



Peter B. Webster
Town Manager

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Selectmen

FROM: Peter B. Webster, Town Manager

DATE: May 5, 2011

SUBJECT: Information for the Selectboard

Rt. 132 Discussion

As you know, Rt. 132 is town owned by the four towns through which it travels (Norwich, Thetford, Strafford and Sharon). There is an interest from the other towns to have our legislators support their desires to encourage the State to take back the ownership and maintenance of this road. Andy and I are also supportive of that effort, as this road probably carries far more nonresidential traffic than residential, and would like your support for the next TAC meeting in Hartford on the 18th of May where it's on the agenda. It's becoming an increasingly rural collector and short cut between interstate exits and by all measures should be a State road. Most people in Town probably believe that to be so, as it is a numbered route. It's probably a long shot, as the State is going the other way in trying to shed road mileage ownership, but I'd like to get your thoughts and hopefully your support. Most of this section has been recently repaved and is probably in the best shape for the State to take it back, and I know that Thetford especially would like to see this happen.

Budget Issues

With just less than two months left in FY11, our best guess is that we'll end up with a surplus of about \$85,000, which could be added to the Undesignated Fund. Revenues might be down by about \$30,949 (\$3,881,422), but expenses are projected to be under spent by about \$116,597, for that surplus of \$85,648.

Roberta has done a fine job of keeping all Department Heads on track with awareness of their spending vs. budget, and even though this has been a difficult year for all municipalities, with many running well into the red, we should come out in fairly healthy shape.

Roberta will continue generating one last end-of-the-month expenditure report for your review as well.

Sidewalk Projects/Prudential Committee/DPW

I had a lengthy meeting with Andy, Brion and Sam to go over summer projects and other joint considerations for the Selectboard and Prudential Committee. At some future meeting I'd like to have an agenda item addressing a proposed multi-year plan for the Town to take over the remaining roughly 5,000 feet of Fire District-owned sidewalks. We talked about a possible phased-in five year approach (FY13, FY14, FY15, FY16, and FY17) for this to occur, if both the Prudential Committee and the Selectboard were in agreement. The details will be worked out between Andy, me and Brion, trying to coordinate the replacement of curbing, curb stops, service and water lines, and repaving of affected streets. It makes sense, to me, for the Town to have ownership of the sidewalks, with some provision for continued funding from the Water Department for future maintenance, as the Water Department needs to focus on water issues.

Transportation Enhancement Grant

Through our Regional Planning Commission, the latest round in enhancement grants is just being made public. There is significant funding in this round, \$4.4 million for Vermont municipalities, with a deadline of June 3rd for the Letter of Intent. I have met with Lucy Gibson, head of the Transportation Committee, and Phil Dechert to go over our possible projects that we might apply for funding. The Transportation Committee will be meeting in the parlor of the Norwich Inn next Thursday at 5:30 pm to further discuss this application. Maximum grant is \$300,000 in federal funding, combined with the local 20% match of the total project cost, for a total project maximum of \$375,000. Half of the local match has to be in cash, which we will have in hand if we continue to fund the sidewalk designated budget with \$15,000 annually. We are contemplating new sidewalks or a new bike/pedestrian path, although other projects are eligible. When we take federal dollars in a grant like this, the project can typically run into a five-year effort, so we might be looking at something along Rt. 5 from the Hartford line, as State roads make these projects much more complicated and time consuming anyway, as opposed to something along Beaver Meadow or another Town road, a project that we might better handle ourselves with our own tax dollars in a much more expeditious manner.

Health Insurance

I am going to engage the services of a consultant to review our current health insurance policy in advance of the coming budget season. I have learned of a couple of neighboring communities who have recently achieved some significant savings by switching from the Health Trust that the League provides, something that many of us town managers have been reluctant to do for a number of reasons—one being the 'bait and switch' low ball policies that can be enticing, another reason being the loyalty factor to the League and our fellow member towns, and an additional reason being unable to return to the Health Trust program for a minimum of two years if we do leave. However, the group that we continue to be part of is an aging group, is shrinking in numbers every year, and is an increasingly unhealthy group, and none of these factors are good to be associated with.

I'd like to put together a very small (3-4) insurance advisory group, including a member of the Selectboard, myself and a knowledgeable resident, to help with this decision which will be brought before your Board during budget season. We may be able to save as much as 20-25% over our existing plan, with no reduction in coverage, from what I am hearing.

Miscellaneous

We held a 'lean budgeting' web conference for most Department Heads, for me and a couple Selectboard members who were able to sit in, funded and sponsored by the towns of Winhall and Ludlow.

I met with representatives from the Conservation Commission (Lindsay Putnam, Sarah Reeves, Craig Layne), Justin from Buildings and Grounds, and Jill from the Recreation Department to walk the Huntley Meadows area along Blood Brook. We had done some 'cleaning out' and clearing in that area several years ago, as there was an old rusted chain link fence (which ran along the brook/bank) that was in a dangerous condition that needed removal, along with some of the live vegetation that had become intertwined with the fencing. Conservation Commission is concerned about the extent of the clearing and a replanting program with appropriate species will be undertaken, hopefully funded primarily through grants.

I applied for (and received) a \$372 grant through the VLCT to hold a training session for all Town employees, addressing respect in the workplace and sexual harassment issues, something that hasn't been done in a number of years and was a good refresher course on acceptable workplace behavior. This session was conducted by a representative from EAP, Employee Assistance Program. Two Selectboard members were also able to sit in on the session.

We will be going out very shortly for proposals for our banking and financial management needs as we are approaching the end of the three-year relationship with our current financial institution.