



TOWN OF WINSLOW, MAINE

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Monthly Report to the Town Council –August 2023 - Presented September 11, 2023

Esteemed Councilors,

The August Coffee with the Manager was changed to an afternoon Ice Cream with the manager and was well-attended, including Councilors Trahan and Caron. We had good discussion surrounding road maintenance, taxes the revaluation process and tax relief programs. This type of open discussion in a relaxed informal setting is invaluable in both educating the public about Town Operations and issues, but also in getting their feedback and ideas.

The annual MTCMA Manager's Institute was held at Sugarloaf August 9 through 11. Of interest, there was a full session on the revaluation process. Judy Mathiau has done a wonderful job of explaining the process to everyone, but the presenter from the State was able to explain in depth why this process is mandatory, that it's a Constitutional requirement in the State of Maine, and that the process is about ensuring equality among taxpayers. It was eye-opening to see how many municipalities are either starting, in the middle of, or completing the process of town-wide revaluation right now. The experiences are similar across the board in terms of the percentage increase in value. Many municipalities were certifying below 100%, which means that sales are not matching up with property values. The lower the certification ration, the more money a municipality loses in Homestead, BETE and state revenue sharing. The net result is that the residential taxpayers end up subsidizing those losses because there is less revenue to cover the Town's expenses. So while the tax bills are up this year, they would be worse if we lost these revenues. Winslow collected \$1.1 million in Homestead and BETE reimbursement from the State last year and another \$1.5 million in revenue sharing.

The new Tax Collector/Codes and Assessing Assistant, Vanessa Cote, started with the Town on August 22 and has been catching on quickly. She is eager to learn and has been researching her own questions before going to her supervisors for help. She is already proving to be a wonderful addition to the Town of Winslow team!

Tax bills went out at the end of the month, and unfortunately residential taxpayers are seeing more of an increase than commercial taxpayers due to the commercial values having been more accurate prior to the revaluation. Statutorily the Town cannot waive interest, and there is already a payment plan of quarterly installments instead of one lump sum payment. We encourage individuals to take advantage of the State's expanded tax relief programs that are out there, and those in true hardship may apply for a tax abatement through the Assessor.

In happier news The Town had the Employee Appreciation Picnic on Thursday, August 31, paid for entirely by donations and manager/department head contributions. We sincerely thank our hard-working, dedicated employees who do so much for our residents and for the people who visit this town.

In project news:

Chaffee Brook Pump Station upgrades continue on track for a November river crossing.

Sunset Heights is still in the funding phase. The hope is that construction on a portion of the area can start next summer, but it will depend on how much funding is available.

The Cushman Road stormwater project received a waiver of the BABAA requirements which were requiring that concrete pipe be manufactured and sold in the USA. Pipe will now be ordered from Canada and the project should be able to commence in September.

The Public Works Director and I met with FEMA for a preliminary reimbursement discussion on the cleanup at Fort Halifax Park resulting from the May Day Storm. FEMA will be onsite September 12 to assess the cleanup requirements in person. Ranger Construction who has provided the quote for this work will also attend.

The old Winslow Junior High was fully decommissioned and boarded up in August. This allows the building's electricity to be disconnected, saving approximately \$1,200 per month in utility bills.

The assessment of the current Town Office building for the Municipal Facilities Study is in negotiation. Haley Ward believes they can find some savings to make this more affordable, understanding that the Town can make no decisions without this important piece of information.

The Ticonic Bridge project moved to the single direction traffic phase on August 14. Traffic from Winslow to Waterville is being detoured to the Carter Memorial Bridge. MDOT is also fully closing the bridge to overnight traffic on many weekdays. Be aware of the signs indicating these closures and check the Town's website for updates. Travelers may also wish to consider travelling north to cross over to Fairfield in Benton depending on their final destination. NOTE this is an MDOT project not under Town control. Citizen concerns regarding this project should be directed to Robbin Lanpher, the MDOT project manager, at 207-941-4500 or via email at robin.lanpher@maine.gov.

Respectfully submitted by,
Erica LaCroix
Town Manager