

Eliot Town Manager Report

July 28, 2022

Submitted by

Michael J. Sullivan to the Eliot Selectboard

Special Town Meeting; Thank you for your support and attendance at the recent Special Town Meeting (STM) held July 13th at the Eliot Elementary School. It is understandable why we all did not relish having to take such a different path to meet the funding needs for FY 23.

It is true Town Meeting is the purest form of democracy. Voters came listened, spoke, listened and spoke, until a vote was taken and then voted what they believed was best for Eliot after listening to both positions. Of course, as is the case in any attempt to bring understanding and cohesion, there are those who are just plain hard of listening and refuse consider the opinions of others. Sometimes blinded by unhinged hatred, some led to the empty abyss of animosity, sometimes they just politely disagree. I would ask everyone consider the fact this was a necessary exercise, otherwise we all would have preferred to be somewhere there was a better sound system.

Prior to the STM, I attended a gathering of concerned citizens on a beautiful Friday evening, in a lovely garden, I appreciated being invited. Some of the tropes and obdurate positions which were professed in the garden as to why the STM was not fair, unethical and in the opinion of some a violation of the Eliot Charter, I reject wholly there was anything unfair, unethical or in violation of the Eliot Charter. It is understandable how the undercurrent of pernicious internet gossip can forge such conclusions, but it does not make it a fact because it is on-line even in Eliot.

One person in that garden presented his beliefs based on his understanding and involvement in writing the Eliot Charter. He felt strongly and passionately the voters will from June 14th was being completely disregarded. I disagreed, he believed the Charter was being ignored, I disagreed, he believed there was no harm in waiting, I disagreed. Yet, beyond my position versus his I saw him as a passionate, thoughtful and responsible citizen of Eliot. A person who could give perspective and I thought respected opposing opinion.

Well, a little more than 120 hours later I would see the same person in a very different light as he approached me shortly after the end of the STM with rage in his eyes, accusations of malfeasance sputtering unfounded accusations towards me personally, claims of conspiratorial improprieties carved in to the humid air of the elementary school gym. I was struck at the level raw hate directed at a person who he only met only one other time.

Did he think my intent was cozening Eliot's process? Did he not see that I was only asking for the tools I truly felt I needed to do my job for Eliot? Did he understand I had nothing to gain

personally? Was he so cemented in his singular interpretation that he could not even consider the input of others? The Town Attorney clearly stated the Special Town Meeting was allowed; the Select Board deliberated on the matter and felt it was the most reasonable course of action given the nature of the shortfall. The Budget Committee Chair was made aware well prior, but neglected to respond or express concerns when notified three weeks prior.

More than 175 people showed up to vote. I was told there were more people than in most recent past Town Meetings. It was very impressive how people listened, asked questions and expressed their point of view. They became newly informed in some cases, they did not have to rely on recommendation from a board or committee, they did not have solely rely on what the Town Manager said, they listened to their neighbors, citizens of Eliot and they cast vote to make an investment in Eliot. They heard the reasoning, they heard personal attacks, they heard and recognized half-truths or mistruths, they considered the testimony, they heard factual information and then voted.

Like so much discourse we experience in the new ways of the world, if you disagree even slightly those more entrenched in a different position call foul, loudly, thankfully they are loud, but a minority. I certainly heard it, like “the Town Manager is a bully”, “he throws tantrums”, “he loses his temper”, “his hometown does not have 18% of the voters come out or something to that effect, the vote was not democratic, the “Good Old Boys”, call names and hurl baseless accusations when someone disagrees seems to be the recipe for a few.

The man who verbally assailed me I asked “are you upset because I fought for what I thought was right”? I really never got an answer, he was saying something indistinguishable about something I did to the Charter, beyond upholding and reading it, I feel I have done nothing more than exercise the Eliot Charter.

In the end it was lost that the mill rate will likely go down again this year, the amount raised through property tax to fund the “town budget” will be less than the year before and more than half of the “town budget” will be raised by fees from permits and licenses. Hopefully, we all can become better listeners, have more faith in local government and make a concerted effort to work together.

Eliot Festival Days. Just a shout out to all those who are organizing and promoting Eliot Festival Day and the Eliot Festival Road Race for September 24. The Festival starts at 9 AM and the 5K goes off at 8:30 AM (I am not a pre-race favorite to win!). Please go to eliotfestivaland5k.com for mor information



Eliot Connects/Ampion. Ampion Solar has recently made a generous gift of \$5,000 to Eliot Connects. Kate Rooney from Ampion was on hand to make the presentation to Eliot Connects board members. The Vice Chair of the Select Board Bill Widi was on hand, as well.

Beyond the generosity aspect we all benefit from moving more homes to renewable energy. Cleaner fuels, cleaner environment!

This donation will provide important funding and will continue as residents sign up with Ampion. As part of Maine Community Solar, we encourage residents to find a renewable energy partner who suits their household needs.

We thank Ampion for their community engagement and thank Eliot Connects enough for being such a thoughtful, dependable, and trustworthy organization. I would like to thank Claudia Kaerner from Eliot Connects for coordinating this presentation and for all the great work Eliot Connects does for the community.

Land Use Division. We recently were made aware a key employee in Land Use Division (Planning, Code Enforcement, Assessing) was offered a great career opportunity by the Town of Kittery. Kearsten Metz has grown in her position as the Land Use Assistant and had become an incredible asset to her colleagues and the public alike. We all wish her great success in Kittery and hope she knows she will always be welcome in Eliot.

One of the misconceptions professed at the Special Town Meeting was that people were leaving Eliot for a dollar an hour, that is not factual. She will be leaving Eliot to do a very similar job in Kittery for \$15 dollars an hour or \$31K a year. Needless to say, we were not in a position to match the offer. I will be putting forward to the Select Board an outline of compensation adjustments necessary to stem some of the outflow of talented employees at the August 11 meeting. While this plan will primarily address non-union employees, union positions will need to be addressed as well and I will be asking the Select Board for permission to approach the clerical union about some mid contract changes and adjustments.

Initially, as allowed for personnel issues under the law, I will be asking this plan be discussed in executive session by the Select Board, however the final plan will be available to the public for review. It is key to understand the adjustments are about the position and the responsibilities, about how Eliot will need to prepare if it was necessary to compete for a quality replacement. It is not about the "person", we will have other components and methods through training and evaluation to address work place knowledge and performance. This is the first step to retention and development of staff.

We also have entered a compact with York County Community College to partner with them in some work force development and training programs. We are hoping to cover customer service this will include building skills to understand diversity, to gain strategies to work with residents with different abilities, to provide respectful and professional service. We also will work on de-escalation techniques and how we can become more efficient. Some of the training costs will be covered by a YCCC workforce development federal grant. We also are exploring other training ideas and needs.

Until such time as we are able to fill the Land Use Assistant position it is necessary to make adjustments to the way we do business in that section of Town Hall. We ask that anyone looking for information from Land Use to consider calling or emailing with your questions, you may have to leave a message if you call. We are very open to making appointments, as we are with any town office, when it is necessary or appropriate. We continue to be committed to getting you accurate information and avoid the tragedy of “off the cuff” responses which are too often misunderstood and cause complicated challenges down the road so to speak.

For Code Enforcement Officer Shelly Bishop, please email sbishop@eliotme.org for Planner Jeff Brubaker planner@eliotme.org for Assessor Brent Martin assessor@eliotme.org to inquire about an appointment. If you are not sure who to contact, please email me townmanager@eliotme.org and I will try to get you to the best person to help with your questions.

236/Sewer Expansion. We are proceeding to enter an agreement with Defelice Construction for Phase #1 of the sewer expansion project. Defelice was the only bidder after the request was circulated widely by the town and Underwood Engineering. The amount of the Phase #1 contract will be for \$6,959, 300.

Phase#1 work will be primarily along State Road (towards Bolt Hill from Beech) and Beech Road (to 236). This will cause disruption in traffic patterns which we will work with the Eliot Police Department and Defelice to mitigate traffic to the greatest extent possible. The initial work will start, but on a restrictive basis as we are awaiting final approval of the SRF Funding from Maine Municipal Bond Bankpatiently!

We have received qualifications and interest from several professionals to act as the Owner Project Manager (OPM) for the expansion project. It is critical there is an experienced agent working on behalf of the Town of Eliot overseeing the project. We should have an OPM in place by mid-August, I am sure Planner Jeff Brubaker will be very happy with that development, as he has been doing yeoman’s work moving this project along, in addition to his already heavy workload.

As for 236 it should be noted there are several projects and studies going on and will continue for likely the next several years. They include but not limited to, resurfacing different sections, installation of a gas line and reviews of traffic counts for signalization.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Manager, Eliot