



Peter B. Webster  
Town Manager

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Board of Selectmen

**FROM:** Peter B. Webster, Town Manager

**DATE:** November 19, 2010

**SUBJECT:** Information for the Selectboard

### FY Municipal 2012 Budget

Most of the past week or two has again been devoted to budget efforts to prepare for:

Nov. 23 2<sup>nd</sup> budget session w/ Dept. Heads  
Nov. 30 3<sup>rd</sup> budget session w/ Outside Agencies  
Dec. 8 4<sup>th</sup> budget session  
Dec. 15 Regular meeting of the Select Board  
Jan. 12 1<sup>st</sup> Public Hearing of the FY 12 budget  
Jan. 19 2<sup>nd</sup> Public Hearing of the FY 12 budget  
and final approval of FY 12 budget to Town Meeting

We've had the first session, with much attention focused on the Public Works Department budget. A comparison to the towns of Royalton and Thetford was made, based simply on road mileage, which both Andy and I feel is misrepresentative and probably not the best of town comparisons. I will have more information on these comparisons at a future budget session, but I recently met with the Town of Hanover Finance Director to go over some common budget issues and have looked at their highway budget, very similar to ours as a percentage of their total budget. Although their population is larger, their total road mileage is very similar to ours, and I think their high expectation levels are quite similar (namely, many professionals, doctors, who need to have dependable road conditions throughout the winter months). I will continue to

crunch some numbers for towns such as Morristown, Woodstock, Williston, Stowe, Essex, Randolph and Rockingham, making comparison with percentage of total budget, dollars spent per road mile, etc. This grouping of municipalities has road mileages and total taxes collected that are not too dissimilar to our town, and fairly similar demographics. As I've said right along, the budget process this year especially will not be an easy or pleasant one when salary and step increases are considered, along with the health insurance costs.

### **Town-Wide Reappraisal**

We had our first Listers' Roundtable discussion two evenings ago with a small crowd in attendance. I thought it was a helpful dialogue about the process, about the Grand List maintenance, the relationships between Listers, Selectboard members, Assessor and Town Manager. I believe we are all unified in wanting the best, most objective, accurate and equitable new Grand List done by the most appropriate and cost-effective outside firm we can find. I think the Listers have put into play a thorough, transparent process for hiring the right firm, for utilizing the best software for the Town's needs, and have put us on the tight timeline to get this in front of the voters for a warned article on March 1. I've sat in on the four interviews the Listers have held with the different software companies, and you will hear their thoughts.

### **Norwich Energy Committee**

The RFB for the Solar Project went out via email last Friday. We had a mandatory site visit scheduled for this morning for any potential bidders. We had fifteen people at the site visit; representing 12 solar companies. This is again on a tight timeline to get this before the voters, possibly at the March Town Meeting, perhaps at a special Town Meeting. We will know much more when bids come in December 30<sup>th</sup>. If the numbers continue to be positive, I will continue to recommend this effort.

### **ZeroSort Recycling**

We had seven of us on the bus to Charlestown, MA. for the Casella ZeroSort field trip. I think we all felt it was extremely worthwhile, and I'll be happy to share what I got out of it. Ed Childs was also along. Casella may schedule one more of these excursions for those unable to make this one. We are currently sending 1.8 pounds to recycling for every 1.0 pound that is being landfilled. While this is an excellent start, it is just that—Claremont is further along on the learning/experience curve with ZeroSort, and is recycling 3.0 pounds for every 1 pound that is being landfilled, so we have a way to go. I want to thank Andy for helping to organize this trip, as I think it was a great chance to view some impressive technology.

## **Joint Selectboard/School Board Meeting**

Our first joint meeting was a good one, with small turnout. I think we can nibble around the edges of a much larger problem when we discuss ways to save a few dollars here and there—the much bigger issue is how we fund education in the State of Vermont. The problem is simply this—when there is such a huge disconnect between budgets and tax rates (school budget this year was down 5%, municipal budget down 8%, homestead tax rate up 4.7%), the problem lies with the formula, one that is irretrievably broken. The VLCT has been lobbying for change almost every year since Act 60 was passed in 1997. The VT Coalition of Municipalities (VCM), formed after the passage of Act 60, has worked towards fundamental change in how we fund education every year since 1997. The towns I worked for previously encouraged me to be on that board, and in 2008 when I started here, I was chair of the VCM. Norwich has not wanted to participate in supporting fundamental education funding change, and we will continue to deal with the complex formula that requires two pages of explanatory notes go out with the annual property tax bills. I will be meeting with Linda Kelley going forward, exploring opportunities for savings and efficiencies, but I think there is a more fundamental problem at work here rather than our budgeting.

## **Other Issues**

The Recreation Council will be applying for a grant to fund the creation of a mountain bike course around Huntley Field. We will continue to dialogue about this improvement to the fields, and the Council will be holding public meetings to discuss the specifics of this project.

Ben Trussell has requested permission to join the union representing the police and highway department. I can see no reason to object to that, and in fact, do not believe there are grounds for denying him that opportunity.

That's about it from Tracy Hall.