended through April 30, 2023, without cost and with a commensurate extension from the MA DOT which is funding that work via a grant. The Town has been purchasing all necessary materials for the project through a vendor on the State Contract (Standard Electric) and an updated quote for the light poles, luminaires, pole accessories, and lighting control cabinets is presently being developed. When all other sources of funding are considered (two grants and another Town Meeting appropriation), a sufficient amount should remain uncommitted and that remainder will be used to have a contractor install the lighting system (see next item).

*Recommendation:* **Board approval of the order of at least the poles, luminaires, and accessories (due to long lead time).**

(4) Approval of Lighting System Installation Order (\*)

As noted above, sufficient funds will remain with respect to the downtown decorative lighting project after engineering, subsurface preparation, and materials purchase are considered, to allow for the installation of the actual above-ground portion of the lighting system. The contractor that is presently under contract for the subsurface construction work (Pine Ridge Technologies, Inc. – PRT) is also on the State Contract for electrical work and has quoted the work at \$74,870.

*Recommendation:* **Board approval of the electrical services order with PRT.**

(5) Centennial Grove Restroom Modular Construction Bid Process (\*)

When I was developing the budget for the possibility of a grant for Centennial Grove improvements, we studied the costs of site-built public restrooms versus modular public restrooms and modular restrooms are less expensive and more durable. This is particularly the case when pre-cast concrete modular buildings are concerned. As such, I would like to move ahead with a procurement process for a modular building.

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

(6) Quotations for Downtown Landscaping Maintenance for 2024 (\*)

The Town used a landscaping contractor to maintain the downtown public areas during the 2023 season. The Town's contract with that particular contractor was only for one season and I am working with the Chairman of the Economic Development Committee to review the scope of services and tailor it to our changing needs. I will be soliciting quotations for the 2024 season over the winter and would like to have the Board's feedback on what the focus should be.

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

**E. Insurance**

No items.

**F. Facilities**

(1) Delivery of Tree for Memory Tree Ceremony

Each year, Essex residents gather in front of Town Hall to remember loved ones who have passed away. Participants hang ornaments on a tree known as the "Memory Tree" – which was once a large evergreen planted on the Town Hall grounds. After that tree and others were removed in the past due to overgrowth, I have been arranging for the purchase and delivery of a cut tree. I expect that the tree will be delivered sufficiently in advance of the ceremony, which will be held on November 30 this year.

*Recommendation:* No further action is necessary.

**G. Fiscal/Budget**

No items.

**H. Complaints**

No items.

## **I. Meetings Attended**

No items.

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

### (1) Zoning Bylaw Review Project Meeting Summary

I participated in the subject meeting along with Chairman Pereen, Town Planner Dana Menon, Planning Board Chairman O'Donnell, and Planning Board Member Early, along with personnel from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) on November 16, 2023. The successful passage of four zoning articles at the recent Fall Town Meeting adds to the passage of the Zoning Bylaw recodification that was approved at the Annual Town Meeting back in May and the Planning Board is looking forward toward proposing district zoning in May of 2024. To that end, MAPC will continue to assist the Planning Board with development of proposals and the next public forum will be held on December 6, 2023.

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

## **K. Legal Issues**

No items.

## **L. Grants**

### (1) Apple Street Project MVP Grant Status Update Meeting Summary (\*)

As the Board is aware, Town Meeting decided not to obtain easements over private property in conjunction with the proposed roadbed elevation and culvert replacement on the Southern Avenue end of Apple Street. Without those easements, it is not possible to complete the permitting process for the proposed project. I discussed the status of the project with Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) grant personnel and our engineering consultant on November 15, 2023 and updated them on the result of the Town Meeting vote. Given the circumstances, the MVP agrees that we should close out the grant at this time. To that end, I can prepare the necessary case study summary and PowerPoint slides that the MVP program requires of all grantees and any unspent grant funds for fiscal year 2024 will be reabsorbed by the grant program.

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

### (2) Debrief Concerning Unsuccessful Rural and Small Town Grant (\*)

As the Board is aware, the Town had applied for a \$500,000 Rural and Small Town Development Fund Grant for improvements at the Centennial Grove. I met virtually with representatives of the grant awarding authority on November 20, 2023 and they explained that the Town's application did not fare well mainly

since it does not have any direct or even indirect connection to affordable housing or zoning revision. Although municipal facilities were technically eligible within the grant program, projects such as ours lose significant points right from the start because of the lack of those connections. The agency responsible for awarding these grants is primarily interested in affordable housing. Our project scored as high as was possible for financial feasibility given the high degree of local and donated matching funds. We also did well in the Economic Development category. However, this was not enough to overcome the lack of specificity with respect to housing and other outcomes that the funding agency is most interested in.

We are told that this program will most likely deem municipal construction projects ineligible in its next round in the spring and that the Governor's Office may create a new type of grant program that focuses more on this type of project. Program staff definitely agreed that it can be a real challenge to weave the sought-after aspects into a municipal building construction project and were unable at the time of printing of this report to provide an example of a similar project that did actually get funded.

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

#### **M. Emergency Planning**

No items.

#### **N. Other Items**

##### (1) Thanksgiving Holiday

The office was closed on November 23 and 24, 2023, in observance of the subject holiday.

*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.*