**Town Manager Update**

*January 13, 2025*

We are going to go out to bid for the Orchard Road project without the substantial drainage improvement planned due to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resource considering the drainage a change of use under Article 97. That means we would have to conduct an alternatives analysis, submit it to the Secretary, and provide replacement land of equal or greater natural resource value, acreage, and monetary value. Our DPW Superintendent is working with the engineer to address the drainage issue using only the road easement and bid the project as soon as possible for an April 1 start date.

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission is working on a MassSave and Green Communities competitive grant ($120K/yr. for 3 years) to support a shared municipal energy manager, who would work with a number of towns on school and municipal energy management projects. Our participation is supported by the Green Dalton Committee and I agree the position could help the Town’s energy management and might bring in funding for energy projects.

There are new residents at 6 Gulf Road, Oliver and Stephanie Santillan and their two boys. Habitat for Humanity reports that they look forward to getting to know the local community, as well as getting involved in local activities to support the maintenance and the beautification of their new neighborhood.

Based on the Community Compact grant for updating the employee handbook, I look forward to two staff meetings later this month to go over what staff like and any suggestions they have for changes. We’re having two so that offices can be covered and as many employees as possible can participate in an in-person discussion. One change I would like to make is crediting employees who have municipal experience with their municipal time worked for purposes of vacation time.

I’m sorry to report that the firm that was doing our website re-design was not performing well. I give great credit to a volunteer, Todd Logan, who is very experienced in web design and who helped draft the invitation for bids, for seeing that our scope of work was not being properly addressed. After giving the company time to correct their deficiencies, notifying them that we would not pay any further invoices until the deficiencies were corrected, after receiving a subsequent invoice without the deficiencies being addressed, and after conferring with Town Counsel, I terminated the contract. About half the $15,000 allocated was spent before we took that step. I am conferring with Mr. Logan regarding lessons learned and the possibilities of making substantial improvements to our existing website using the remaining funds.

I would like to note that President Biden signed the Social Security Fairness Act, which rescinds the Windfall Elimination Provision, affecting all public-sector employees with pension systems, and the Government Pension Offset, affecting surviving spouses. During my time here, I recall one job applicant turned down a position specifically because of that, so not only is it good news for retirees, it is good news for recruitment efforts among those who are well-informed about retirement pay.