
OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

TO: SELECTBOARD
FROM: PETE WEBSTER, TOWN MANAGER
SUBJECT: TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT
DATE: FEB. 20, 2009

It has been a busy week and a half, with union negotiations, bandstand discussions and meetings, touring town roads and neighborhoods with Andy Hodgdon, a meeting with the Norwich Business Council, Local Government Day up in Montpelier, the DRB meeting for the new bandstand construction, meetings with transportation committee members about possible 'park and ride' locations, the annual meeting of the GUVSWM District, not to mention the all important tax collections last Friday. I continue to do my best to keep you all informed of my activities, of what issues continue to challenge me and the Town of Norwich. And I continue to try and reach out to as many residents as possible in an effort to better understand this town and its needs.

Two good pieces of news—I have just locked in #2 heating oil prices for next year through our Competitive Energy Services consultant, Keith Sampson, at a delivered price of \$1.85/gallon. This compares favorably with what the Town of Norwich locked in this current heating season, namely \$3.51/gallon, a drop of 47.3%. Spoke with a number of other town managers, and also Steve Jeffrey from the League at the Local Govt. Day in Montpelier this past Wednesday, and all agreed that being able to lock in heating oil at that price was the right thing to do. The last couple of winters we've burned through just over 7,000 gallons each winter, so this savings should be in excess of \$10,000 for the heating season. I believe locking this price in at this time is our best course of action. Last year, for the first time in six years I chose not to lock in home heating oil for my house, and I think it was more a matter of luck than anything else.

Also, Phil had applied for a planning grant a while back. We just received the \$3,600 check for his municipal planning grant. This will go towards updating the Town Plan.

Bandstand

As we approach construction season, this topic takes more and more of my time. I have met with 13 contractors, Charles Egbert, Neil and Dennis in a pre-bid conference to go over all the details and issues relating to construction. There is a lot of interest out there in this project, and I am hopeful of some very competitive bids. I have also met with Richard Electric, as the electrical component will be separate from the construction bid. I will have all these prices and bids in Friday the 20th by 4 pm. I have met with two different historic preservationists, Dan Quinn and Eliot Lothrop. The Lothrop assessment is funded by a grant that Ann Cousins secured (\$500 for the assessment, another \$1,000 for relocation and

preservation, if we employ his recommendations, which is not a stipulation of the grant—we would just forfeit the \$1,000 portion of the grant). The Quinn report was no charge and was quite damning when it came to the condition and historical value of the base. You've seen both of these reports by now. I have also engaged the services of an independent, objective structural engineer, with whom I met today, and who will also give an assessment of the base. The contract will be awarded once we know our fund is sufficient to cover the new design, and the old bandstand will shortly thereafter be removed from the green. As of 1:30 Friday afternoon we already had five bids in, and I'm hopeful we will have 8-10 when we open the bids at 4 pm.

At the DRB meeting last night, there were no serious objections to the new design for the bandstand, and no interested parties who spoke up or registered to speak, who could possibly then object during the 30 day period, further delaying this project. I believe I will have the DRB's written approval (with conditions) for your meeting next Wednesday.

Union Contract Negotiations

Not much can be reported out of Executive Session other than the fact that we continue to meet, have three more meetings scheduled, and are (hopefully) working towards a mutually agreeable contract. Both Andy and Doug have been extremely helpful with their thoughts and historical perspective on previous talks.

Tax Collections

I am working closely with Roberta and Alison on the collections. As you will remember from last year's Town Meeting, all payments received after the due date (Friday, Feb. 13th, at 4:30 pm) are considered late and automatically subject to the 8% penalty. We also, as many towns do, accept postmarks with that date. The problem arises when we receive envelopes with no legible postmark date, or they are pre-sorted with no date whatsoever. The policy in other towns I'm familiar with is very clear, no gray area. There can be no 'wiggle room', and I will be firm in enforcing that policy. I would like to hear your thoughts on this. You will undoubtedly be hearing from some unhappy property owners who waited just a hair too late. I have met with both Roberta and Cheryl to further scrutinize the questionable payments; i.e. those that have illegible postmark dates and were received several days after the due date, no postmark dates at all, etc. I would suggest in future warnings the language include the word 'legible' in front of 'official U.S. Post Office postmark/cancellation'.

Other Issues

The annual meeting of the Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste Management District was this past Thursday. Brion McMullan and I both attended, to hear a good presentation from Casella Waste Management about a possible public/private partnering on the future construction and management of the No. Hartland landfill. There was also a good presentation from three Thayer School students concerning the relatively new baling technology that can increase a landfill's capacity by about a third.

I attended last Friday's monthly meeting of the Norwich Business Council at the Inn. I also shared lunch with some of our seniors at the Bugbee Center last week, as I wanted to see their facilities and meet more of our residents. The Bugbee Center is one of our voted appropriations, and I think it important I try and understand each of these organizations that we support with our tax dollars.

That's it for this report. I do appreciate your time in the executive session we held this week, and I wish you all a great weekend.

Sincerely,

Pete Webster