

Eliot Town Manager Report

December 7, 2023

Submitted by

Michael J. Sullivan to the Eliot Selectboard

Honorable Select Board, this is an abridged accounting of some of the projects and issues I and the dedicated municipal staff have been working on lately for the benefit of the Town of Eliot and its citizens.



Town Hall Project.

The Town Hall rebuild project has begun. The CIPC committee recently met to cast the process progression. Chair Brad Swanson, members Ed Henningsen and Jim Latter will hopefully be considered by the Select Board to expand their role as an exploratory committee to one that will enhance the process through their experience and guidance.

The project familiarity they possess is only exceeded by their personal experiences in similar settings. Brad and Jim have been deeply involved in numerous projects for public building construction (Town Halls, Schools, Police Stations, and more) and Ed possess a treasure trove of knowledge from his private sector successes related to construction. I believe these three highly regarded Eliot citizens deliver a lot to the table and will be a wonderful conduit for other citizens' impressions, suggestions, and concerns.

The Select Board has been asked to add the Town Clerk, The Public Works Administrative Assistant, and the Town Manager as advisory non-voting members to the committee. Having these employees serve as advisors will bring an acute understanding of the needs for serving the public, act as outlets for employees to add their input and a means to make suggestions as how to maintain and protect the investment of the building post construction.

As the public is aware this project has been in the planning stage for a long time and is fairly evolved from a design perspective. There seems to be consensus, the project completion should be completed by late Spring 2025. While this is an aggressive goal, I sincerely believe with the support this project has been receiving from the public and the CIPC guidance the completion date is achievable.

We will continue to work with Port City Architects to assist with design and scoping. Lita Semrau from Port City has been working on this project for over two years and has succeed in designing functional and efficient similar municipal projects (Arundel, York, Ogunquit, did I mention Arundel). Hopefully we will be able to solicit bids in February or shortly there after and engage a contractor by April or early May.

Part of the discussion has been where we will service the public on a temporary basis, as the best situation for construction would be for us to be able to leave the present site entirely. We have looked at a few throughout Eliot, but there does not seem to be much available. Certainly, if you have any lead please send them to msullivan@eliotme.org and we will do our best to vet them properly.

The Town Clerk operation is the most critical as it is the most public facing service and with three elections in 2024 it is vital; we have a place suitable to operate. We are initially exploring the possibility of housing that service at the PD. This allows a central location, near the present service, but we will need to determine the effectiveness of what needs to be retro fitted and what accommodation may be needed.

We have also looked at four different "commercial" sites, each with drawbacks and positives. The idea of trailers has been looked at but is fraught with challenges, costs, and other challenges. Like everything related to this project we are trying to do it as cost effective as possible without eroding the service we provide. Of course, we will need and appreciate the continued patience the citizens of Eliot are able to provide during the project.

There will be a "project page" on the website similar to the Water and Sewer Project page set up in the next few weeks. We will also set up a project e-mail list soon as well, which worked well for residents to get accurate information related to the W&S project.

Water and Sewer Extension Project.

Speaking of the W&S Project, the visible side of this complex project has become invisible. I can attest there is plenty of work going on behind the scenes for Contract #2 and #3, but neither of these will become as ever-present in the lives of Eliot citizens as the subterranean pipe installation which laid siege on Beech, State and 236.

Just this morning there was another multi-hour TEAMS meeting to review the work that has been done, a riveting discussion about core samples and the art of trench repair. Maine DOT has agreed to plow the state roads touched by the construction. As State, Beech and Dow Hwy meet all of the standards set by DOT prior to construction.

MaineDOT has been wonderful and understanding to work with and they have the roads on schedule for repairs for the Spring, including the final skim coat. There are some laterals we will watch closely, and it should be noted we have a warrantee for a year on the performance of the paving.

The contractor has a checklist of about forty minor repairs which need to be made in the Spring. Again, I cannot thank the residents of Eliot who asked the questions and listened and understood the challenges of this phase of the project.

Fiscal Year 2025 Budget.

The FY 25 budget is under construction, and I am doing everything possible to have the draft ready for late December. The Select Board, Budget Committee and the public will be able to see the draft recommendation before the January 5 deadline set by the Charter.

The major cost drivers will be compensation as we try to attract and retain staff. I will be recommending creating two additional positions at the Eliot Police Department. Presently we have one unfilled position and recognize it is taking a year or more to find the right person, hire them, get them through the

required training academy and working as an Eliot fully sworn officer. This is a necessary step to ensure residents can be confident in their public safety providers. We also need to alleviate some of the strain officers have been experiencing as they fill shifts and work twelve-hour or more shifts, it is simply unhealthy for everyone.

There also will be an increase in benefit costs and health insurance will increase 4.7% January 1st and also increase mid-way through FY 25 a predicted 6 to 7%. We are looking at ways to mitigate the increase but must keep an eye on how any change will impact recruitment and retention.

There will be some areas where we will look to reduce the budget, but unfortunately less than we would like to see. I will do everything I can to control costs while continuing to invest in Eliot.

Food Waste Bio-Bags.

As you can see from the Select Board packet, I have brought back the discussion about the bio-bags at the Transfer Station. After legitimate concern about cost to the residents from Select Board Member Lauren Dow and suggestions from other members I have reached out to our composting partner Mr. Fox.

After an exchange with the Director of Composting Operations (great title) at Mr. Fox, I discovered the bags were part of an Eliot policy, not Mr. Fox. The contractor actually prefers no bags for food waste. I am proposing we begin to charge for bags, and also allow residents to bring 5-gallon pails of food waste to the transfer station to add to the Mr. Fox bins without charge. For those who choose not use a reusable five gallon or less pail we will sell bags as previously recommended.

We hope that residents continue to participate in this program as food waste is suggested to be 25% of all trash nationally. The tipping costs for Mr. Fox as less that the bag trash (not as much as when the program began, but still less) and therefor it remains cost effective for the Transfer Station operation and will allow us to continue this municipal service longer (many communities are privatizing).

Waste disposal costs in every town are increasing steadily with no end in sight, recycling revenues are greatly reduced labor and operational energy costs are increasing exponentially. These and other contributing factors continue to make staying in the business much more difficult.

Holiday Schedule.

There is no major change to the Town Hall schedule for this year. However, many of our staff will be taking well deserved time off in the final weeks of the year. We ask that you plan ahead, call ahead and make an appointment, if possible, to conduct your business. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you and we all wish you a wonderful holiday season, whatever you choose to celebrate and hope that 2024 is your best year yet!

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

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Town of Eliot, Manager