



Peter B. Webster  
Town Manager

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Board of Selectmen

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

**DATE:** May 19, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Information for the Selectboard

### Health Insurance for F/T Town Employees

Nancy and I, along with some of your Board, met with representatives from an insurance consultant last week, Benefits Group of New England, who have been making similar presentations to quite a number of municipalities. We reviewed our current plan, its benefits and expenses, and learned about some options that may well save significant dollars in next year's budget if we move forward on a change, without reducing our employees' coverage. One of the unfortunate issues we've been dealing with in recent years as it relates to our group insurance coverage, is the group that we are involved with through the VLCT Health Trust is, unfortunately, a shrinking group of aging municipal workers. That's just the demographics of this employment sector, and it is an increasingly less healthy group as it ages. Even with the changes that have been implemented over the past 30 months (switching to a less costly High Deductible H.S.A. plan, having employees contributing towards the deductible or the premiums), we have been experiencing difficult increases in our costs. If we were to switch to a different insurance provider and be involved with a much larger, healthier and younger group, our claims would be fewer, our loss ratio better, and the overall expense of premiums would be reduced with a higher deductible than we currently have. I have been informally talking with individual employees about this, and so far there seems to be general support and interest in having a formal presentation by the consultant. This could be rolled out for a July 1<sup>st</sup> start date, which would then have the plan coincide with our fiscal year, another plus when it comes to budgeting.

## **Safe Routes To School Project**

As the State continues to do their right-of-way research, the actual bidding out and construction of this sidewalk section will again be put off until next year. Aimee Pope's quote from VTrans: "At this point the Norwich project is put on hold until VTrans can determine the ROW". There is nothing for the Town to be doing until the State has completed this ROW work. Apparently they have limited numbers of employees and are scrambling to move people around with the flooding that is occurring up north. This was very disappointing news, as I truly thought this sidewalk would have been completed by now.

## **Transportation Enhancement Grant**

Phil and I met with members of the Transportation Committee recently to review this grant and its requirements, and to go over our list of projects that might be covered. It was decided to apply for a grant to create a bike/ped path along Rt. 5 South that would eventually connect with the Upper Valley Trails Loop. This would be beneficial for our Farmers Market among others, and has been a long time goal of the Transportation Committee. A simple Letter of Intent is due by June 3, with a formal application due later in August.

## **Other Grants**

We have just been notified by the Women's Club of two generous grants that we applied for—one for \$1,900 representing half the cost of a new floor covering (plus electric winch) for the Tracy Hall gym, and Jill's Recreation Department is receiving \$2,400 for a new equipment shed for one of the fields at Huntley Meadows. Our gym covering has reached the useful end of its 17 year life and really needs to be retired. The Upper Valley Trails Alliance received almost \$20,000 from the Recreational Trails Program for rehabilitation of the Gile Mtn. Trail. Jake Blum received a wonderful grant of \$10,000 (out of a total of only \$75,000 statewide from a Community Forest Program) from the Preservation Trust of Vermont for new tree plantings.

## **Request for Proposal for Banking and Cash Management Services**

Roberta and I have gone over the last RFP that went out some three years ago to just the few banks that had a physical presence here in Norwich. We are going out with a similar request this week to a much broader group of financial institutions, approximately 12. We expect responses by June 10, and hope to have it to your Board by your June 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

## Miscellaneous

- I have been meeting with individual Department Heads to go over their goals and objectives for their departments for the upcoming year. I believe we have some very knowledgeable, experienced and dedicated people running most of our departments, and we all benefit from their depth of knowledge. I'll have a list of those projects for the Wednesday meeting.
- Delinquent Tax Update—payment plans continue to be filed with the Finance Office, signed by both the individual taxpayer and the Town Manager, so the new policy seems to be working well. Our current delinquencies are down slightly from last year.
- Recent meetings—(1) At the latest TAC meeting in Hartford, we discussed the chances of the State taking back maintenance and ownership of the Rt. 132 that travels through Norwich, Thetford, Strafford and Sharon. All four towns are in support of this, and no one was quite sure when this became a town road—possibly back when the UVD dam was constructed. (2) The DPW Committee meeting, which is finalizing their survey to go out by mail to all residences in Town. (3) The latest Capital Facilities Committee meeting, which is looking into a new report covering the Town's Capital needs. (3) Town-wide Reappraisal forum—small turnout, but our consultant, Bill Krajesky from New England Municipal Consultants, did a good job of describing the two-year process ending in June of 2013.