



# TOWN OF WINSLOW, MAINE

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## Monthly Report to the Town Council –September 2023 - Presented October 10, 2023

Esteemed Councilors,

This will be my last full monthly report. I undertake this with mixed feelings. I want to thank the Council, my staff and the public for my last three years. It has been my honor to serve you.

I believe we've accomplished a lot in the last three years. Unfortunately, this was not possible without increases in the property tax bills. We had just fallen too far behind. Combined with the post pandemic economy and inflation, wage competition among essential workers, and lack of new development in the Town, expenditures have risen more than revenues. Despite this, the Town still provides the most services of any other municipality in the region, including Waterville, and taxes do not surpass those of our neighbors.

Significant accomplishments since October of 2020 include:

- Negotiation of two new labor contracts which brought Fire and Police salaries in line with market demand, as well as a comprehensive salary study for all employees.
- Implementation of the 4-day work week achieving extended evening office hours for the public without adding overtime or flex schedules that cause short-staffing during open hours.
- Overhauled the employee performance review system ensuring annual reviews are conducted and goals are met.
- Addition of 3 full-time firefighters and 1 full-time police officer.
- Addition of a second ambulance which, in combination with the additional fire staff has allowed Winslow to maintain rapid response times to EMS calls as Delta's ability to meet regional demand has declined. The unit was paid for out of existing capital funds without adding to the budget burden and the resulting transport revenue has fully funded the three new positions.
- Consolidation of Police and Fire into a single Public Safety Department, saving over \$100,000 annually.
- Coordination with Maine DOL and Winslow High School to create an internship program for students exposing them to municipal jobs.
- The Coffee With the Manager monthly open public meetings.
- Implementation of new Town Website and new asset management system, improving public outreach and information as well as the ability to track activities and plan for future capital expenditures.
- Use of TIF Economic Development Funds to make improvements and add community events
  - Addition of seasonal banners to the commercial corridor
  - Beautification Committee of volunteers to add plantings around Town improving aesthetics.
  - Coordinating with The Children's Discovery Museum to bring the Parade of Lights to the Winslow side of the River.
  - Concerts in the park (coordination meetings in progress)
- Addition of a dedicated Food Waste Recycling site.
- An infusion of \$2.4 million into the paving budget, \$1.7 million of which came from grant funding and sale of property revenues.
- Benton Avenue Sewer and Paving

- Chaffee Brook Pump Station collector replacement (underway with Congressional Earmark funds).
- Cushman Road area drainage improvements which will mitigate flooding in the McDonald's and Cumberland Farms area (underway with 95% grant funding).
- Completion of the 2018 Comprehensive plan prior to my departure.
- Launched the Modified Downtown Development Study with CMGC (beginning stages).
- Launched the Municipal Facilities Study to determine the most efficient and cost-effective path forward for Town facilities (in progress).
- Worked with Auditor to overhaul accounting procedures, streamline chart of accounts and implement best practices.
- Revamped budget process to add power point presentations designed to "tell the story", aimed at making the budget easier to digest for the general public.
- Procurement of \$3,759,000 in grant funding with another \$3,000,000 awaiting federal budget approval (not including \$800,000 in ARPA funding). This eclipses the increase in the tax bills of \$3.1 million since FY2021, meaning that for every additional dollar required from a taxpayer we have added more than a dollar to meet the Town's needs.

These accomplishments were only possible due to the support of Council and a staff that engaged fully, devoted their efforts, and provided the input required to make things happen.

While we've accomplished so much there is so much more to be done. With the energy provided by new manager Ella Bowman, and the dedication of the absolutely fantastic staff here in Winslow, we'll get there. I can't wait to see what you all achieve.

On to monthly news.

September saw the resignation of Deputy Fire Chief Scott Bolduc. DFC Bolduc devoted 3 ½ years of dedicated service to the Town and was a key player in the implementation of the Ambulance Transport Service. We wish him all the best in his future endeavors. The position has been posted internally and there are several internal candidates with solid credentials being considered as his replacement. It is not anticipated that we will need to go outside to fill the position.

Public Works has finally been able to fill the vacant Truck Driver position after five months, an indication that these wages need to be revisited in the upcoming contract. Randy Kitchen holds a Class A CDL and will start with the Town on October 10.

I would like to recognize Executive Assistant Kaitlyn Philbrick for her work on two projects. First is her research on a new notification system which she is presenting to you tonight. I delegated this project to Kaity and she has done a great job of interviewing providers and compiling a list of solutions with pros and cons. Second, and in my opinion most exciting, she spearheaded the meetings with the Maine Department of Labor and Winslow High School to implement a new student internship program for vocational students. This is a great opportunity to expose high school students to the careers offered in the municipal arena. They get some valuable work experience and the Town gets some volunteer assistance. Initially they are concentrating on light clerical work, but we hope to expand this to the boots-on-the-ground services, at least by shadowing staff, moving forward. The first student to participate will be on site the first week of October.

In project news:

Chaffee Brook Pump Station upgrades are underway. The river crossing portion (Phase I) of the project will be completed this year. We are still awaiting bond approval and may need to seek short-term financing with a BAN to cover the portion of Phase I not covered by the Earmark (which fortunately is now fully executed).



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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 will break ground the first week of October. Unfortunately this will close one lane of traffic on China Road which will impact Cumberland Farms, and to a greater extent McDonald's. The closure is expected to last approximately two to three weeks. While the timing of the project in conjunction with Ticonic Bridge construction is unfortunate, if this project were delayed the Town would lose the \$2.7 million dollars in MIAF funds which are covering 95% of the project.

Fort Halifax Park cleanup from the May Day Storm is a designated project with FEMA. The Public Works Director and I are working closely with FEMA to file all the required documents in order to have the project fully reimbursed. Work cannot begin until the ground in the Park firms up so that soil disturbance and damage are minimized.

Icon Environmental has issued an RFP for asbestos abatement at the old Junior High Building. This is the first step to demolition if the Council determines that is the desired direction.

Haley Ward has issued an updated proposal for amending the Municipal Facilities Study to do an engineering assessment of the current Town Office. That amendment is on your agenda. Funds are available in the Town Office, Police and Fire facilities capital accounts. This may require delaying flooring and paint renovations scheduled for this fiscal year.

The Ticonic Bridge project continues with Consolidated Communications scrambling to make up for lost time with the summer rains. They are having to close the bridge to all traffic overnight during the week. There has also been a new project manager assigned by MDOT. His name is Peter Brown.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Erica LaCroix  
Town Manager