
OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

TO: SELECTBOARD
FROM: PETE WEBSTER, TOWN MANAGER
SUBJECT: TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT
DATE: NOV. 21, 2008

It has been a hectic couple of weeks for me. I can't begin to list how many people I've met, how many histories/backgrounds I've been learning, the files that I've been through. I find this a fascinating, complicated, energizing town, with a rich history, and I continue to be excited to be here working as your Town Manager. Again, thanks for the opportunity to do your bidding.

I've met with the Listers on several occasions these past two weeks to get up to speed on the Bragg Hill assessment law suits. Most recently I met with the Listers, Steve Wheelock and our attorney Charles Merriman just yesterday, for three hours, to go over the issues, get to know Charlie Merriman, and plot our defense. I will fill you in next Tuesday during the Executive Session.

One of my main short term goals is to move the bandstand project forward based on your Board's Oct. 22nd vote to go with Option B-2. I had previously met with Nancy Hoggson last Tuesday to get some more background history on the issue. I had a meeting this morning attended by Alison, Norman Miller, Donald McCabe, Bill Aldrich representing the NHS, two representatives from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (they changed their name from AT 'Conference' about 3 years ago), a Matt Stevens and Jody Carton, and Neil Fulton. I believe it was a very productive and positive meeting, focusing on the relocation (to Foley Park) and renovation of the 93 year old bandstand, as it has to be moved prior to the construction of the new design. I have Phil working on the zoning and ownership issues associated with the current location, and I am hopeful we can move the existing bandstand soon. My thought is that it be moved to an interim location, probably near the town garage, where it will be better protected and some renovation work might even be able to begin over the winter season. In my opinion it represents an 'attractive nuisance' in legal parlance, where it currently sits. I will be working on those details in the coming weeks. I am hopeful the Historical Society will come around and eventually see the wisdom in this proposal, and lend their support to what could well become a great, uplifting effort. The involvement of the A/T only lends credibility to this concept.

On Friday the 14th Nancy and I travelled to So. Burlington to get the latest health insurance rates from the League at the annual Health Trust meeting, and I have already shared with you the overall average increase of 21.74% across all the plans. I may put together an advisory group of residents who are knowledgeable about health insurance issues to give us some thoughts on how we can possibly control our runaway health insurance costs for town employees. If we go with our same plan this year (and it would be impossible at this late date to make a change, with the contractual obligations we have in place), we are looking at an increase in those health insurance line items of about \$44,000 across all the departments.

I sat in on the Finance Committee's monthly meeting this past Tuesday, prior to attending a dinner invitation to speak at the Lion's Club bi-weekly meeting at the library. Again I learned a great deal at each of these meetings. I've attended the last two Wednesday Rotary Club luncheons in Hanover, as Rotary has been a significant part of my life for almost twenty-five years. At each of those luncheons I've had great conversations with residents of Norwich who happen to be Rotarians, giving me further perspective on town issues (read 'bandstand'). There is strong sentiment from residents I talk with to have the bandstand project behind us. I will most probably be joining the Hanover Rotary Club, as they also cover our town and do a wonderful job of giving back to the local communities. Also last Wednesday I attended my last Vt. Coalition of Municipalities Board meeting, and have since tendered my resignation, based on this town's involvement with issues stemming from Act. 60.

In preparation for this past Wednesday's budget session, I've been meeting (and will continue meeting prior to Monday's second budget session), with the various department heads to better understand and familiarize myself with their numbers. I continue to believe this is a very responsible budget that Neil has constructed, one that provides for our coming fiscal year's needs with a nod towards the extreme financial times we all find ourselves in. I haven't found much 'fat' in this budget yet, and am continually impressed with the way it's been put together. I will not be embarrassed at Town Meeting to stand up and defend it. In talking w/ my fellow town managers around southern Vermont, a budget with a 3% increase or less will be in the minority.

I met with our Town Attorney, Frank Olmstead, yesterday for lunch to just have a social meeting (he was 'off the clock!') and learn about the history of various legal issues the town's been involved with the past few years. It is great to put a face to the voice on the phone, and we had a very productive one hour luncheon at the Norwich Inn. Later that day I attended the meeting held here by the Upper Valley Transportation Management Association, VTrans and our Two Rivers RPC. I finally met Peter Gregory, our Regional Commission Executive Director, and a number of other people I need to get to know. This meeting was all about Vermont's "Long Range Transportation Plan". Interesting to note in the Executive Summary of the Vermont Long Range Transportation Business Plan that by the year 2025, at our current state-wide funding schedule, we will be about \$4.2 billion short of where we need to be on maintaining our state bridges and roads, possibly as high a shortfall as \$8.7 billion if inflation is factored in at a 5% rate versus a 2% rate. This is exactly the reason we need to be disciplined as a town to maintain an adequate infrastructure funding level, rather than doing the easy thing and succumbing to pressure from some residents to cut road repairs in an ill-advised effort to come up with a negative increase budget.

Next Monday I will be meeting with Ames Byrd from the Conservation Commission to learn more about that organization's works. Again, one of my immediate goals is to be very pro-active in reaching out to meet the key players in this town, the stake holders who volunteer for these organizations that are so important for a town such as Norwich. I am open to any and all suggestions from your board as to whom I should be reaching out to—please just email me names and their interests in or roles in our town governance.

Sincerely,

Pete Webster

