**Town Manager Update**

*December 11, 2023*

Preliminary budget docs are coming in. The DPW is expecting expenses close to the ten-year average; the Senior Center is expecting to exceed that, but not by very much.

I’m pleased to report that we honored about 65 volunteers at the Volunteer Brunch yesterday. Kudos to Alyssa for organizing, and thanks to those who donated to the raffles: Kelly’s Package Store; Dalton Rays Tanning; Greenridge Variety; L.P. Adams; the CRA; Zinky’s Pub; the Dalton Restaurant, and Porta Via.

I spoke with Matt Kerwood, Pittsfield’s Finance Director, about the recent sewer bill from Pittsfield being $71,000 over the original estimate. I learned that Pittsfield’s sewer account has been running at a deficit for years. The Department of Revenue really doesn’t like revenue deficits, and has been taking the deficit from their retained earnings. Finally, DOR required a real fix, and they and Pittsfield settled on this year’s 25% rate hike. That’s part of the $71,000 increase above last year’s estimate. DOR seems fine with the current plan, even though there’s still a small deficit. Matt believes the new mayor will look favorably on a new approach to rate increases: rather than once every three years, which leads to sticker shock, he’s proposing an annual increase at some objectively defensible rate, perhaps the Consumer Price Index. This would make budgeting for Dalton much more predictable—though there would still be some level of fluctuation from any estimate. Another structural problem is that Pittsfield sets its sewer rates in July (taking into account the prior fiscal year’s usage), and of course we’ve already had our Town Meeting by then (as we are required to by law). So we’re still looking at an estimate, but Mr. Kerwood is hoping it will be closer going forward.

I spoke with Jim Driscoll about hiring for the Fire Chief position and the tower truck situation. They are interviewing three out of at least 12 applicants for Fire Chief and hope to make an offer the week of the 18th. They are also continuing to pursue litigation to recover all the tower truck money paid to Northern Fire Equipment for breach of contract.

I heard from Rep. Natalie Blais, who has a proposed bill that would allow the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources to own land. This would simplify our situation with the Bardin parcel, though it may not get through the legislative process in time. Still, I’ve offered to provide testimony should it be needed.

As at least some of you noted, there is a universal waste shed being built by McCann students for use at the Transfer Station. The shed will, to begin with, receive fluorescent bulbs and lithium batteries. Other items may be added if Dalton would like to take on collections now done regionally.

We received an estimate for constructing a sewer line along Dalton Division Road as part of the eventual reconstruction. The low number was $1.7M for an alternative that Bud and I do not prefer due to its requiring pumping; another option, for $1.8M, also requires some pumping. The DPW Superintendent and I think the best option is the one that is completely gravity-fed, which would cost $2M.

Thanks very much to Jill Taylor for producing the Town Report for many years. She is stepping down from that task, but now that Alyssa has an assistant who has related experience, we are planning to produce it in-house, as well as a Town newsletter.

Our Veterans Services Officer, Stephen Roy, is resigning from his position. I have spoken with the managers of a number of other involved in the current District, who have no basic problem with the proposal. That said, the City of North Adams, the current host municipality for our Veterans Service Officer, has suggested that they might not be willing to continue working with Dalton; our population brings their district over the number with which two staff are considered adequate; they would need three to be in compliance with state law and are looking to stay with two staff. We should be good for the rest of the year, but I have contacted Pittsfield to inquire as to whether we could pay for one of their agents to come to Dalton for 4 hours per week, as Stephen Roy has done.

The Town Planner and I have been working with BRPC’s on digital equity issues. The state has identified nine unserved locations in town; the Town Planner is identifying the individuals, most of who seem to live well off of a main road. We’ll contact them and confirm that they are not served, and ask why; I anticipate the main reason will be that they would have to install poles from the nearest street.

The Town Planner is also looking into the possibility of a brownfields grant for the former gas station next to the Post Office.

I requested and received a proposal of $5,500 for exploring the various options for a new lift or lifts at Town Hall, including cost estimates, and am planning to go ahead and having that work done in preparation for a possible capital article at Town Meeting.

Also, we have received an estimate of $4,900 for sidewalk engineering for Orchard Road, including a cost estimate, and I also intent to move forward with that.

On the sewer rehabilitation, the DPW Superintendent, Foreman, and I have met twice with the implementation team, who are doing some preliminary work now and will take a winter break for the more temperature-sensitive work, with a projected substantial completion date in May—some finish work could well run into June. They’re going to do some work before winter, then take a break while it’s too cold for construction till the weather warms up.

I usually give updates for significant progress or project completion, but I thought I’d give a more detailed update at the end of the year regarding some other slower-going projects:

* One general note regarding ARPA: projects need to be contracted for in about a year, before December 31, 2024, in order to be considered obligated. Any money not obligated by then is forfeited.
* Citizens’ PILOT – I am working with Town Counsel on negotiations. K-P Law has a specific template I had proposed to Citizens Energy, but they proposed substantial proposed changes to it.
* Town Academy – I am working with a volunteer to set up a series of meetings for next fall.
* Financial Management Review – this is in process with DOR Financial Management Bureau; I am expecting a report within a month or so.
* Parking lot lease – I have not yet heard back regarding a proposal.
* Cybersecurity review – I am continuing to work with MassTech and our IT consultant on our state cybersecurity audit. We have had three online meetings and expect a final report within a month.
* Easement for L. P. Adams – The Town installed drainage through L.P. Adams’ property with the promise of an easement but didn’t follow through. I am following through and plan to bring an article to you for the annual Town Meeting warrant.
* Town Hall roof load study – I am also moving forward on this project that was delayed due to Covid. The question is, will the Town Hall roof support a significant number of solar panels?

**Procurement**

* Potential grants for Walker Brook are on hold pending funding for engineering; this is on tap for Town Meeting. Regardless of the grant, The Town cost will likely require borrowing.
* A climate change “roadmap,” from TM funding – waiting for new draft from Green Committee.
* Website development, from Town Meeting funding – a working group met and discussed scope of services.
* The Electric Vehicle Charging Station at the CRA project, from ARPA funding is in process after many small delays.
* Orchard Road – slated for next construction season; will require a highly developed bid process.
* Space needs study (TM funding) – I have not yet developed the RFP for this.

**Department/Committee involvement:**

**DPW**: replacing the garage roof needs specs and bidding; we have $13,140 from FY23 encumbered in Dept. #401 plus additional FY24 401 money; we are moving forward with garage insulation (an $11k GC grant/$24,941 Berkshire Gas grant through CET); we are replacing a broken garage door; and renovation of the Transfer Station is at the conceptual level: we are considering revenue enhancement/enforcement; building composting and electronics disposal capacity; equipment replacement/purchase, and rebuilding the site, where the concrete blocks are beginning to crumble.

With other departments: first, I am participating in the Hazard Mitigation Plan process, which is being run by the EMD. Second, the Green Committee is proposing an EV charging station at Pine Grove Park; I’m working with the DPW Superintendent and Tony Pagliarulo on that. Also, as you may recall, Mr. Esko and I are looking into a Skate Park and have support from the Open Space and Recreation Committee to gather information and present a plan.

Longer-term possibilities include:
A Pine Grove Park upgrade; this will need input from DPW, Police, and the Building Superintendent; An employee handbook revision (I applied for a grant); the development of a

capital plan with a working group; and a proposal for a clean-up fund, as suggested, together with a proposal for an Health and Human Services Department for the Council on Aging, the Board of Health, and our Veterans Agent, perhaps with an added licensed Social Worker.