

# Eliot Town Manager Report

December 9, 2021

Submitted by

Michael J. Sullivan

Please accept this report as an abridged account of the initiatives and activities I and the diligent municipal workforce have been engaged on behalf of the Select Board and citizens of Eliot.

**Payroll Systems;** One of the areas which I have been concerned, have heard from staff and Select Board Members since I have arrived has been how we track, submit and ultimately deliver payroll.

This week the Treasurer Jordan Miles, the Administrative Assistant Melissa Albert and I had a virtual meeting with a group who specializes in municipal payroll systems and has been successful in Maine and throughout New England in systemizing municipal time/attendance, required reporting and other key aspects of payroll.

As part of our due diligence, we will review the savings, security, redundancy and efficiencies this particular or other such platforms may bring to Eliot. I would want to be clear we are nowhere near making a recommendation and recognize there is much more study needed before we do so. However, a weekly system with handwritten submittals for all facets of the personnel process is prone to error, staff intensive and devoid of any protections.

This and other measures are part of Select Board Member's encouragement and directives to look at cost effective measures to add protections and reduce staff time on task. This will also allow us as an organization to reallocate staff time to other systems which can be streamlined and address other lingering issues. These range from creating more flexible staffing to investigating storage and items being stored. I greatly appreciate the Jordan and Melissa's support in respect to these adventures.

**Management Training;** The initial steps have begun for both building capacity for management and to develop transitional plans. This will hopefully create depth and strengthen Eliot's organizational capacity. We will have two staff attending management seminars beginning in December and as we progress, I hope to have every department manager and other key staff to have taken some level of training in regards to management or advancement in their discipline.

I am confident the investment in time and utilization of existing resources will provide a stronger foundation for the future of Eliot. It is apparent to me the municipality is blessed to have so many dedicated employees, but there is a known offset as we continue to see retention challenges. Another testimony to the quality of employee as we continue to see other employers recognize that fact.

In respect to the challenge of retention we recently lost a fantastic member of the team to a better offer. The Administrative Assistant at the Public Works Sara Ouimet has left the .... barn, the DPW barn that is. Her pleasant demeanor and thorough organizational skills will be missed and very hard to replace. We have done an exit interview and have the job opening posted. Director Robinson is using

some temporary staff to help us get through this period which is necessary as the Public Works Team prepares for winter and all its challenges.

**Seasonal Viruses, COVID, Family and other challenges;** We have already seen some of the ill effects on service delivery due to illness. As per usual it runs the gambit of child care, employees who are ill, family members who need care and a host of other virus-related situations. With a normally very thin staffing model we really encourage people use email when possible or call ahead to many departments. The Clerks Office does a phenomenal job covering the regularly scheduled hours, but other departments with fewer staff it may be wise to email and make an appointment or call ahead.

With Thanksgiving just past and Christmas, Hanukah, Winter Solstice, New Years, Kwanza, Bodhi, family member birthdays, anniversaries, weddings or any other large gathering one may attend, we have to remind people if they feel sick.... STAY HOME! It does not help us when employees bring the gift of sickness to work. It is not something which could be admired like a diamond, a new car or even your most recent ugly sweater. We all want to stay and avoid returning to the previous difficult measures which were necessary to impose last year.

We will be working with State Representative Michelle Meyer and Maine CDC to bring a pop-up vaccine clinic to Eliot. We hope people will consider a booster or their first vaccine. With the latest talk about the Omicron variant headed our way we will need to continue to give thought how we plan to accept COVID 19 as endemic and how we will need to evolve our behaviors to stay as healthy as possible.

We continue to encourage visitors to follow the familiar precautions, (hand-washing, social distancing, wearing masks, consider vaccinations, avoid large crowds for extended periods, in-doors especially). Let's preserve the progress we have made together and avoid additional unpleasant and unwanted restrictions!

**Capital Improvement Planning Committee (CIP);** I continue to be brought up to speed about the plans regarding the Town Hall Project and the other capital need I met with the CIP on November 29 and listened intently as they thoroughly discussed options and steps and associated research needed to properly evaluate those options.

The CIP was previously presented with a plan from Port City Architects with a design of a new Town Hall with the idea of building a new separate building south of the present structure which was reviewed and still is in the mix. However, as part of an appropriate due diligence exercise the CIP would like to reconnoiter a model in respect to an addition to the present building. Having such a plan to compare the "new building" concept with, will likely prove valuable when looking at cost effectiveness and also allocation of financial resources.

The next steps directed by the CIP was to have S.W. Cole Engineering do some sample test boring on the area directly behind the Town Hall. This will determine the composition and the compaction of that area to see if it is suitable for considering a Town Hall addition on the land. At the same time, I have reached out to Port City asking to start to think concepts for such an addition. Thankfully they were already on it.

Lita Semrau from Port City has accepted an invitation to schedule another meeting with the CIP to further discuss the possibilities and the challenges with the different approaches to the project. I am hoping that we will be able to have that happen in December.

The CIP also suggested the municipality consider getting a memorandum of understanding in place for a use of Marshwood Middle School for voting. The school has been used as a polling location by Eliot for generations and there has been no indication that standard will not continue, just to be clear. The CIP thought having something more defined would be prudent and Select Board Member Lauren Dow agreed to bring it back to the SB for discussion and direction.

**Agriculture and Food Stability Committee;** At a recent SB Meeting the idea of forming an ad-hoc commission initially, in the hopes it would be designated by Town Meeting as a permanent commission to advocate and coordinate farm and food security for Eliot.

This is a very exciting idea and very timely. This project has all the bells and whistles to create a sustainable community. Looking at issues like farm land conservation, access to healthy foods and generally focusing on how we can efficiently manage the land and resources to provide sustenance.

Citizen Advocate Leslie Stevens and Select Board Member Bill Widi have agreed to become involved in the foundation building so we can fashion a model for the commission which will speak to farmers of all types in bringing exciting concepts which will allow agriculture in all its forms to continue to be economically viable and be a means for all citizens to have a greater understanding of local crop/food production.

**Regional Bike Share;** In discussions with Eliot's Town Planner Jeff Brubaker, we came upon the idea of exploring regionally a bike share program. This could possibly be another transportation option for the region, as it has had such success in so many different areas, with so many models, it would be a shame not to explore.

It would be another component to the Eliot Bike/Walk initiatives as outlined in Jeff's recent report and complement Kittery's Comprehensive Plan along with other area communities.

In a region which has little in the way of fixed route transit this could be a significant mode of transportation. We have reached out SMPDC Transportation Coordinator Stephanie Carver who has expressed a high level of interest in the idea and has committed to working through her regional contacts to see if it is viable.

In other regions there has been great success in tapping into Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality or CMAQ funds to launch similar projects. I have offered to reach out to some of those projects to get more information to SMPDC. I look forward to working regionally and with Planner Jeff Brubaker and Aging in Place Chair Ellen Ceppetelli on the idea to bring pedal assist bike option to Eliot!

**Eliot Festival Days;** If everyone was dedicated to their civic passion as Gene Wypyski there would be no issues in town which could not be solved.

Before I even arrived, Gene was making sure I was aware of Eliot Festival Days and how we may be able to improve the annual celebration. It truly was inspiring to watch and hear the Co-chair of Eliot Festival Days express his excitement in the festivity. He is as proud to call Eliot home, as he is to promote the "Days".

Mr. Wypyski was kind enough to take some time to welcome me to Eliot and to discuss the importance of the "Days". The importance and benefit to the community internally and externally is very apparent.

The simple act of bringing a community together in a civil and safe manner to celebrate a community is needed more today than ever before. Being proud of your town is not as common as it once was in America. Yet if you get to hear a southern drawl, excited about Eliot's history and future tied to a weekend in September, you will know you are with someone named Gene Wypyski!

Here is a little snippet from a site called ClearGov which presents some interesting data on Eliot. Gives a lot to consider.....



Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Sullivan

Town Manager, Eliot