

Eliot Town Manager Report

January 6, 2022

Submitted by

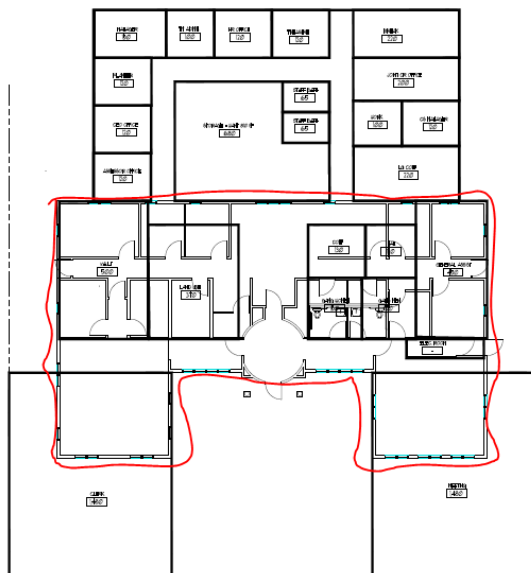
Michael J. Sullivan

The Start of Year 2022; Well, the New Year has begun in Eliot....and everywhere else. I am continuing to make an effort to understand the local culture and doing my best to prepare myself for the year and hopefully beyond. As is the case with each new year or new adventure the only thing which remains constant is change.

Sometimes change comes in the form of “bad news” for some and “good news” for others. In this case the bad news for this community came by way of the announcement from the Treasurer Jordan Miles he had been made a professional offer from another community to bring his talents north. In Old Orchard the good news came in the form of his acceptance.

The Town of Eliot invested heavily over the last three years in Mr. Miles experiential learning and it will be a while before I have the confidence in any replacement down the road. I am sure there will be some who will draw the uniformed conclusion that Eliot could not afford to compete with a much larger town like Old Orchard. The fact of the matter is we can and as the economics of retention is clear we cannot afford not to compete for important positions and cease being a training ground for other communities (although training must go on).

There will be self-professed experts who suggest bigger communities always pay more for the same job. When the reality is in this case and in many others is the fact do not indicate one job, but many, but he was only getting paid for one and even then, inadequately. He was not doing one job; he was doing three when compared to Old Orchard and he was getting paid less than any of the component support positions he will now oversee. Congratulations to Mr. Miles, I value the short time I was allowed to work with the talented individual and wish him continued success in all his pursuits.



Town Hall Replacement/Renovation; Capital Town Hall Building Committee Chair Brad Swanson, members Ed Henningsen, Jim Latter and I met with Lita Semrau (Port City) to review some of the latest concepts.

One of the approaches to lower the cost to the taxpayers is to look at the feasibility of renovating and expanding the present Town Hall. This would lower the cost of the previous “two-building option which was estimated to be around \$5.3 million to a project cost of somewhere in the neighborhood of \$3.5 million.

There are limitations and advantages when considering one building versus two. Two facilities would allow more flexibility, especially when providing programming. However, the cost related for two buildings are

significant consideration, as well. Ranging from increased construction to operating two buildings to eventually replacing two buildings instead of one will undoubtedly be more expensive long and short term.

Outlined in red the early concept drawing the existing building (do not blame Port City for the rudimentary red-line designation), the addition depicted would more than double the size to just over 9,000 square feet (from 4,150). This would allow Community Services and Age in Place to expand program offerings, give ample space for voting to be held on site, allow appropriate space for General Assistance, improve accessibility throughout the building and explore additional service enhancements.

Population growth has been a topic of discussion, but there also needs to be consideration given to how the service model has changed in recent years and will continue to evolve in future years. There likely will be more municipal business done on-line and concepts like “curbside” and “drive-up” make their way into the public space, all adding a layer of complexity to the future municipal model and therefore the design challenge increases.

There were some test pits done in the back with no unearthly findings and there will be some additional test borings done in the next few weeks to determine if there are any contamination issue. There will still be some need to look at the septic capacity and I suspect a boatload of other ideas, meetings and discussions before a final plan is readied to put before the voters.

Again, thank you to the committee members for their dedication and diligence in regards to this project.

Budget FY 2023; In keeping with change in the New Year and within the construct of the Eliot Charter I have, as you are aware, implemented some efficiencies to the process. Including encouraging the Budget Committee to work independently. This will include directing members to update their own binders, channeling questions through the Chair of the Budget Committee to the Town Manager in writing and not offering Department Managers sit for committee sessions.

This will allow administration to adequately answer questions, have replies which are in writing as well posted on the afore mentioned page, better coordinate the message and allow the Budget Committee to work “independently” as stated in the Eliot Charter.

There will be an initial overview presentation of the Town Manager’s proposed FY 23 budget January 12, 2022 which the Budget Committee and the Select Board will be invited to as well as the public. Both formalizing the inquiry process and creating a dedicated web page will allow greater transparency for

the public, who will also be encouraged to submit question to townmanager@eliotme.org. In all case the question and the answers will be answered honestly, timely as time will allow and to the best of our collective ability.

As I have stated prior the budget has very modest increase for FY 23, is completely loyal to investing in Eliot and will not materially effect cost to the present tax structure.

Training; One of the keys to my budget proposal is to increase managerial effectiveness in Eliot around increasing training. This in some case is related to the costs associated with



training itself, but also to retain staff who has been trained by way of fair compensation. While I am always open to input, decisions around these key components should not be by committee, but made by the duly appointed Town Manager. It has been my experience that is one of the primary reasons why cities and towns have a Chief Executive Officer. Managing by committee was long ago abandon as impractical for most communities and those who have not changed have struggled.

The sum of this exercise is to make investment in the service model long-term. Not a day goes by that we do not see a story in the media about the struggles “some” businesses are facing in attracting and retaining staff. Those challenges are substantiated with every visit to the grocery store, retail shops or restaurants of all types (local, chain, sit-down, dive thru etc.) or even your doctor or dentist. Have you asked your local plumber, mechanic or electrician about their challenges in staffing?

Without revealing too much, as change and flexibility are both necessary and difficult and important to preserve. We have signed a couple of individuals up for leadership training through the Maine Municipal Association, we have two other individuals doing on-line classes related to the Maine building code to build depth in that area.

There are several in-house cross trainings going on to strengthen our ability to provide various services. It also will be critically important to prepare for training on various platforms we are considering in FY 23, including but not limited to payroll, permitting, GIS mapping and improved public notification systems. I am getting new training daily and feel for the trainers.

Again, all of the effort and investment is to better serve the public and to meet the challenge of a changing expectation from the public. The future for Town Hall service models will be as different as your banking or coffee shop or gas station is now compared to fifty years ago. It is critical as any investment and there is no savings in waiting for next year.

COVID 19; I have attended a couple more York County Emergency Management Agency weekly meetings. The cases, as you are likely aware unless you are leading a monastic existence, are steadily going up. Some of this is due to increased testing, some is linked by experts to new variants and I suspect there are innumerable other causes, but we continue to ask everyone to consider vaccinations.

There are some vocal opponents for a host of reasons and beliefs and those should be respected when presented respectfully. We also encourage people to consider wearing a mask when sensible, vaccinated or not, social distance when you are able and wash your hands while singing the birthday song twice or so I am told. We appreciate you giving all of these strategies worthwhile consideration.

Thank you for your support and leadership. I would also like to thank all the wonderful people I have the pleasure of working with everyday in Eliot. Be safe.

Respectfully submitted

Michael J. Sullivan

Eliot Town Manager