

Waterboro Crossroads 2017

(By Town Administrator Gary Lamb June 21, 2017)

For the second time in five years, Waterboro voters have recognized our continued municipal growth requires change in how we govern ourselves. In 2012, voters approved a new charter which moved the Board of Selectman away from most daily operational decisions and into more of a policy and budgetary oversight role. The Town Administrator was now responsible for accounts payable, payroll and other daily operational decisions. Consequently in 2013, Selectmen no longer needed to meet weekly and started meeting twice per month. This is a more efficient way of doing business and many towns our size are operating in a similar manner.

On June 13, 2017, Waterboro voters approved replacing our traditional Saturday morning open Town Meeting with referendum voting. Beginning in June 2018, our Town Meeting will consist of all day voting at the usual Tuesday statewide election. In addition to regular candidate voting, voters will also have a longer ballot complete with warrant articles formerly voted on at the Saturday open Town Meeting. This will result in up to several thousand votes on our annual budget compared to a few dozen votes at recent years open Town Meetings. While many of us will miss the open floor debate on Town Meeting floor, such discussion with taxpayers can occur all year long twice per month at Selectmen's meetings.

June 17, 2017 Town Meeting voters also passed significant staffing changes. Our Public Works Director will go from 20 hours per week to 40, and will also have more administrative oversight concerning transfer station, all Town buildings and much of the Parks and Recreation seasonal field work. Our longtime Librarian Ruth Blake retired this spring and we will soon advertise for her replacement as a full time professional position with benefits. Our Fire Department will hire a new Captain later this summer. This will improve staff supervision by decreasing the number of shifts having all contract per diem staff and no full time town employee on a shift. These and other changes are expensive and I only proposed them because as Waterboro grows we need more full time professional staff to meet growing demands for services.

Other changes come to mind as we look farther into the future. We should hire a full time combination Town Planner/Economic Development Director to improve local zoning and review processes and customer service to the business community. We should have a full time Assessor rather than 2-3 day per week contract Assessor who has too little time to get all our backlog of fieldwork completed. At some point we need to renovate or replace our Central Fire Station because it violates life safety codes, has no sprinkler system and wastes thousands of taxpayer dollars each winter

because it is poorly insulated. I respect the will of the voters in the past two defeats of Fire Station addition bond proposals, but inaction now is only costing taxpayers more in the long run. Our Water Department needs a new well and storage tank. Each of these projects is at or above one million dollars in cost. We have no public sewer planned in case we want to plan and construct a new village center in South Waterboro village, possibly on and around the old tannery site. Our water and sewer infrastructure is vital to continued growth since many companies simply will not locate in communities without both of these public utilities. Our proposed Tax Increment Finance District can help produce some dedicated funds to assist with the design and planning of such facilities. We should form a Community Center steering committee NOW and take a year or two to learn from the community about what such a facility should consist of (library?, recreation department?, function room and large kitchen?)...and where it could be built.

These and many other projects will be discussed or voted on over the next decade or two. The time to plan for such things is now. Be a catalyst for change instead of just sitting back and saying no to it now. Tell your elected officials and staff what you want Waterboro to look like 50 years from now when our population has doubled. I welcome your ideas.

Respectfully...Gary Lamb, Waterboro Town Administrator