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Office of the
SELECT BOARD
ABBOT HALL
188 Washington Street
MARBLEHEAD, MASSACHUSETTS 01945

Thatcher W. Kezer III
Town Administrator

MEMORANDUM

To: Select Board
From: Thatcher Kezer, Town Administrator
Date: July 9, 2025
Re: Town Administrator Update

This memorandum provides a consolidated summary of key ongoing projects, operational updates, and upcoming initiatives currently underway across town departments.

2025 Independence Day Fireworks Event Recap

I am pleased to report that this year's Independence Day fireworks and harbor illumination were successfully carried out as planned, marking a strong return for Marblehead's cherished Fourth of July traditions. After two challenging years, a fog bank in 2023 and the cancellation of the 2024 display due to a fire aboard the fireworks barge, this year's event proceeded without incident and was met with widespread enthusiasm and appreciation from the public.

The fireworks display took place on Friday evening, July 4th, and drew significantly larger-than-normal crowds due to the timing ahead of the weekend. The harbor illumination began promptly at 8:45 p.m., followed by a full 20-minute fireworks display at 9:00 p.m. Clear skies and favorable weather contributed to a highly visible and well-received show across all key viewing areas, including Chandler Hovey Park, Fort Sewall, and Crocker Park.

The Marblehead Police Department reported that the crowds were generally well-behaved, with only a few minor incidents occurring throughout the evening. All were promptly and professionally addressed without escalation. Coordination between public safety personnel, volunteers, and event organizers contributed to a smooth and safe experience for attendees.

Special thanks are extended to the Marblehead Fireworks Committee, the Harbormaster's Office, Marblehead Police and Fire departments, and all volunteers and donors who made the event possible. Their efforts helped restore confidence in the Town's ability to safely and successfully deliver this much-loved community celebration.

Joint Ambulance Services Agreement with Town of Swampscott and Beauport Ambulance

The Towns of Marblehead and Swampscott have jointly selected Beauport Ambulance Service, Inc. as the new provider of emergency ambulance services under a three-year agreement currently being finalized. The decision follows the conclusion of the existing contract with Atlantic Ambulance, which was set to expire on June 30, 2025. The timing of the contract expiration allowed both towns to explore a joint procurement opportunity, resulting in a more competitive and comprehensive approach to regional emergency medical services.

The contract with Beauport Ambulance is structured as a zero-bid contract, meaning there is no direct cost to the Town for the service. Instead, proposals were evaluated on the basis of service delivery, response standards, integration with public safety dispatch, and patient care capabilities. The agreement includes 24/7 ALS and BLS coverage, locally stationed ambulances in each town, and mutual aid support when needed.

We appreciate the cooperation and professionalism of Atlantic Ambulance, who agreed to a 15-day transition period to support a seamless handoff to the new provider. This has allowed for a smooth operational and administrative transition while ensuring uninterrupted emergency response coverage for residents.

While the intention was to have the final agreement ready for approval at tonight's meeting, we are continuing to review final edits with all parties to ensure accuracy and mutual understanding. A finalized contract will be brought to the Board for approval at the next available meeting.

Impacts of Referendum Repealing 3A Zoning Compliance

On June 18, 2025, Marblehead voters approved a referendum repealing the Town's prior Town Meeting vote to comply with the MBTA Communities Act (Section 3A of M.G.L. Chapter 40A). As a result, the Town will be officially **out of compliance as of July 14, 2025**. This change has significant implications for the Town's eligibility for numerous state and federal grant programs.

Financial Impacts

1. Current Grant Awards at Risk:

- **\$1.28 million** in awarded but not yet contracted state grants will be at risk, including:
 - Marblehead Shipyard Resilience Improvements (\$1,125,000)
 - MBTA Safety Action Plan Pilots (\$100,000)
 - MA250 Celebration Grant – “Sails & Stories” (\$50,000)
 - Community bike rack installations (\$6,250)

2. Existing Contracts Potentially Jeopardized:

- **\$354,792** in currently contracted grants may be reconsidered by the state due to the Town's pending noncompliance:
 - MassWorks – Five Corners Redesign

- Community Planning Grant – Master Plan Update
- Municipal Fiber Network Phase 3

3. Pending State Grant Applications at Risk:

- Over **\$3 million** in pending applications are now vulnerable, including:
 - Abbot Hall Attic and Accessibility Project (\$999,320)
 - Rail Trail Improvements (\$866,930)
 - State Street Landing Resilience Design, ADA projects, and downtown planning initiatives

4. Federal Grants Dependent on State Match:

- More than **\$11.6 million** in federal grant requests are at risk, including:
 - Port Infrastructure Development Program (\$11.25 million)
 - Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) (\$400,000)

5. Future Grant Opportunities Affected:

- An additional **\$2.98 million** in planned grant applications, such as the Village Street Bridge Reconstruction, may be disadvantaged due to noncompliance.

Programmatic Impact

The Town's noncompliance with 3A zoning will not only affect financial resources but may also diminish Marblehead's competitiveness in future state planning and infrastructure programs. Many grant programs now integrate MBTA Communities compliance into their evaluation criteria.

Next Steps

Town staff are actively communicating with state agencies to clarify the impact of the upcoming compliance lapse on existing and pending grants. We will continue to monitor developments and assess options to preserve funding for critical infrastructure and planning initiatives. A follow-up report with recommendations will be provided to the Board.