



Peter B. Webster
Town Manager

MEMORANDUM

TO: Norwich Selectboard

FROM: Peter B. Webster, Town Manager

DATE: August 13 2010

SUBJECT: Information for the Selectboard

Setting Tax Rate

My last 'formal' report to you was your last regular meeting, when your Board set the tax rate on July 7th. I'd just like to reiterate this Town's progress in holding the line on municipal tax increases. For some reason this remarkable record seems to get lost in the discussions about the proposed parsonage sale. Your Board set the municipal tax rate for FY11 at \$0.4588, a reduction from the FY10 rate of \$0.4658. This was accomplished despite a flat Grand List, despite rising costs across the board, and includes a fully funded (15% of the annual budget) Undesignated Fund. In FY09, the tax rate was higher still, at \$0.4810, in FY08 it was \$0.4728, and in FY07 the municipal tax rate was set at \$0.4790. One has to go all the way back to FY06 for a higher municipal tax rate than the current year. Not many other towns that I'm aware of can point to that track record of cost containment, and it's something we should all take pride in.

Parsonage Sale

Much has transpired since early July on this opportunity. I have had numerous meetings with the church representatives, with their attorney, with Department Heads, with the Finance Committee, and with contractors to inspect and quote on possible future renovations. We've now held three public forums to disseminate information on the process and on a possible use for the building,

and we have learned much from the public. We will hold a formal Town Meeting the evening of September 9th, followed by an Australian ballot on September 14th with three warned articles. I believe the public will have had ample time within the next month and during this past month to digest the facts surrounding this potential purchase and make an informed decision. Furthermore, I don't believe the expense (perhaps \$500) for a Town-wide mailing is necessary or justified, nor do I have it in my budget to fund such a mailing.

Public Works Facility Master Site Plan

In June, an RFP was sent out to about a dozen firms to get a formal master site plan for the Public Works Facility. We received eight proposals, interviewed the top three, and I will be requesting your Board's approval to expend funds from the Highway Garage Designated Fund for this study. We expect to have the final plan by mid to late November, which will also include information necessary for a possible solar facility somewhere on the 26 acre site. That information will be necessary for the solar project to move forward with additional public forums, and possibly to a March Town Meeting vote, as the \$220,000 in grants procured by the Energy Committee will expire in 2011 if the project has not been started. As far as when any improvements to the Public Works Facility might be done, that will depend on continued meetings of the NORCAP Update Committee, and a recommendation from them to your Board on the expense involved. Of all the municipal capital needs facing the Town, I feel this is one of the more urgent ones. I recently toured the Town of Hartford's Public Works facility (constructed in 2003), and would encourage you all to do the same, after touring our facility.

GUVSWD

You are aware of the Aug. 24th primary vote, which also includes an article from the Solid Waste District. The vote to bond \$875,000, which is a restructuring of current SWD debt, is for the expense involved with the construction of the bridge over I-91 two years ago. We are only one of the ten towns in the District, but carry about 20% of the total vote, based on town population. You have a letter in your packets from your representative, Brion McMullen, urging your endorsement of the bond, a sentiment with which I agree. Stuart Close of Twin State Sand and Gravel should be at our meeting to answer any questions concerning this note that is being restructured through the bond vote.

Communications Study

We are currently awaiting the report from Norman Boucher at Communications Design and Consulting Group. Early indications are that our Town coverage for radio communications is even worse than we had suspected. This may be an expensive future cost, with a recommendation of more than one tower, but this is an expense we are hopeful of funding almost entirely (95/5) with state/federal funding.

Public Works Projects

The public continues to become more accustomed to the new Zero-Sort system each week, and Andy continues to make additional improvements—a new concrete pad, with an area to be protected from the elements for our residents. Andy and I still have plans for a trip to Casella's Zero-Sort operation up in Chittenden County, and will let you know when we schedule that so others may also be involved.

Andy is working closely with the Fire District on the new sidewalk along Main Street from Turnpike to Koch. This week we are widening the shoulder along that stretch of Beaver Meadow from Moore Lane up to the Norwich Pool. This is an area of poor sight lines yet gets heavy traffic from our younger people as they walk or cycle from Huntley Field up to the pool. It has been an area of concern for many years, and we hope to further calm traffic heading downhill into town by installing a radar monitoring device on a utility pole just uphill from the pool, as the speed limit drops from 40 to 25 MPH. The other radar device on Church Street that was installed some months ago has had a very dramatic, positive effect on traffic approaching the Marion Cross School, and neighbors seem delighted with the results.

You have a request for funds for paving, and the only bid we received this year was from Blaktop Inc. We hope to finish the paving of Union Village Road, along with a section of Koch Road, and all of Hazen St., Cliff St. and Trumbull Lane. That work should be completed later this summer or fall.

Miscellaneous Issues

I've met with Jake Blum, Tree Warden, and Kevin Brown of Brown's Nursery, to go over some plantings at Foley Park. We are using a small amount of that insurance claim to replace the tree that was destroyed this past winter.

I've received the compensation study I ordered some months ago, from Gallagher Flynn Human Resource Services. While there are no great surprises in the report, it should prove helpful for the upcoming budget season and I will be drawing upon it.

I applied for an energy audit grant through the RPA, which was awarded to Norwich. We will be having a thorough audit of Tracy Hall done, including a blower door test, thermal imaging, and a complete report detailing areas of increased weatherization.