

Town Administrator Report

April 28, 2019

The Town Office continues to function at full staff levels. We practice social distancing and are working on plans on how to maintain social distancing for when we are able to reopen and the upcoming July election.

Town Meeting

With the emergency extended until at least May 15th and an assumption that it will be unsafe to have large gatherings at least through the summer, I encourage the Board to consider a secret ballot referendum to piggyback on the July election. I fear that even if we could hold a traditional Town Meeting some of our residents would be reticent to attend and be disenfranchised.

I am in the process of researching some of the legal protocol for this type of election but some things to consider are:

- Do we only put on the Budget and Business Warrant Articles? This would leave off the marijuana, land use ordinance and most of the capital articles. The assumption would be that we could hold a special Town Meeting in the fall or another secret ballot for these items in the November election. Two main reasons for leaving these off the warrant are:
 - Keeping the length of the ballot to a minimum as it is too late for us to get a thumb drive coded and these ballots would be hand counted.
 - It may be difficult for residents to attend a Public Hearing or Zoom meeting and be able to fully be educated on the land use and marijuana articles.
- Do we include the question regarding the change to a Manager/Select Board form of government?

Budget

The next subject we logically come to is the budget. With these uncertain times, what do we do to limit the mil rate this year? Many communities are halting spending on anything but what is absolutely necessary for this budget season with an assumption of lost revenue this year. Durham is a little insulated from the issue of reduced revenue because we are a calendar year and we budget off of last year's actual revenue and not a forecast.

I have taken our spending to date and looked at places where we may be able to not spend. The truth is, there is not much to cut as our budgets are tight already.

The budget could be decreased by taking a bi-year in two places:

- **Maintenance Paving.** This could decrease the budget by \$300,000 canceling out the additional monies we need to raise for the bond payment due this year on the 2019 Bond.
- **Capital Funding.** This is two pronged. On one hand, we could hold off raising any additional capital funding. On the other hand, we could access some of the existing capital funds to pay some of the existing debt payments due.

In addition to these steps, we could also use some undesignated funds to offset the mil rate. This is a step I have opposed in the past but with the pandemic, the Town has a responsibility to mitigate the economic effects on the residents as much as is possible.

The next budget question is what Capital Projects are funded this year. There are several Fire Department projects that need to be funding; SCBA cylinders, Protective Gear, Well and Septic. In addition, with the RFP for the plow truck coming in at below \$190,000, do we place the question on the warrant knowing the funds will not be raised from taxes and it is unlikely the Town will receive such an advantageous price in the future.

I have received a request to look at the savings which may accompany a reduction in hours for employees. Durham is a direct reimbursement employer. If an employee claims unemployment (partial or complete) and is approved, the Town is direct billed for the expense of the unemployment. It is thought the Federal Government will reimburse this expense by 50% but this is not a certainty. Preliminary numbers, making a number of assumptions (see spreadsheet), indicates the Town may be able to save up to \$13,500 for partial labor reduction or \$35,000 for a full temporary labor reduction. This does not take into account the cost on morale, possible employee attrition or services which will be unavailable to residents.

I am enclosing for you estimated impact sheets with reduced spending. This assumes:

- Maintenance paving is decreased to \$60,000, only for possible required repairs.
- The dump truck is purchased.
- No new funding for capital is raised.
- We use the Fire Department Capital Fund to pay for the Ambulance Bond Payment.
- We use the excess Excise Tax saved from the Public Works budget to pay for a portion of the 2019 Road Bond.
- We use approximately \$80,000 from undesignated funds to offset cemeteries, Debt payment, Manager Search, Emergency Fund and the raise pool.
- Raises are held at 2% for all Town Employees.

Pine Tree Waste

Nate and Erica from Pine Tree Waste will be “here” to answer any questions. If we go ahead with a secret ballot Town Meeting in July, we will have authority to pay them the increased amount which will be billed in August. The Town would be without a contract for the first 15 days of July but Pine Tree is willing to work with us. As the contract takes into account any increase in tipping revenue for recycling, there is no advantage, and possibly a disadvantage, to delaying the vote on a three year contract.

TAN

Please note that the use of undesignated funds this year may cause a need for a TAN next year.

I will be putting together a motion and updated figures to cover a TAN for this year. We will require the TAN due to the decrease in revenue (which should be recouped later in the year) and the inability to commit taxes until after the July election. This will be a full month after the regular date of our commitment.

Androscoggin River Upgrade

I have included the letter proposed as an approval of the upgrade of the Androscoggin River from a Grade C to a Grade B. After reading the letter, I have not changed any of the wording. The impact to Durham would be minimal due to a lack of commercial entities along the river and may be a benefit to residents who utilize the river for recreational purposes and those who live along the river.

Other Business not Covered in the Agenda

I have received a request for us to renew our contract with our website host. We originally contracted with Virtual Cities and Towns which has now been taken over by Civic Plus. They are updating their contracts to reflect this change. The amount listed on the contract corresponds with the amount for which we have budgeted.

I have added to the agenda oaths for election workers, registrar and warden. The Town is required to appoint these poll workers no later than May 1st.