

Eliot Town Manager Report

December 8, 2022

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 at the Holidays. There is a great deal going on over the next few weeks as we close out 2022. December 2nd there was a nice turnout for the annual tree lighting event Marshwood High had a wonderful choral group leading the attendees in singing holiday favorites. There was cookies and hot chocolate, smiles and candy canes all around and in the Hammond Park Gazebo.



The children's faces really lit up when Santa himself came down State Road high atop an engine courtesy of the Eliot Volunteer Fire Department.

Santa and his helpers were welcoming to all even those who travelled afar and spoke a language other than English, the jolly man in the red suit quickly and skillfully switch to the international language of "candy canes". Job well done Santa!

Canning Lessons @ Green Acres. Congratulations and thank you to the Eliot Agriculture & Food Security Committee (EAFSC) and in particular member Chef Norm Owens for leading the canning lessons (see Town website) and as always thank you to Green Acres for being such a wonderful community partner.

The EAFSC will be hosting a display at the entrance of Town Hall in the beginning of the New Year which will map working farms in Eliot and provide more information for about agriculture in our community. The EAFSC is also working with MSAD#35 to develop a clear path for "farm to cafeteria tray" for locally grown produce and farm products.

These initiatives and programs are key to a better understand how we may harness local farm initiatives to reduce the number of links in the supply chain. Maybe some day the residents of Eliot will look to create a food co-op market, I seen smaller communities do just that, the possibilities are endless when good people like the EAFSC put their mind to a task.

Budget FY 24. There is continued work on the ever-evolving fiscal year 2024 budget. Each department is diligently trying to predict what their respective needs will be 19 months from now. Where will fuel, health insurance, staffing or equipment cost land in June 2024 I suspect you agree, it “ain’t” easy!

We have been working diligently to bring the budget worksheet to a more accurate and easier to read format. I appreciate the time, effort and sensibility Finance Director Kristin McNulty has brought to the process. Her experiences working in other municipalities, her outreach to other Finance Directors and her willingness to allow me to give input to the design has been very appreciated and productive.

The process has also included collaboration with department managers and various staff to include their institutional knowledge and historical awareness in terms of expected costs. It is critical to understand what is budgeted creates a ceiling, in most communities as is true of Eliot when it is all said and done the expenditures are appreciably less than expected.

Some areas of focus if the budget is approved will be to for every department to find ways to increase citizen engagement. Whether a department or manager improves their presence on line (including the website), holds charettes or uses multiple means of reaching citizens it will provide for a better-informed public which will make for greater understanding and therefore a stronger community.

During the budget process I will speak to some strategies of using borrowing to invest in parks and Town Hall. While I appreciate the concept of “reserves” for projects, like most people’s personal lives, there are those things you save up for and those you need to mortgage. Even some of the wealthiest cities and towns use bonding as a responsible tool.

We are developing a strategy to present some fees-based improvements at the Boat Basin, including security cameras, park improvements, safety upgrades and monitoring technology. I believe this can be done by creating a revenue schedule which has little or no impact on Eliot residents, but capture some lost opportunities with visitors.

All of the departments and responsible parties have had at least two discussions with me about their budgets. Most boards and committees have submitted their requests and we continue to receive the annual requests from charitable organizations. We hopefully will have a very early draft posted by next week or early the following week, shortly after the Select Board meeting.

Hopefully, everyone understands that these changes are necessary and will take a few cycles to show the full value. We will do everything we can to answer questions, publish the answers on the website and do out reach to inform the public about municipal costs and allocations.



Training Day. December 7 was a big day for training at Eliot Town Hall from 8 AM until 9:30 staff and management gathered in the Town Hall Meeting Room for a in-person seminar with Maureen LaSalle. Ms. LaSalle is a professor in the Hospitality Department at Husson College and also serves as Chair of the Hospitality Division of the Maine State College System.

This important training was part of an Alford Grant through York County Community College, I cannot thank Cait Grant (proud Eliot resident) for coordinating the training and the funding. These opportunities are really a catalyst for the service we provide, as well as moral.

The training recognized the difficulties which have rapidly evolved in Eliot Town Hall and elsewhere over the last few years when dealing with the public. As pointed out by Ms. Lasalle a small portion of the overall public we deal with have become uber combative. From relatively small, but a seemingly growing fraction, of the population the frequency of taunts, threats and disrespectful language in becoming more common place.

All town staff has experienced it to some degree, unfortunately. This skill building opportunity allowed us to explore new techniques to provide services in the most professional, polite and even-handed manner possible. Often the assailant does not understand the person they are addressing is more than likely just following a prescribed by law or ordinance process, one they have no ability to effectively change.

We will be continuing similar training on December 14th about how we can de-escalate tense situations. The training will be in Town Hall from 7:30 AM until 9:30 AM, so Town Hall will open an hour later than usual.

The same afternoon we had training from Harris Systems on the soon to be updated "Trio" software. Trio as you know is the heart of our accounting, budgeting, financial, permitting and several other municipal recordkeeping functions. The new Trio will be cloud based for security, have more functionality and will be able to more directly communicate with state agencies (i.e., motor vehicle registrations. Maine Municipal Bond Bank etc.).

The previous system will not be supported by Harris in the not-too-distant future, it will appear to be more expensive in the short run, but since we will not be saddled with the cost of hard drive servers, I am confident the costs will level out over a five-year period.

As a cloud-based system the remote locations such as CSD will have secure access to the budget module as well. It will also provide some approved employees to work remotely, when necessary, on needed entries and reports. It certainly adds to our efficiency and flexibility.

New Telcom System. Consolidated Communication after nearly two years from when this was first proposed began installation, and par the course, started on the same day in the same room as all the other afore mentioned activities, December 7th. Once installed the new system will have numerous features which will assist the staff in doing their jobs. Learning the new system will be the opening challenge, but we will meet that one.

There may be a short period during the switch over where Town Hall will have no or communication or very little, that period is predicted to be very brief. Based on past experiences on VOIP system installations there will be some mistakes with transfers, forwarding and messaging functions. Please let us know when you experience any of those inconveniences.

Maine Municipal Bond Bank. MMBB trustees voted to approve Eliot's application for \$4.5 million dollars the first tranche of bonding for \$22 million sewer expansion project. Preliminary work has

already begun on State and Beech Road and we will see the contractor (Defelice) bringing in the heavy equipment as soon as the weather allows (likely mid-March).

It goes without saying no one is looking forward to more road closures, detours or “temporary patches”, but it is necessary. However, we are confident the end result will be a demonstrable value to the Town of Eliot and its residents. This will not only be an economic catalyst, but a significant ecological investment as well. We all look forward to the completion, long before it even started.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town of Eliot, Manager