

Town Manager Report

June 2020

- Collective Bargaining:
 - As of July 1, one outstanding issue remains as part of the handshake agreement. This hopefully will be worked out at the July 8 bargaining session.
 - The master contract redline has been crafted minus the specifics of the “comprehensive tentative agreement” (due to the singular issue remaining).
 - Pending the July 8 bargaining session, the ratification process will begin.
- Great River Hydro, LLC Appeal – The case was mediated on June 2, 2020 but the parties were unable to reach an accord and now are proceeding to exchange expert reports on valuation prior to continuing with discovery before leading up to an eventual trial date. Per the current schedule, expert reports will be exchanged on or before August 31, 2020, depositions completed on or before December 15, 2020, pre-trial motions on or before January 15, 2021, and the matter ready for trial as of February 15, 2021.
- Personnel Issue – at this time and for the foreseeable future this item remains confidential. The board discussed this issue with legal counsel and a course of action was discussed.
- Completed 10-week Leadership Training course.
- The Town Manager is putting together a group of “expert” individuals in the spirit of a blue ribbon committee to advance racial equity while striving to strengthen the Norwich Community around related issues. The group will be independent from political influence or other authority, though the group will have no direct authority of their own. They will use their individual and collective expertise to issue findings and/or recommendations for use by the Town Manager (and others) to conduct proactive, actionable items in the spirit of their charge. See the below list of possible suggestions the Town Manager offered to help introduce the idea to those invited to participate. At this time, participants include: Melissa Horwitz, Omer Trajman, Kate Barlow, Brie Swenson, Alex Northern, and Jennifer Frank with the possible insight from Emily Easenath-Smith and two other persons the Town Manager has yet to make contact with.
 - TM lecture series;
 - Tracy Hall (or other locational) display;
 - Identify whether there is a “mobile” museum that could make a stop in Norwich (Similar to the Freedom Train from 1976 that celebrated the USA’s bicentennial by making train stops throughout the United States);
 - “Celebratory” concert on the Green;
 - Collaborations with other Town/regional entities (e.g., Women’s Club, Library, Vital Communities, peers, Montshire, etc.);
 - Spike Lee film series for high school-aged kids;
 - Norwich Cadet-sponsored event;
 - NPD public forum(s) on the “average” uniformed officer’s day in Norwich with a moderated discussion;
 - Identifying a list of policy level provisions that should be woven into existing or new policies (e.g., looking to update any current anti-discrimination policy); and,
 - Other... [TBD]

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In the interim of the group's work, the Town Manager welcomes any insight from the public at-large to offer suggestions, ideas, recommendations, and the like. The only caveat the Town Manager asks is that such insight be positive-oriented and "doable" at a local level.

- Grants:
 - The Town was granted an amended VTrans Structures grant to shift the grant engineering project for Chapel Hill bridge to the unnamed box culvert on Rte 132 near Bowen Hill Road due to the severity of the box culvert's condition balanced with high volume traffic use of the roadway.
 - A VLCT-PACIF 2020 Equipment Grant (50/50 grant) was awarded to the Town to purchase some Fire Department and Police Department equipment.
 - Women's Club grants were awarded at least to Recreation for improvements at Huntley-Meadow (updated signage and new bases) and Conservation Commission (?).
- Financial Reporting:
 - Monthly reporting:
 - May report, including balance sheet, provided to the Board
 - Pre-audit work continues between TM, Finance Office, NEMRC, and auditor.
 - Tax Rate Status:
 - The state just announced that school tax rates for Homestead and Non-Residential property owners will be released on July 8. Normally, these rates are announced on June 30.
 - The Listers grievance process and related "lodging" of the any amended grand list will occur by mid-July.
 - **Given the above information, the Selectboard should be able to set property tax rates during the 3rd or 4th full week of July. Once the tax rates are set, tax bills will be prepared and sent to property owners.**
 - The August 14, 2020 (4:30 pm) first tax installment deadline will be delayed due to the unavoidable delays noted above as a result of COVID-19. **At this juncture, it looks like the first tax installment will be due toward the end of August (instead of August 14),** with the 2nd installment still due on February 12, 2021. The actual date due for the 1st installment will be noted on the tax bills, and once that date is re-established, the public also will be notified via the Listserve, the Town webpage, and through other media sources typically used by the Town.
 - Further, it is anticipated that there will be the need to send out revised tax bills later this year relative to individual property owners juxtaposed with the time that they file their Homestead Declaration with the state. In these select situations, property owners will be expected to pay the amount shown on the original tax bill received. Then, once the state processes that property owner's Homestead Declaration, the Town will be notified by the state. At that time, a revised tax bill will be prepared, including any necessary adjustment, and will be sent to the property owner. Any property owner who receives a revised tax bill

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and has questions, at that time, they are welcome to contact the Finance Office (802-649-1419 x3) for any clarification.

- Note: the Town is sensitive to COVID-19 and the impact it may have had on their personal finances. Once property tax bills are received, **if any individual (or business) finds it will be a struggle to make on time payments, that individual is encouraged to contact the Delinquent Tax Collector (who is the Town Manager) via the Town Finance Office (802-649-1419 x3) to set up a payment plan. The Town would be happy to help accommodate those struggling in this difficult period.**
 - FYI, the VT Legislature passed temporary legislation allowing Town's to alter their voter approved deadlines for tax payments (August 14, 2020 and February 12, 2021) without having to have additional voter authorization. The Legislature also passed some temporary legislation granting municipalities the ability to waive penalty and interest charges related to tax payments should they wish. Both are important considerations as the Town enters fiscal year 2020-21.
- Finance Director interview scheduling is underway.
 - Update to the Local Hazard Mitigation Plan continues with help from the TRORC. At least 2 of the 3 public meetings have been held. Once the 3rd meeting is held a draft document will be prepared. So far, the project remains on schedule for completion and submittal to FEMA for approval before the current plan expires.
 - The unnamed box culvert on Rte 132 near Bowen Hill Rd. project is moving forward. Stantec Engineering has been retained to conduct the necessary engineering scoping/design work. As noted in Grants above, VTrans funds have been shifted to help offset the engineer's costs. As this project progresses, there likely will be a reduction of travel lanes from two to one lane with temporary signals installed to manage traffic flows in both directions. Ultimately, the project envisions a replacement of the box culvert, but that will only be decided once Stantec gets into their engineering analysis. Additional questions should be directed to Larry Wiggins, PE, Public Works Director (802-649-2209).
 - Brown Schoolhouse Bridge design-build project. The proposal review team met and ranked the seven technical proposals received. Once ranked the cost proposals were opened. Based on the results of that process, Nick Fabrikant was named the "preferred contractor" due to the high scoring on his technical proposal balanced with the least cost proposal submitted. The Selectboard authorized the Town Manager to execute a not-to-exceed contract with Nick Fabrikant and for the Town Manager to solicit bank term bids for the voter authorized borrowing to offset the project costs. The voters authorized up to \$80,000 in borrowing. Nick's contract is not to exceed \$75,700. Also, the Trails Committee continues to try to find other sources of revenue (e.g., private donations and grant funds) to help minimize the project's fiscal impact on taxpayers (i.e., to minimize the amount of debt service related to borrowing).
 - Beaver Meadow Sidewalk Scoping Project. VTrans MAB team gave the go ahead to proceed with the scoping work with DuBois & King Engineering. A contract with DuBois & King is amid execution (at the writing of this report). Scoping work momentarily will begin.

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- Continued to work with the board on various new and updated policies.
- As usual, addressed numerous questions, concerns issues identified by the public at-large.
- Soon, a new, secure “drop box” will be installed near the Main Street entrance to Tracy Hall. This will afford residents the opportunity to drop off ballots, tax payments, and other documentation without having to enter Tracy Hall. It’s believed that residents will enjoy this new opportunity.
- In the near future, VTrans is going to conduct relatively significant repair to the I-91 overpass bridges at the Norwich exit (over Route 10a). In advance of that work, VTrans is required to hold a “regional concerns meeting”. That is scheduled for July 22, 2020 at 6:30 pm as part of the Selectboard’s regular agenda. This will be a ZOOM™ meeting, so monitor the Listserve and the Town webpage for release of that meeting’s agenda. The agenda includes the “hyperlink” to connect on-line with the meeting.
- In case you noticed, there is a new “gate” (chain) at the Transfer Station. The previous gate was totaled when some high winds starting swinging the gate closed. Concurrently, a resident’s pickup truck leaving the Transfer Station impacted the gate. VERY fortunately no one was hurt. Unfortunately, the resident’s pickup was significantly damaged. The Town’s insurance agent is amid dealing with the claim.
- The fiscal year end Delinquent Tax Report was transmitted to the Town Treasurer.
- REMINDER: IF YOU USE THE TRANSFER STATION, IT’S THAT TIME OF YEAR, AGAIN, TO PURCHASE YOUR ANNUAL STICKER. 😊
- REMINDER: THE STATE PRIMARY AND RECONSIDERATION VOTE ON TRACY HALL RENOVATIONS IS TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2020. DUE TO COVID-19, VOTERS ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO OBTAIN “EARLY VOTING” (FORMERLY CALLED “ABSENTEE”) BALLOTS. CONTACT BONNIE MUNDAY, TOWN CLERK (802-649-1419 x2) TO OBTAIN A BALLOT. ☑️📄