

## **Selectboard Report**

### **March 2, 2010 – March 1, 2011**

At its first regular meeting after Town Meeting 2010, the Selectboard met with Ted Kellogg who graciously agreed to assess what needed to be done at the Creamery. Based on these recommendations, we completed \$2,125 of work on the Creamery and we plan to dedicate the entire annual rental income for 2011-2012 plus an additional \$2,000 to continue this work. We believe, however, that the issues raised by the repairs needed to this building should be considered in a broader light: what does the Town plan to do with this building in the future?

To that end, we applied for and were granted a \$8,000 Municipal Planning Grant. This money will enable us to hire a consultant to assess the housing needs of our Fire Department and our Highway Department, investigate available options and propose solutions to the Town. Should the existing buildings be repaired? Should the current Town Garage facility be expanded to include the Fire Department? Should a new site be sought and a new building be constructed to house both departments. Obviously, the results of the consultant's work will not be binding but will, rather, provide a solid base of information that will enable us all to move effectively toward deciding what is best for the Town.

In that same light, we believe that the Town must decide what should be done regarding the exterior of the Community Hall. A year ago it cost \$1,800 to paint the north side of the building. This past year we budgeted \$2,000 to paint the south side. Because of new lead paint regulations, the lowest bid was \$3,500. Siding the entire building – which is not eligible for an historic preservation funding – would cost approximately \$50,000. Should 5 people make a decision to continue painting or to install siding? We do not think so and so are proposing Article #17 to the voters in the hopes of provoking a discussion about this.

This past year The Highway Department completed several major projects, funded by grants. The Clay Knob culvert on Park Hill Road was replaced. \$56,322 of this \$62,580 project was funded by a grant from the Vermont Department of Transportation. Bridge #17 on Route 144 was replaced. The total cost of this project was \$335,812. We received \$315,537 in stimulus funds and our match of \$20,275 came from the money we had put aside in a CD many years ago. A Rain Garden was installed at the intersection of Stage and Lake Roads. This not only helps with the storm water run-off but also has given us a long-needed place to put the Stop signs. This project cost \$13,540 and was primarily funded by a grant from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources for \$10,400. Additionally the Town received a \$10,000 grant from Better Backroads for roadside ditching as well as \$44,084 from VTrans for damage we incurred during the July 29 and August 8, 2009 summer storms.

In many instances, it was the existence of our dedicated Grant Match Fund that qualified us to be able to apply for these grants. After several years of using these funds to guarantee grants, we have actually had to spend most of the \$7,000 you voted in 2008, and we are now asking you (Article #16) to replenish these funds.

At Town Meeting 2010, Article 16 authorized the Selectboard to borrow up to \$87,000 to purchase a new payloader. We obtained a Municipal Equipment Fund Loan for that amount at 2% interest, sold our old payloader for \$22,000 and used \$13,000 from the Equipment fund for the remainder of the down payment for a 2010 CAT payloader. We had estimated that the payments for the new payloader would be the same as the old grader payments. When we realized, however, that we could save money by shortening the term of the loan, we opted for higher annual payments.

How could we afford to do that without raising taxes? In Fiscal Year 2009-2010, the Highway Department received reimbursements for two projects (North Lake Road Ditching and Highway Emergency Grant) that

had been previously paid for with regular highway funds. These reimbursements totaled \$51,084. The Selectboard committed \$30,000 to the Equipment Fund to be used toward the payloader payments. The actual cost of the municipal loan will be \$92,220 and we will be budgeting \$66,500 over the next 5 years. The difference of \$22,720 will come from the Equipment Fund.

We also used some of this income to pay off the balance on the Storm Drain Project. The 2009-2010 Highway Budget thus remained in the black and had a carry over of \$2,656. In other equipment news, the Grader was paid off in October.

On the town wide fundraising front, Selectboard member Gina Cull has brought several very popular new events to Town: the Basket Party, the Chowder Cook-Off and the Car Show. These activities raised money that was used to expand the fun available to everyone on Family Day. Please see the report from this Committee on page 30.

Other accomplishments:

- The Town of Benson's designation as a Village Center was renewed this past spring. This enables the Town to receive preference for much funding available through the State.
- The Planning Commission has initiated work on long range efforts to make Route 22A a safer route to travel.
- Work continued on reviewing and updating when needed the Town's policies.
- The ATV Ordinance was amended to permit ATV's on Stage Road in the Village.
- Project Worksafe came and assessed the safety of all Town buildings. Corrections were made where indicated.
- Our monthly newsletter is now paying for itself, thanks to our local advertisers.

To facilitate the transfer of the responsibility of Town Treasurer from Jan Ladd to Daphne Bartholomew, we contracted with an independent auditor, Telling Associates in Middlebury. The final results of their audit should be available by Town Meeting 2011. Additionally, we have been able to encourage people to run for the position of Auditor. If we are able to return to having 3 auditors, we believe we will be able to avoid a large annual expense for accounting services

Two Town employees left us during this past year. Bob Ballard retired after many years of service in the Highway Department. Pete Parent was hired to replace him as Equipment Operator. We also accepted with regret Wayne Kenney's resignation as Zoning Administrator. David Wallace has stepped up to fill this position.

On the Budget front, our biggest challenge, other than trying to maintain our Town buildings, was the proposed 17% increase in employee insurance and the fact that all four of our eligible employees have elected to join the program. To try and keep this line item "neutral", our employees have agreed to change to a high deductible plan. We will try this for one year.

So, where do we stand? Our goal was to level fund without being penny-wise and pound-foolish, but given the costs over which we have no control, that was not possible. Last year we asked you to raise \$198,932 for the Selectboard Budget. This year we are asking you to approve \$216,583. \$12,200 of the \$17,650 increase is for insurance. For the Highway last year we asked you to raise \$332,701. This year we are asking for \$338,572. The difference of \$5,871 represents a .02% increase.

We appreciate everyone who has volunteered to serve our Town during this past year and we continue to encourage all of you to become more involved.