



TOWN OF WINSLOW, MAINE

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Monthly Report to the Town Council –April 2023 - Presented May 8, 2023

Esteemed Councilors,

April showers bring May flowers...and so it seems although we maybe didn't need quite this much rain! The rain over the last weekend of the month caused the Kennebec to overflow its banks and flood Lithgow Street and Fort Halifax Park. Fortunately we don't seem to have incurred significant damage as some neighboring communities have. Thanks to our Public Works crews for being on their game!

The April 5 Coffee with the Manager brought some new faces and new perspectives on Town priorities and budgets. Among those present there was a desire to see the Town focus on growth in an upward direction rather than outward, safer and improved access for pedestrians and bike traffic, and a continued focus on Public Safety as a budget priority. There was also interest in serving on committees and events. The next Coffee with the Manager was supposed to be held at Maine Crisp on May 3, but will have to be relocated to the Library due to flooding on Lithgow Street. We will reschedule with Maine Crisp for June.

On April 3 we held the final budget workshop for the FY2024 municipal budget which was dedicated to the School Budget. While the school could not avoid an increase, they managed to find alternative funding sources and cut enough items to keep their increase below the rest of the municipal budget. Thanks to Peter Thiboutot and his staff for their diligence on this budget. On April 24 we held the budget Public Hearing and the first reading of the FY2024 Budget. For the first time the Town put on a full presentation for the public. Although it took longer than expected it was well received in terms of educating those present. I have received positive feedback, if not on the budget itself then at least on the way the information was presented. This was a huge amount of work from the staff, and they did a great job! Special thanks to Sherie Fisher for putting together 3 of the presentations; Public Works, Fire and Police. The second reading of the budget will be at this Council meeting tonight.

In project news;

Bids are in for the Chaffee Brook Pump Station for the force main river crossing. We were very disappointed to only receive two bids, and further dismayed that the lowest bid came in almost \$1 million higher than what had been anticipated. Council will see an amended order for borrowing authority for this project on this agenda.

We have applied for Congressional Directed Spending for the Sunset Heights project with Senators King and Collins and Representative Pingree. This year the project was selected to be moved forward by the Senators, which is the first step towards approval. We are thankful to Senator King and Senator Collins for recognizing the importance of this infrastructure project. Fingers crossed that we make it to the final round.

The Ticonic Bridge project started the first week in April and so far there have been only minor inconveniences to the traveling public. MDOT and Cianbro are sending us the traffic plan for each week by the prior Friday and the Town is keeping our website updated with the latest information.

This can be located on Facebook and on the Alert popup window on the home page of the website and is updated at least once per week.

The Municipal Facilities Study is ongoing and site assessment at the Public Works facility is underway. I met with Haley Ward last week and discussed multiple possibilities for how that site could be configured. I also discussed getting a proposal on renovation of the current facility so the two options can be compared side by side. This will happen only if the Public Works site is cleared as a potential location. If not we don't have anywhere to locate a new facility and the project will terminate or be suspended at that time.

Last, Environmental work at the Junior High building is ongoing and we can expect demolition cost projections within a few weeks. Regardless of the timeline for demolition we are going to need to make a decision regarding a complete shut-down and boarding up of the facility soon. The roof has a major leak which is posing a fire hazard, and the security system is failing and will cost significant money to repair. Without a security system we cannot leave the building's windows and doors exposed to vandals and trespassers.

In April the Property Maintenance Ordinance went into effect. Despite an outcry by a small portion of the residents we have had far more positive feedback. Homeowners are fed up with derelict properties (mostly owned by absentee landlords) that pose health hazards, harbor vermin and have a negative effect on the values of abutting properties. We have gotten numerous complaints of properties in violation. Most have been valid, but some were deemed to not have basis, such as a snowplow sitting in front of a garage with a piece of plywood leaning up against the side of the building. These issues do not rise to the level of a nuisance property and are not the type of thing the ordinance is intended to correct. However, we have made progress on a couple of the properties that we get the most comments on, and are in progress with others. Of note, Irving Oil has now put out a bid to have the abandoned fuel canopy on Bay Street demolished and has agreed to keep the area mowed until the contractors can do the work.

In staff news I would like to congratulate Audra Fleury for achieving her MTCTA Tax Collector Certification. These certifications take an average of 3 years to achieve and require a lot of classwork. While she doesn't need this certification as Town Clerk, she is supervising the staff that handles all of the Town's collections. Additionally, her expertise will be needed until we can hire her replacement in the Codes and Assessing Office and get them trained in the Tax Collector duties. Well done Audra!

Our new CEO has hit the ground running and is learning Winslow's Code and procedures. Every municipality is a little different, so there is always a learning curve. I am finding Jim to be very deliberate and diligent in his decision-making, and he is finding issues that we need to improve or upgrade as he goes. The public has been complementing his friendly demeanor and straightforwardness. Jim's goal for the coming year is to get all permitting available on-line. I would also like to thank Kaity Philbrick for filling in as the Codes/Assessing Assistant while we look for a replacement for Audra. While I miss her terribly as my Executive Assistant she has been working closely with Jim and together they are making excellent progress in process and procedure for both Codes and the Planning Board.

In closing, I want to congratulate our neighboring Town Manager in Oakland, Ella Bowman, on being awarded Municipal Employee of the Year by the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce. The awards ceremony was held on April 27 at the Enchanted Gables in Oakland. Ella's accomplishments were on display and all I can say is that Oakland is truly fortunate to have such a forward thinking and energetic leader growing that Town. I hope to follow her lead and do the same for Winslow!

Respectfully submitted by,
Erica LaCroix
Town Manager