

Memorandum

To: Selectboard
Cc: Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director; Aaron Martin, Public Works Director; Dan Roy, Finance Director
From: Greg Duggan, Manager; Karen Adams, Deputy Manager
Re: Discussion regarding March 2026 ballot item(s) related to the new municipal complex at 80-90 Upper Main St project
Date: 12/31/2025

Issue

The issue is whether the Selectboard will approve ballot item(s) on the March 2026 Town Meeting Day ballot regarding the new municipal complex at 80-90 Upper Main St..

Discussion

The Selectboard's most recent discussion about the new municipal complex project planned for 80-90 Upper Main Street was on December 15, 2025 as part of a series of discussions about project implementation. The overall effort involves construction of new roadways and utilities, municipal buildings, and other potential buildings or improvements on a property purchased by the Town in 2023. Conversation have included discussions of possible ballot items in March of 2026. The Selectboard is invited to continue conversation about the goals, merits, language, and desired outcome of placing an item, or multiple items, on the upcoming ballot.

As noted in the December 15 discussion on this topic, *"(e) Public questions shall be written in the form of a question, with boxes indicating a choice of "yes" and "no" directly under or to the right side of the public question."* (Public questions are any items on the ballot unrelated to an election, office, or budget). Questions must be labeled as advisory.

After these most recent discussions, staff recommends five changes to the language presented on December 15:

- A disclaimer added to the first question to reflect that Local Option Tax revenues could only be used if such a tax were to be adopted.
- A "ceiling" of \$2 million in spending on public infrastructure design for the new municipal complex was added to Q1. With our current engineering estimate of \$1.5 million, this amount keeps spending at appropriate levels for this phase of work, and also includes a safety factor to account for project cost changes the Town cannot influence.
- The amount of eligible grant funding (\$500,000) was also added to the question.
- Amendments to the project description to improve consistency between the two questions.
- Discussion on December 15 included consideration of whether Q2 was effective as drafted. This has been slightly reworded to be more clear that the intent is to determine whether the voters would like the Selectboard to *"continue overall progress on implementing"* the new municipal complex. The Selectboard should continue to discuss whether the phrasing about

voter approval being required prior to construction should appear in each question; given the 12/15 discussion appeared to more clearly define the intent of the question as to get input on the project “overall,” this has been removed from the second question.

- Additions noting the questions are “Advisory”.

Amended language for these amended ballot questions can be seen below:

Question 1:

“Shall the voters of Essex Town advise the Selectboard to complete public infrastructure design at 80-90 Upper Main Street that was purchased in 2023 to serve a new municipal complex, and for which the Selectboard adopted a conceptual Master Plan in March 2025, under the following conditions (Advisory):

- 1. Only the following funding sources are eligible to cover Town costs: capital funds, impact fees, \$500,000 in eligible grant funding and any other grant awards, donations, Reserve funds, approved fund balance assignments, and/or Local Option Tax revenue, should any local option taxes be approved by voters.*
- 2. Construction of any portion of the new municipal complex project shall not occur without future voter input.*
- 3. Costs for this phase of work do not exceed \$2 million, to come from the sources listed above.”*

Question 2

“Shall the voters of Essex Town advise the Selectboard to continue overall progress on implementing the new municipal complex at 80-90 Upper Main Street, for which the Selectboard adopted a conceptual Master Plan in March 2025?” (Advisory)

Cost

The cost of warning an item for the March ballot is approximately \$75.

Recommendation: Staff recommends the Selectboard approve one or both ballot item(s) on the March 2026 Town Meeting Day ballot regarding the new municipal complex at 80-90 Upper Main St., with or without amendments.

Attachments: None