

SELECTBOARD REPORT

We are richly blessed

It is often proudly remarked in conversation, the Town Newsletter, the Front Porch Forum and our public meetings that Westford is a special place to live. There are a number of characteristics one may cite to support this assertion. Above all, Westford is a special place to live because of who we are as a people and a community. We are a people who selflessly volunteer and give of our time, talents and resources to make this place we call home more caring, nurturing, enriching and safe. We are thankful to all of you who work in ways great and small, seen and unseen that make Westford, our home, a special place indeed.

Town General Fund Budget

After careful consideration and deliberation, we are proposing a budget that may result in an additional amount to be raised in taxes of \$5,535 over last year's budget. This represents a 0.53% increase or \$4.70 per \$100,000 in home value. Examples of where this additional funding would be employed are as follows:

- \$17,000 to defer increasing legal fees.
- \$10,000 in matching funds for a \$90,000 Huntley Road culvert replacement grant.
- \$10,000 to defer administrative salaries, 2010 elections administration expenses and costs related to in-house property appraisals by our Listers.
- \$8,000 to increase our Road Department capital equipment fund allocation to \$15,000 in this budget verses \$7,000 in the 2008-2009 budget.
- \$8,000 to defer an increase in management fees from the Chittenden County Solid Waste District related to trash and recycling services.
- \$4,000 to fund an "on-call" road crew member. This position will cover peak service demand periods and may substitute for full time road crew members in their absence. It also enables the transfer of legacy knowledge from our seasoned staff to the succeeding generation of road crew staff.

There is also a possibility that we may see a reduction in the amount to be raised in taxes of \$50,465 over last year's budget. This would represent a 4.83% decrease or -\$20.40 per \$100,000 in home value. The Town is applying for a \$56,000 grant from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) to defer expenses related to the reconstruction of the southern portion of Woods Hollow Road. The work on Woods Hollow Road will occur whether or not this grant is awarded. In an effort to be more conservative in our estimation of expected income for the 2010-2011 fiscal year, we did not include these funds in case the grant did not come through. The Town will be advised prior to the tax rate being set in July whether or not we will receive this grant award. If we do not receive the grant, the tax rate would increase as described above. If we do receive the award, the tax rate would decrease as described above.

Separate Town Articles to be voted on by Australian ballot

There are several proposed, separate articles for your consideration. Two of the articles have a potential tax rate impact. The remainder are administrative in nature:

ARTICLE *Shall the Town authorize an additional \$15,000 to fund the Equipment Reserve Fund?*

As mentioned above, our proposed budget increases our Road Department capital equipment fund allocation by \$8,000 for a total of \$15,000 this year, versus \$7,000 in the 2008-2009 budget. We believed this allocation should really have been \$30,000 but decided to place the additional \$15,000 in this separate Australian ballot article for you to help us make that decision. Please keep in mind that this reserve fund formerly had \$40,000 annual allocations made to it, which in recent years was cut to \$20,000 and then to \$7,000 last year. The less money we save for the purchase of a \$210,000 grader or a \$140,000 dump truck, the more we will have to bear in future interest expense on borrowed funds. The impact of passing this article would be an addition of \$6.80 in taxes based on a home value of \$100,000.

ARTICLE *Shall the Town establish a Town Emergency Shelter Generator Reserve Fund in accordance with 24 VSA §2804 for the purchase of a generator at the Westford School in the event of an emergency, and raise by taxes for three consecutive years commencing in 2010 the amount of \$10,000 each year for deposit into the fund?*

The Westford School is our Town's designated emergency shelter in the draft Westford Emergency Operations Plan. People would be able to use this shelter during a declared Town emergency event, such as a severe ice storm, flooding, etc. There is currently no backup power supply at the school. Under current circumstances in the event of a power outage, our emergency shelter would not have any heat, water supply, operating toilets, lighting, etc. As a side note, our children attending the Westford School are subject to these same conditions when the power goes out while school is in session. Vermont Emergency Management has been offering annual grants for the purpose of funding the installation of generator facilities for designated emergency shelters. These grants require 50% matching funds from the Town. The current estimate to fund such a project for our emergency shelter is \$60,000. Our matching funds in this case would be \$30,000. We are hoping to raise these funds in equal installments over a three year period. The impact of passing this article would be an addition of \$4.50 in taxes based on a home value of \$100,000.

ARTICLE *If the Town does not receive grant funds in a minimum amount of \$90,000 prior to June 30, 2011 for replacement of the Huntley Road Culvert, shall the Town establish a Huntley Road Culvert Replacement Reserve Fund in accordance with 24 VSA §2804 and deposit \$10,000 contained in the 2010-2011 budget into such fund?*

As previously mentioned, a portion of the proposed increase in the amount to be raised in taxes is related to \$10,000 in matching funds from the Town for a \$90,000 grant from the Vermont Agency of Transportation for the purpose of replacing a culvert that runs under Huntley Road, draining into the Brown's River, near the intersection of Drinkwine Lane. In the event we are not awarded this grant, having these funds placed in a reserve account for this project enables the Selectboard to take advantage of currently unannounced potential grant funding that may become available from other sources. It also gives us something to work with in the event this culvert collapses and some stop-gap measures must be taken by the Town.

ARTICLE *Shall the Town establish a Municipal Records Reserve Fund in accordance with 24 VSA §2804 for restoration, preservation, conservation and computerization of municipal records, to be funded by revenues of not less than \$3.00 per page nor more than \$4.00 per*

page, as determined by the Selectboard, received from recording fees established under 32 VSA §1671 (a)(1) and (6)?

One of our goals for the coming year is to initiate the computerization of municipal records. State statute requires that a Municipal Records Reserve Fund be established by a Town if you pursue computerizing municipal records to ensure adequate funds are available for municipal records administration and preservation. Establishment of new reserve funds is required to be approved by the voters. A fee of \$10 per page is currently assessed to file land records. \$3 to \$4 of the \$10 fee would be allocated to this reserve fund. The rest of the fee income would go into the Town's general revenue. This article has no tax impact.

ARTICLE *Shall the Town establish a Fire Equipment Capital Reserve Fund in accordance with 24 VSA §2804 to purchase vehicles and equipment for the Westford Volunteer Fire Department?*

Another of the Town's goals for the coming year is to establish a formal Capital Budget. As previously mentioned, establishment of new reserve funds is required to be approved by the voters. We would like to establish this reserve fund for the Town's Capital Budget management. We are not proposing any tax funding of this account this year.

2009 Grants & Accomplishments

The following grants were secured:

- "Better Back Roads", VT Agency of Transportation - \$10,000 for improvements to Pettingill Road.
- Climate Change Grant & Energy Efficiency Lighting Program - \$6,000 for improvements to the Town Office.
- Salt Shed site planning grant - \$15,000
- Trees for Streams Grant from WNRCD & Essex Center for Technology - \$340 plus free planting labor from the Tech Center students to plant approximately 25 trees and 25 shrubs along the Brown's River bank at the old town garage site.
- Municipal Education Grant for Affordable Housing Seminar - \$2,500 value shared with the towns of South Burlington and Hinesburg, to develop contemporary strategies to encourage the development of affordable housing.

Melissa Manka, the Town Planning Coordinator, continues to be integral to our success in securing grant funding for Westford.

Examples of the Town's accomplishments this year are:

- Energy efficiency upgrades to the Town Office
 - o Through grant funds secured, we were able to air seal and insulate the building and install a more energy efficient hot water heater and energy efficient replacement lighting. Pat Haller, a town volunteer, was instrumental in enabling the Town to secure this grant funding and also served as our project manager for the improvements.
- Establishment of a Town Energy Committee
 - o Pat Haller initiated this concept and volunteered to chair our Energy Committee. This Committee has been very active promoting and assisting with energy

conservation, not only in our town buildings but also private residences in town through their “Button-up Workshops”, encouraging the development and use of renewable energy. They also pursued grant funding to underwrite future energy efficiency initiatives. Look for their table at Town Meeting and discover ways to save.

- Adoption of revised Zoning and Subdivision Regulations
- Enrollment in the Regular National Flood Insurance Program
 - o This enables greater access to federal financial aid in times of emergency/disaster declaration and allows residents to purchase up to \$250,000 in federally subsidized flood insurance (as opposed to \$35,000 under our former plan) for residential dwellings. Melissa Manka’s efforts, on behalf of the Town, were essential to our successful enrollment in this program.
- Completed town wide reappraisal.
- Conversion of the Common Road and Route 128 intersection to a “T” design, addressing long standing safety concerns for that area.
- Adoption of a Town Trails Ordinance for their preservation and safe use.
- Working to make FAHC Westford’s primary default hospital destination for EMS transport.
 - o Nearly complete. NMC medical direction has agreed and an agreement is being drafted between the Town and Fairfax Rescue to formalize this directive.
- Working to reduce/eliminate St. Alban’s dispatching services
 - o Working with Essex PD to assume responsibility for dispatching Fairfax Rescue. Would require a one-time investment of \$3,500 in radio equipment and licensing. Would eliminate \$9,000 in budgeted expenses for dispatching services.
- Extended the service life of a Town dump truck by four years
 - o The road crew worked very diligently preparing and installing a new dump body on one of our older dump truck’s chassis, extending the service life of this vehicle and postponing its replacement purchase.
- Added an “on-call” road crew member
 - o This position will cover peak service demand periods and may substitute for full time road crew members in their absence. It also enables the transfer of legacy knowledge from our seasoned staff to the succeeding generation of road crew staff.
- Expanded use of the Town website
 - o A big thank you to Ted Horton and Chuck McGill for their continued support of the Town’s website. This year our Recreation Committee made electronic applications for Rec programs available through the website. Essex Rescue also has established a link on the site providing monthly helpful health tips.

2010 Grants & Goals

The following are the Town’s current potential grants:

- Huntley Road culvert replacement - \$90,000 from VTrans (plus a \$10,000 match from the Town Budget)
- Woods Hollow Road reconstruction - \$56,000 from VTrans (southern end of Woods Hollow)
- Town Library Energy Efficiency - \$13,588

- Energy efficiency grants to be announced – being pursued by our Energy Committee

Examples of the Town's goals for 2010 are:

- Northern Route 128 repaving by VTrans
 - o Through the vigilance of former Selectboard Chair Cherie Dunkley and more recently Rich Elmore and Representative Martha Heath, the repaving of Route 128 from a point two miles south of the Town Village to Route 104 is in the VTrans budget this year. The reconstruction of the southern end of Route 128 to Route 15 is in the two to three year plan queue.
- Adopt a formal Capital Budget for capital assets funding management
 - o We have been funding an equipment reserve for the road department for many years on an informal basis. We are now looking at adopting a tool to better manage our comprehensive inventory of capital assets (buildings, road equipment, fire trucks, etc). This not only provides our Board with a good planning tool, it expands the Town's opportunities to apply for grant funding and utilization of zoning impact fees.
- Revise the Town's zoning fee schedule.
 - o The Town's current zoning fee schedule is well below "market" as compared with surrounding municipalities.
- Adopt a revised Town Plan
- Adopt a Town Emergency Operations Plan
 - o Erik Brennan is heading up this effort for our community. This is not just a great emergency preparation tool it is also required to be in place for the Town to be eligible to apply for certain State and Federal grants.
- Implement an electronic, computerized municipal records system
 - o This initiative has several benefits: title searches can be done electronically resulting in less handling of original documents extending their preservation, and an off-site electronic file of our documents is maintained for disaster recovery in the event of a fire, water damage, etc.
- Property appraisal to be done by Listers
 - o Appraisal work will be performed in-house in an effort to improve quality.
- Complete Ancient Roads Committee work.
- Work to further improve the energy efficiency of town buildings.
- Increase the electronic distribution of the Town Newsletter.
- Continue to expand and enhance our utilization of and communications through the Town website.

Special Recognition

We would like to recognize Pat Haller for his exceptional volunteer contributions to our community in the field of energy conservation over the past year. On behalf of the people of Westford, we truly thank you and your family for your inspirational commitment to service.

In Closing

Your time and attention to this report is very much appreciated. Our Board worked very diligently and held many special meetings in order to present the town budget proposal before

you. We extend our gratitude to all our town residents, committee members and town staff that assisted us and contributed to drafting the 2010-2011 budget.

We would like to thank you all for the privilege of serving you as your representatives on the Selectboard. We understand you have placed in us a great responsibility and a great trust. Our effectiveness is always enhanced by your active engagement in the process of addressing the challenges we face and pursuing the goals we hope to achieve. Now more than ever, we must draw on our strength as a community. Together we will strive to ensure Westford continues to be a very special place to live.

Respectfully submitted,
John Quinn, Chair
David A. Tilton
Robert Bancroft