**Town Manager Update**

*September 13, 2021*

I have several pieces of news about grants projects. First, the Shared Streets Shared Streets Pedestrian Lights project finished, and we have had no further complaints about the bollards protecting the light pole and those waiting to cross. For the FEMA Hazard Mitigation grant for Walker Brook, an RFQ/P for the preliminary engineering study for hydraulics and hydrology went out, with bids due September 22. We have submitted a grant proposal to MIIA, our insurance association (who runs a very useful grant program) for $1632 for chainsaw safety equipment, and last but not least, we submitted and were granted— in record time—two Community Compact grants, one for contract development for solid waste disposal (to replace the current contract with Casella) and one for a classification and compensation study to update our job descriptions and pay schedule, which I put out to bid on August 18 and for which bids are due September 21. This last one was the work I promised to try to avoid spending the $25,000 approved at the special Town Meeting. Those funds still remain in case the work is more expensive than the $25,000 we will receive for the grant.

I successfully renewed the three-year contract with Dufour Escorted Tours, Inc. for student transportation to technical schools, following all necessary bidding procedures. The winning bid was also the only bid, and was somewhat higher than the budget ($2,379.60 on a $100,000+ bid), so unless there are several days on which students are not transported, we’ll have to transfer some funds at the end of the year.

I have a brief update on Town Hall renovation regarding the timeline and sequence. We are setting up a meeting with the owner of the bank building across Carson Avenue to negotiate a lease, if possible. We’re looking for a lease from October for at least six months, with a possible three-month extension. We need fiber installed at the Town Office, as well as the new phone system (which will be easier to transfer to wherever we end up), moving one office per week starting in November. We also have a substantial bat problem which could take tens of thousands of dollars to resolve; I have a meeting with the Animal Control Officer Wednesday. We’re looking to get the engineering work bid as soon as possible, which will include the service of bidding the construction, hoping for construction bids in by Nov. 1 for a Jan 1 start date and a three-month project.

I convened a meeting of the financial staff as well as representatives from the Select Board and Finance Committee to go over a number of items. We reviewed the effect of COVID-19 on last year’s operations; had an update on new staff; covered the Citizens’ Energy solar project, Town Hall renovation, and the Walker Brook hydrologic study; spoke of the upcoming classification and compensation study with options for average, above average, and competitive wages; I asked the team to look at a couple of comprehensive financial policies and procedures and consider compiling the Town’s into one document; and most importantly, discussed options for spending the Town’s ARPA funds. The group generally agreed that there were sufficient infrastructure needs, including roads and sewer, to focus on those projects. We also had a request from the Water District for $145,000 in engineering funds, which is allowable under ARPA spending rules. Finally, we discussed forming a staff-level capital planning and debt group, with Select Board and Finance Committee input.

Staff are working on the contract with Regional Resources Group for assessing services for FY22. This will be a one-year contract, as was agreed last year; we will have to go out to bid for any three-year contract, as RRG has proposed for future years.

The Highway Supervisor reports that all of the new hires are working out very well, with a substantial amount of postponed work getting done and a friendly crew.

Finally, I’d like to commend our Accountant, Sandra Albano, for hosting our auditor, Tom Scanlon, and the entire financial team for a spotless management letter, the vehicle used to describe any deficiencies, of which we had none.