



Memorandum

To: Board of Selectmen
CC: Heidi Jackson-Rhine
From: Paul Branscombe
Date: June 23, 2016
Re: Town Administrator`s Report

The month of July signals my first year as the Gilmanton Town Administrator which has been both a challenging and rewarding period of my Municipal career.

In the early days of my tenure I received a great deal of unfounded verbal accusations from residents inferring that I was responsible for the increase in the Town`s 2015 property taxes. This couldn`t be further from the truth and what transpired in March 2015 when the Town voted for a Default budget that was higher than the proposed Operating budget led to the increases reflected in the first 2015 tax bills.

There were many positive steps taken during the first few months in the Selectmen`s office and of particular significance was the retention of Marie Mora as our Finance Officer. She came to the Town office with over twenty five plus years-experience at the County level and helped transform our Finance Department. Marie took control of all aspects of our Finances including Payroll and Accounts Payable, functions which previously had been given to individuals with no financial experience and which ultimately caused problems. She recommended that we consider putting department budget items that were under the Executive budget back into the respective department budget so as to accurately reflect the cost of that particular department. This we carried out in the 2016 budget.

We increased the visibility of Department Head meetings and encouraged our Partners and Vendors to attend. Our Workers Compensation insurance carrier, Primex introduced us to a `Best Doctors` program designed to assure that our injured employees receive the best medical care possible while focusing on an expeditious return to work.

We resurrected the Joint Loss Management Committee under the leadership of Fire Chief Hempel and subsequently reviewed conditions at the Transfer Station, Highway Garage and the Public Safety Building. We established a Personnel Policy Committee spearheaded by Heidi Jackson-Rhine with participants from all departments.

Although the Town entered into a renewal contract effective July 1, 2015 with the PLT, then the Town's Property and Liability insurance carrier (knowing full well it was in run-off) we were able to negotiate better terms effective July 1, 2016 with Primex. This now allows every department to participate in on-going workshops and seminars where hopefully the learning experience will help to keep our insurance costs down. We shall also benefit from their Human Resource experience in tackling our personnel policy issues.

We collaborated with the School District and put together a Memorandum of Understanding as respects the Elementary School being used a Shelter in the event of any emergency. Future topics for discussion may well center around the purchase of supplies, fuel deliveries, building maintenance and IT services.

Other significant items to recap were the Board of Selectmen adopting a Fund Balance Policy; the on-site audit by New Hampshire Retirement System; the Town Administrator's recommendation for an energy efficiency audit conducted by NHEC; the alternative look at health care coverages; the change in business software in the finance office from Munismart to BMSI; the cable franchise agreement with TDS and the revised and amended agreement with Metrocast and the approval by both the Board and NHDOT to have Hoyle, Tanner & Associates perform an Engineering study for the two Bridges on Stage Road.

We were invited to participate in the inaugural meeting of the Lakes Region Municipal Managers Group formed to share information and discuss topics affecting all contiguous communities. Regionalization is a hot button with the affiliation brought about recently by the City of Laconia and the Town of Belmont sharing Fire Department services. It is quite possible that the Town of Gilmanton could see savings in the future with coordinated efforts with the Towns of Alton, Barnstead and Loudon. Gilmanton has little Commercial development on which to increase its tax base so increases in the Town and School budgets are inevitable unless the Town wishes to see some of its Municipal services curtailed.

In the next twelve months it is incumbent upon the Town Administrator to recommend to the Board of Selectmen ways in which cost savings can be accomplished. We did explore a self-insurance option regarding our health care coverages however this route would not have taken care of the administration of our retirees so the proposal was shelved.

The March 2016 election saw two new Selectmen join the three man Board, Stephen McWhinnie and Marshall Bishop both of whom were quick to attend and participate in workshops for 'newly elected officials.'

During the last twelve months many new faces have appeared at the Academy Building and in other Departments. At the Police Department Chief Matt Currier took over the helm from Joe Collins and Patrol Officer Casey Brennan was promoted to Sergeant. Casey has returned to regular duty here in Gilmanton after being deployed for nine months as a Medic with the US Army in Afghanistan. In the Town Clerk/Tax Collectors office Debra Cornett has been joined by Amy Russell and Linda Lance. Brenda Paquette became our Finance Officer when Marie Mora retired. Brenda also has a wealth of Municipal experience having been the Finance Officer in Belmont for over twenty years and in fact worked in Gilmanton from 1989 to 1994. Heather Carpenter joined the team in the Selectmen`s Office when Stephanie Fogg resigned. Heidi Jackson Rhine came into the Selectmen`s Office after serving as the Town`s Deputy Town Clerk/Tax Collector and has been working in the Assessing Department. She was recently made the Assistant Town Administrator and is being groomed to take over from me as soon as she is ready.

We have an obligation and responsibility as Managers and Administrators to our profession to bring the next generation along to ensure succession and sustainable management strategies for our community.

Now that the Board of Selectmen have returned to the audio taping of their meetings the Selectmen`s Office intends to take this transparency to the next level with the announcement of the formation of a Town newsletter which will be available on the Town website. This newsletter will be reporting topics from the Selectmen`s meetings coupled with Department reports and other items of interest that are going on in Gilmanton.....it is to be named the "Gilmanton Beacon."

Respectfully Submitted

Paul Branscombe
Town Administrator
Town of Gilmanton