



MANCHESTER CRICKET

A Local Tradition Since 1888

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BRIEFLY

Manchester COA Announces Jan 15 Local Trip to "Mangia, Meatballs, and Murder" Event

The Manchester Council on Aging has announced it will offer an opportunity to see the Delvena Theatre Company's production of "Mangia, Meatballs, & Murder!" on Wednesday, January 15, at 1 p.m. Who dunnit? An exciting, live, comedic, interactive murder mystery performance set in Luigi's Ristorante featuring Lynne Mouton, Joseph Zamparelli, and Fran Baron in multiple roles. Come put your "super sleuth" on - having much fun along the way. Token prizes will be awarded. Coffee and Italian pastries will be served. Mangia, Meatballs, & Murder! is supported in part by a grant from the Manchester Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency. Info and registration, call the COA at (978) 526-7500.

ME Rotary Club Annual Raffle Fundraiser

The Manchester Essex Rotary Club has opened its annual Fundraiser Raffle. A total of 300 tickets will be sold for \$100 each beginning now. Winning tickets will be drawn on the day of the club's Annual Kentucky Derby party in May 2025. Cash prizes include a \$7,500 grand prize (oh, my!), a \$1,000 second prize and a \$500 third prize. Interested in purchasing a ticket? Contact Jen Doane of the ME Rotary Club's Fundraising Committee: jendoane2014@gmail.com

Boston Bruins Crooner Returns to MBTS Town Hall

The Boston Bruins National Anthem Singer, Todd Angilly will return to Town Common on Tuesday, December 24 at 4 p.m. for a Christmas Eve performance to spread good cheer through song. Concert will be approximately 40 minutes. Town Hall will provide hot chocolate and treats for all. Originally, Angilly appeared to sing as the result of a town employee winning a performance as a raffle prize. It seems the performance has become a tradition at Manchester Town Hall.

Impromptu Christmas Pageant, First Parish Church

On Tuesday, Christmas Eve, at 5 p.m. the First Parish Church will host an "Impromptu Pageant and Candlelight Family Service." Open to all, simple costumes will be provided. The program will include carol singing for all and a presentation of Christmas stories. Again, all are welcome.



Santa's Last Ride!

On Sunday, Santa Claus' annual tour of Manchester by fire truck was promptly launched from the fire station at 12 noon, much to the delight of local children. The event was billed as the last public appearance by Santa prior to his returning to the North Pole and resting for his big around-the-world trip next week. Santa was escorted by engines from the Manchester Fire Dept. and a cruiser from the Manchester Police Dept.

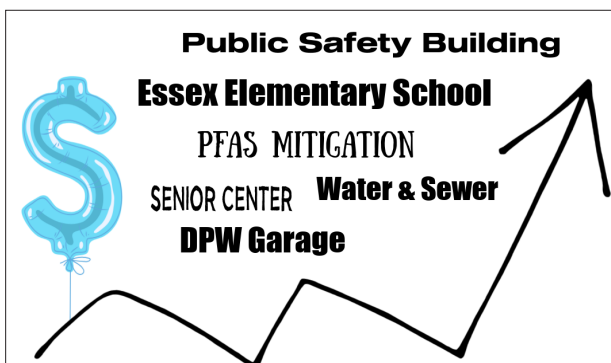
A New Year With New Challenges

by Gregory T. Federspiel

Every year brings its challenges to municipal operations. The year 2024 was no exception though we were spared large damaging storms or major infrastructure failures (though last winter's flooding that saw Masconomo Park and Beach Street underwater certainly was notable!) The MBTA 3A zoning work and debate will rank as one of the bigger items that took a lot of attention as did the proposed 40B project at Shingle Hill. Of course, there are perennial issues like funding the school district and capital improvement projects.

These last two issues will be front and center again in 2025. Getting an approved school budget for the current fiscal year required a second try at a lower amount when the original budget that required an override in Essex failed.

The budget for next year will be even more challenging. The Manchester Essex Regional School District is facing a very large increase in the cost of health insurance premiums based on recent claims history. This



likely increase, coupled with contractual obligations for inflation impacted wage increases, is making it impossible for the District to retain current programming while keeping within their normal 3-3.5 percent increase in expenses. The tentative level service budget increase is close to 10 percent.

The School Committee will be working hard to lower this number but even if the number could be cut in half to 5 percent Essex will need an override to approve their share (Manchester has excess levy capacity that, while still requiring Town Meeting approval, avoids the need for a ballot override vote.) There was talk of the possibility of a "super-town meeting" with both towns voting together last

spring - the option may have to be back on the table this coming year.

Funding capital improvements is another issue that is hard to resolve. Human nature favors attending to what is immediately needed and to put off longer-term needs. Voters have approved gradual increases in annual capital expenditures to the point where the town is spending between \$3-\$4 million annually on roads, pipes, vehicle and major equipment replacements, etc. This is significantly more than what was spent 10+ years ago and we have been doing this on a cash basis.

While this level of investment is doing well to meet regular capital replacement needs it is not sufficient to

address major facility and other large-scale improvements. Doing so requires borrowing through the issuance of municipal bonds that get repaid over time like a mortgage. Assuming a 30-year bond, for every \$5 million that the town borrows, the tax rate increases by a percentage point.

Looming large facility needs include new PFAS filtration systems at Gravelly Pond and the Lincoln Street well, a new DPW facility to replace the 60+ year-old garage, new Police and Fire stations (likely a combined public safety facility) that is out of the flood zones, a new or rebuilt Essex Elementary School, dredging of the harbor, and larger stretches of water and sewer pipe replacements. We very quickly get to over \$100 million for this list, which does not include protecting parts of town from bigger storms and rising seas or the needs of the Manchester Public Library.

In order to afford these projects, we will need to think hard about the timing and what other revenues can come into play. The good news is that retiree liabilities will be paid off by

the early 2030's as well as most of our current debt. The Cell Signaling Technology biolab campus will add to our tax base and various fees can be increased.

Even so, tax increases will be required that will be in addition to the increases needed for operating budgets. How much more are taxpayers willing to pay? Ultimately voters will decide through their approval or rejection of future budgets and proposed new bonds. In the past voters have shown a willingness to pay for projects that are well justified. The Select Board, Finance Committee and staff will continue to work on various proposals that will be brought to future Town Meetings.

A new year undoubtedly holds surprises that will require making adjustments to whatever plans get developed. Whatever the new year brings know that citizen boards and committees along with staff will respond to ensure critical municipal services continue to be delivered. Enjoy the holidays and here's to a happy and productive New Year regardless of the challenges it will bring.

Salem Man Arrested Sunday on Kidnapping, Battery, Drug Charges

MBTS Police tracked man to Rosedale Cemetery

By Erika Brown

A frightening incident of local domestic violence resulted in an intense, multi-agency pursuit and arrest in Manchester on Sunday after the mother of a five-year-old reported her daughter kidnapped by the girl's father.

The incident stemmed from a 911 call to Manchester Police, and at approximately 1:30 p.m. on

Sunday, Dec. 15, Manchester-by-the-Sea Police responded to a residence on Summer Street for a report of a domestic incident.

The male suspect, George Covan, 47, of Salem, had fled the scene on foot with his young daughter. Covan was arrested and arraigned Monday at Salem Superior Court on eight criminal charges stemming from the incident, including kidnapping and

endangerment of a minor family member; two counts of assault and battery; one count of reckless endangerment; one count of possession of a dangerous weapon; one count of a Class B substance (encompassing substances like cocaine or methamphetamine); and two counts of Class E drug (typically prescription opiates) possession.

"This sort of thing doesn't ... (Continued on page 2)

Weekly Weather Chart

Saturday 21 Dec	☁	36°	24°
Sunday 22 Dec	☁	25°	18°
Monday 23 Dec	☁	24°	14°
Tuesday 24 Dec	☁	35°	15°
Wednesday 25 Dec	☁	41°	34°
Thursday 26 Dec	☁	43°	39°
Friday 27 Dec	☁	43°	40°

Weather data pulled Wednesday and is subject to change.



Gavel to Gavel
This Week's Town Meetings

Manchester Town Hall is open to the public. Public hours are 9 a.m. - 4:45 p.m. Monday through Wednesday and 9 a.m. - 6:15 p.m. on Thursday. Essex Town Hall hours are Monday through Thursday 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

MERSD
No School-Winter Recess
December 23 - 27

Town Halls Closed
Christmas
December 25

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It was a wonderful Senior Holiday Party at The James in Essex on Tuesday. Dawn Burnham (dressed as a Christmas Elf, foreground) reported that the food was delicious. One of the restaurant's owners, Mary Kieley, presented prize winners Jean Balland and Carla Symonds with gift certificates for The James. The Essex Council on Aging will return in March for a St. Patrick's Day lunch, which promises to be both authentic and spectacular.