
OFFICE OF THE TOWN MANAGER

TO: SELECTBOARD
FROM: PETE WEBSTER, TOWN MANAGER
SUBJECT: TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT
DATE: MARCH 6, 2009

I would like to welcome our two newest members of the Selectboard, Sharon Racusin and Lynn McGrew. I look forward to working with this new board and its new chemistry. Elections are always an exciting time in small New England towns, and I am sure everyone will come together behind our new board in the best interests of Norwich.

Corridor Enhancement Project

I met with Robert Chamberlin of RSG, Phil and Neil and Andy Hodgdon about the effects of a lane closure experiment. The projected costs of \$8,000-\$10,000 for the two week experiment led us to spend about \$500 on a preliminary computer simulation model of such a closure, and we reviewed the simulation. This will be shared with you at your March 25th meeting when Sharon will be available, and it shows that a lane closure would have little or no negative impact on traffic patterns on Rt. 10A in the area of Montshire Road and McKenna Road.

Route 5 Being Re-classified a Class 1 Road

I met with Chuck Wise and Andy Hodgdon concerning this issue that was tabled by a previous Selectboard about a year and a half ago. This is back in the new Transportation Bill, and Chuck has some concerns about the language. Andy Hodgdon had done a thorough study of the financial implications, which you will have in your packets. We need to either have this language pulled from the Transportation Bill, or modified, and we will have a discussion concerning this at your next meeting. Also, both our representatives should be in attendance to weigh in on this, plus other bills of importance to the town.

Bandstand

Last Friday, the 27th Trumbull Nelson did a good job of delicately removing the roof from the base for preservation, storing it behind the Marion Cross School, and then dismantling the balance of the structure for removal. The site has now been cleared for the new construction. Many photos were taken of the base as it was opened, revealing most of the interior either in a very rotted condition, or having been replaced over the years with pressure treated lumber through various repairs. Very little of the base appeared to even be original. The bid was awarded to GR Porter, a local company, and work should begin in early April with a completion date of mid June, hopefully in time for the Marion Cross graduation ceremonies.

Union Contract Negotiations

Not much can be reported out of Executive Session. The last two meetings have both been cancelled by the union negotiator, George Lovell, one because of a timing conflict and this past week's session due to illness. I will continue to share any progress in a future Executive Session.

Delinquent Tax Collections

Property owners continue to pay their taxes and the interest and penalties, and most understand the need for a distinct deadline with a punitive 8%. I don't see how we can be any more flexible than what most every other town does, which is to have a firm tax due deadline. I have met with about four or five individuals who wanted some kind of amnesty, but I have simply explained that we vote a date and time specific for taxes to be paid, and need to stand by this town-wide vote (this year Article 32, setting payment dates and penalties, was passed by a 942 to 64 margin. Interestingly enough, this was the widest margin of any of the 32 articles we voted on, save one, the voted app. for Advanced Transit.)

Staff Meeting and Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

I held a brief staff meeting after a presentation by the EAP representative. This program is available to any employee of the town, and is a strictly confidential service for anyone who feels they may be under stress and need some kind of counseling. This benefit of the VLCT Health and PACIF Trusts, and the issues they can help with are: family/relationship problems, workplace stress, anxiety, substance abuse, legal and financial resources, and they can refer our employees to any number of helpful specialists. I've been familiar with the EAP program now for about 12 years, and felt they should come in to make their presentation, as their services are completely free and confidential.

Other Issues

I met with David Goudy, Director of the Montshire Museum, to learn more about that organization and he brought up an event that he tried some 8 or 9 years ago that didn't go over well, or at least it was never repeated. He mentioned they had offered the museum to the local residents for an evening with no charge. We discussed the possibility of hosting a "Norwich Family Day" on the museum grounds with a free picnic. You may not be aware that the Montshire draws over 150,000 visitors each year, and he is eager to increase the local resident attendance, support and involvement. I think a free evening cookout, with donated materials from the local business community, sometime in the summer with its longer evening daylight hours, might be a wonderful community event, growing into a great Norwich tradition. This fall marks the 20th anniversary of the museum coming to Norwich. My thought was to open the museum's trails to families that afternoon for walking, the museum would be open in the evening with all its exhibits, the grills would be going from 5 o'clock until 8, and residents could come any time between 4 and 8 pm, or something to that effect. When I was First Selectman in Essex, Ct I started something called Essex Family Day back in 1997, to honor the family unit, and got it started with \$800 being donated by various banks. We had a burgers and dogs and lemonade, iced tea, coleslaw and spud salad,

with watermelon for dessert, and that has grown into a huge all day, Sunday, festival over the past decade. I think something similar could become a reality with the Montshire's great property as a site, and with their encouragement.

April 4th is the annual Selectboard Institute that the League offers for any newly elected (or returning) Selectboard members. I have sat in on this years ago, and it is a tremendously helpful session, held up in Montpelier at the Capitol Plaza. I strongly urge the entire Selectboard to attend, if at all possible. They will cover fundamentals of governance, essentials of municipal law, running effective meetings and managing a town budget. There is an \$80 registration fee for this, but the town should absolutely be covering this needed expense.

My second monthly Thursday evening session at the Norwich Inn saw about twelve residents joining me for crackers and cheese, many of whom I'd never met before. So, I felt that was a good effort, better than the first back in January. I look forward to the next evening event on March 26th, and hopefully this will grow and become traditional.

Pete